

# **BUSINESS** **COOKERY**

*Tried and tested recipes for business success*

Hannah McNamara and Patrick White

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## ***Dedication***

To my wife Michelle for accompanying me on the journey and to my Sungold colleagues Stacey, Ross, Noel and Karen who made a truly great team.

**Patrick White**

To my wonderful parents and mentors. To my father who taught me independence and inner strength, and to my mother who passed on her gift with words.

**Hannah McNamara**

## ***About the Authors***

### **Hannah McNamara**

A former corporate Head of Marketing, Hannah McNamara changed career and started her own business in 2004. In the years since re-training as an Executive Coach she has become one of the most respected professionals in her field. Her debut business book 'Niche Marketing for Coaches' published in 2007 remains a popular handbook for both new and established coaches alike and she has helped thousands of coaches to start and build their own businesses.

She is a popular conference and seminar speaker on marketing and entrepreneurship. Her articles on leadership, management, negotiation skills and marketing have been published by a variety of magazines and online publications.

She is an in-demand coach working with senior level executives and has an impressive track record in transforming mediocre operational managers into high performing business leaders.

### **Patrick White**

After a successful international corporate career in a variety of industries across 13 countries with responsibilities for up to 14,000 staff Patrick then went on to become a serial entrepreneur owning 14 different businesses in the hospitality, retail, distribution, IT and food and beverage industries. His last business had a turnover of \$US 2.0 billion and 600 full-time staff and numerous part-time staff.

For the last 23 years while owning the above businesses, he has also worked as a high level management consultant and Executive Coach in various business and not-for-profit sectors as well as an international public speaker and trainer on a variety of business and people management topics.

Patrick also acts as mentor to many small and medium-sized businesses and entrepreneurs helping them to establish or grow their existing business. He continues to deliver regular public and in-house training seminars and speak at international conferences. Recently he has worked in Switzerland, United Kingdom, Italy, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Russia, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Sudan, Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iran, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Patrick has also published various articles and papers on Business Strategy, Negotiation Skills, Influencing and Persuading, Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace, Sales and Marketing and issues around Training.

## *Preface*

You may ask why write a business book and use the title “Business Cookery.” Well the answer is really quite simple. We were presenting a seminar together which was about practical techniques the attendees could use to get more clients and grow their business. During the course of the seminar we were both unintentionally using cooking analogies to emphasize various points. It was noticeable that when we did so they seemed “to get it.” It was also noticeable that after a while the attendees were using cooking analogies themselves to make various points. Obviously the metaphor of cooking was useful to them in understanding business issues. The next question is what could we do with this knowledge? Again the answer was simple. Put it in a book and here we are.

This book is an attempt to impart some wisdom from two people who have not only succeeded in the corporate world but have owned and operated 18+ successful businesses between them. It is not prescriptive and in no way tries to present a particular business model that should be implemented by the reader. Our philosophy is simple and applies to employees as well as entrepreneurs. It is that in nearly all cases success is usually the result of hard work and the application of wisdom. If we can help a little in providing you with the getting of wisdom we will have succeeded.



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The awkward silence on the phone line was making her anxious. "It's alright darling, you can tell me what's wrong," said Barbara. "Have you and Simon had a fight?"

"Oh Mum, it's just awful," Jenny tried her hardest to hold back the tears. They came anyway. "How could they do this to me? I've known them for years."

"Jenny, why don't you tell me what's happened? Maybe I can help." She could hear her daughter was hurting. All she wanted to do was give her a cuddle. Even at 39 daughters still need their mums, especially when they are hundreds of miles away.

"I spent ages planning a black-tie dinner party for my birthday. It was supposed to be a get-together for all the girls from school." Her voice trembled as she continued. "I've just been on Facebook and everyone's making excuses why they can't come. Some of them haven't said one way or the other and the party's only a few days away. I know they've all got kids and commitments, but surely they can make a Tuesday night."

Barbara sighed gently in a fruitless attempt to soothe her daughter's pain. She gave Jenny a moment to dry her eyes before speaking. "Darling, before your father and I sold the agency and moved we used to put on a lot of dinner parties for clients. I know you probably don't want to hear this but we never had anyone not show up or pull out at the last minute. Something must have gone wrong if *no one's* coming."

"Well," Jenny said indignantly, "I've been so busy with the business; I can't just drop everything for a party. I've been working on it when I can. I got my assistant to help me planning the food and getting recipes together. She's ordered new tablecloths, sorted out the

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music, ordered fresh flowers, put it on Facebook... I don't see what else I could have done.”

“What about the invitations? When did you send them out?” asked Barbara.

“It's on Facebook,” said Jenny.

“I realize that. What I mean is when did you start inviting people?” said Barbara.

“I think she set it up as an event on Monday,” said Jenny.

Barbara was sure she'd misunderstood, but wanted to check, “what - *this* Monday?”

“Yes.”

For what seemed like an eternity, the crackling of the phone line was the only sign Barbara had that the call was still connected.

“Mum, you're right. I should have given people more notice. If someone invited me to something next week, I wouldn't be able to make it either. I'm rushing from one thing to the next. I've had to stop going to that evening class because Simon can't get back from his office in time to take the kids off my hands. I feel like such a mess right now. Mum what should I do?”

Instinctively Barbara cradled the phone between her head and shoulder and rolled up her sleeves. “If there's one thing I learned from building the agency it's how to get people to come to an event. Grab a pen Jenny and I'll tell you how to do it.”

Exactly 37 minutes later they hung up the phone and Jenny looked down at her notes. She knew what she had in front of her wasn't just the plan for running a dinner party, it was the strategy she sorely needed for turning around her ailing business.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT...

### Knowledge versus Wisdom

There are many sources of information on how to start, run and grow a business whether it is small, medium or large.

So why are there not many more successful businesses given the wide range of resources that are available to prospective and existing business owners and managers? The reason is that having knowledge does not automatically give you the necessary wisdom that is required to run a successful business.

Knowledge is that which we have learned by observation, experience or learning. How we apply that knowledge, or how we use it for the benefit of others is called wisdom

Another way of expressing it is that knowledge is what you know; wisdom is the capacity to judge. *Wisdom* is knowing what to know, how much and what to do with it. *Knowledge* is obtained, wisdom is developed.

The question is “Can you use your knowledge properly if you have no wisdom?” We think the answer is **no**. You need to *develop* your wisdom.

Running a business requires a continuing set of judgments to be made. Decisions such as who will be our customers, what will we charge, how do we manage employees and so on. There are no set formulas, business models or short cuts that will instantly provide that wisdom.

The story in this book is about two people who build their wisdom to help them be successful.

## **Business Cookery**

## *Chapter 1*

As Simon stood poised at the top of the staircase, he felt part superdad, part ninja.

*Superdad* because Friday was the night he made absolutely sure he got away from work on time so he could put Noah and Rosie to bed and read them a story. It was Jenny's night off to catch up with her Mum Barbara who had moved to Spain with Simon's father-in-law John.

*Ninja* because cat-like flexibility was needed to get past the two consecutive creaking steps so he didn't risk waking the children.

"Yes!" he thought. "Jet Li eat your heart out," as he successfully avoided the noisy obstacles.

He stood triumphantly in the doorway of the lounge, hands on hips. "Kids have had their bath, each had a story and they're asleep. Time to relax for the weekend."

For a moment Jenny giggled to herself, picturing him with cape flowing and of course, his underpants on the outside.

Simon noticed the laptop on the coffee table and the TV on mute. What he didn't notice was the pile of tear-soaked tissues which had almost dried.

"So, how many are coming on Tuesday night?" He sat on the arm of the sofa and it took just one sideways glance from Jenny to remind him if he didn't move quickly, he'd be in for a telling off about how sofa arms aren't that strong, how we're still paying for the sofa and how he shouldn't set a bad example for the children. He moved.

With her husband sat beside her, Jenny explained what had happened on the phone, "Mum's given me some great advice. I've decided to postpone the party a few weeks to a date everyone can make."

"How come?" Simon knew how much work she had already put into organizing it and what it meant to her to have her friends around her.

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Since she started her interior design business from home last year, she had hardly seen her old friends. Instead she spent every opportunity meeting new people at local networking events and building her collection of business cards. Getting a freelance PA to handle her paperwork and appointments had been a blessing. It allowed Jenny to focus on what she was good at – design.

“Mum started off by telling me how to organize a dinner party, but as she was talking I realized this was the way she built up the agency with Dad. Here, I've made some notes; I'll talk you through them.”

It didn't take long for Jenny to bring Simon up to date. She was expecting an enthusiastic reception so was surprised when he got up and walked out of the room.

“I hate it when you do that,” she said under her breath in a barely audible whisper.

She heard the fridge door open, the clink of glasses and the feint pop of the cork leaving the bottle.

Simon set the bottle of wine down on the table and began to pour a glass for each of them. The *glug, glug, glug* of the first wine flowing into the glass was the sound of the working week ending and a hectic weekend of swimming, children's parties and food shopping beginning. She put it out of her mind.

Simon looked thoughtful. “You know, I think this plan of your Mum's could work in my company too.”

Simon had recently been appointed Managing Director of a growing software company and had been feeling the pressure to lead the organization to bigger and better things. As an external hire, he sensed the barriers going up from day one. It took only a few days to learn that the influential and charismatic sales director had applied for his position three months previously and hadn't been successful.

“That first step, 'start with your why' reminds me of something I read in 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People' by Stephen R. Covey – start with the end in mind. The *why* is the reason the company exists. The Vision and Mission.”

He got up and walked out of the room again. Jenny rolled her eyes and took a sip of the ice cold white wine.

Simon came back a few minutes later brandishing a folder. The sofa bounced as he sat down next to her excitedly.

“I kept this from a course I went on at my old company.” He flicked through the pages until he found what he was looking for. “This is it. 'Setting your Vision, Mission and Goals'. I've been so wrapped up in the politics and learning about the new company that I hadn't thought to refer to this. This is going to help us set ours. We can do this for your company and mine. That way we'll each know what we're trying to achieve and we can support each other.”

Jenny liked the sound of this. It was like the old days. They used to talk about everything and dream for the future, but life had got in the way recently.

That's what had been missing, their *why*. A sense of purpose. Something bigger than them, the kids and the mortgage.

As they started working through the course notes, she felt the flush of adrenalin through her body. “We're onto something now, I can feel it!”

## *Recipe for Vision & Mission*

The Vision and Mission are part of the staple diet of every business. Just like bread they are best baked at home where the aroma conveys warmth and a sense of family to every room.

Of course it's possible to buy mass-produced bread and it's possible to copy the vision and mission of other companies. You will get something off the shelf which does the job, but looks and feels the same as everyone else's.

Equally you could buy a bread-making machine and you could delegate creation of the vision and mission to someone, outside the company - perhaps your marketing agency. It could take a while before they know how to make bread just the way you like it.

It's much more satisfying making it yourself (and you know exactly what's in it!)

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**Ingredients:**

Flour, water, yeast, sugar, salt

**Preparation:**

*Wash your hands* – you need to focus so cleanse your mind of thoughts about other work or anything else which needs doing.

*Clear a space* – get rid of the clutter and distractions, this includes any friction between you and any colleagues. You need to be fully present and engaged to do this properly. Have a clean and clear working environment away from contaminants.

**Method:**

*Put the flour, yeast, sugar and salt into a bowl and mix with your hands* – take your key people to a different environment where they can mix together freely to discuss the vision and mission. Many companies find their people become more creative and engaged away from their usual environment. You'll need to roll up your sleeves and get involved so they mix up and share their ideas.

*Stir warm water into the mixture so that it starts to stick together* – it can help to have an independent facilitator involved to get people thinking along the same lines and uniting in a common purpose. The mixture might look sloppy at first but as it binds, it will become doughy. Likewise your people may come up with some odd or conflicting ideas about the vision and mission, but they will start to stick together if you keep on mixing them.

*Lightly dust a work surface with flour and turn the mixture out onto it. Knead until it no longer feels sticky* – once you've got the makings of a vision and mission for your

company, change the environment again and really work at it. Knead the draft from every angle – does it work for everyone? Will it stand up to scrutiny? Does it spring back after taking a knock?

*Move the dough into a bowl and cover with cling film or put it in a plastic bag. Leave it to prove and double in size – give the vision and mission some shape and then leave it alone for a while. This is a good time to take a break for lunch or do another activity unrelated to work. Don't keep prodding at it while it's proving or you'll ruin it.*

*Carefully move the dough into a loaf tin, cover with a clean tea towel and leave to prove again. Preheat oven – when taking the vision and mission back to the rest of the company, move it carefully. This is so it doesn't lose its shape when being transported into the hotter, more pressured environment.*

*Cook until browned and risen – when cooking the vision and mission for the first time, you need to watch it doesn't burn. Sometimes senior managers delegate too soon and think they've left the vision and mission to 'cook' with their team, only to find it's been left too long unattended and has burned.*

*Leave to stand until cooled before eating – give people a cooling off period to let the vision and mission settle with them so they get used to it.*

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT...

### Where are we going?

When preparing a meal we will need to know what we want to prepare, how we are going to prepare it and when we are going to prepare it. To answer these questions we will need to follow recipes whether written down or carried in our heads. The recipe will have the title of *what* is to be prepared, it will have a list of ingredients and *how* to put them together and finally there will be information about *when* to prepare the dish, how long it will take and other details such as oven temperature, timing and so on.

Running a business is no different. The first thing we have to establish is *what* do we want to achieve, then *how* we are going to achieve it and *when* will it happen. Putting this in business terminology:

- **Vision** is the '*what*' you are going to do;
- **Mission** is the '*how*' you're going to do it.
- And the **goals**, **objectives** and **targets** are the '*when*' you're going to do it.

Many people confuse terms like:

- Vision
- Mission
- Goals and Objectives

As consultants, we find that many times when we work with a business and ask them what their vision is, we either get a blank look or they start talking to us about goals and objectives or something else.



So at the start of this section let us define our terms. The first one we have to understand is the Vision. The Vision, basically, is the big idea. It is the idea that is going to provide unity and purpose and inspire those around the business. The vision should be uncluttered and easy to understand. It does not necessarily need to say exactly what you are doing but it must give a good idea of where you want your business to go. A business without a vision is like a car with a GPS installed, and the driver not knowing the destination. If you do not know where you are going, you will never make progress, so you must have a clear vision of your destination.

In setting the vision, you need to make sure that all the stakeholders in your business have an understanding of what that vision is. By stakeholders we mean the:

- Owners
- Staff
- Customers
- Shareholders
- Suppliers

These are the ingredients that you need to mix together to create a successful business.

Let us now look at some examples of vision. The first one is NASA. Their vision was *“to put a man on the Moon”*. That is an easy vision to understand although very hard to actually accomplish.

Another famous vision (which has now been superseded) was *“to put a PC on every desk”*. Guess whose vision that was? - If you said Microsoft, you're right.

The interesting thing is that Microsoft does not sell PCs but obviously they need to have a PC on every desk to get their software installed. So in this case the vision is divorced from what they're actually doing, but intimately linked.

Another famous vision is the one that says: "*Quality, service, cleanliness and value*"; now despite your own personal views on the actual product sold by this business; that has been McDonald's vision right from the very beginning, when the business was set up by Ray Crock.

The interesting thing about 'to put a man on the Moon' reminds me of the story of a woman who was working in NASA just prior to putting the man on the moon; John F Kennedy arrived at the NASA Space Centre, saw the woman working there and asked:

"What do you do here?"

And she said:

"I'm helping to put a man on the moon."

NASA managed to get their vision right through the organization, down to operational level. If you can do that in your own business you are most likely going to be a very successful business.

Let us get back to vision. The first thing that vision has to do is provide a clear sense of purpose and direction. It provides motivation for all those around it. It helps coordinate effort and it gives a common frame of reference for all the various stakeholders in the business. The other important thing that vision has got to do is to direct and facilitate change. It is always talking about what *could be* rather than *what is*.

How does this all work in practice? Well, what you have got to do in business is:

- Create the vision
- Set the mission
- Communicate the vision and mission to all of those involved
- Implement the vision and mission

Let us look at an example closer to home.

A soccer team in the Premiership may have a vision that says: *“We want to win the FA Cup.”*

So that is the vision. What will be their mission?

The **Mission** will be stated in a way that appeals to each of the various different stakeholders. So the mission is going to make comments about:

*“We will need a well coordinated group of athletes who are the best in the country.”*

The mission will also state that:

*“We need to have fans that are going to enjoy the exciting football we’re going to play.”*

The mission may also have some comment about the coaching staff:

*“Who will need to be dedicated and skilled to enable the good athletes to achieve their full potential?”*

And then the mission is going to talk about some benefit to the owners:

*“We will have a nationally recognized team that’s going to be a great source of pride and profitability”*

The third stage is to communicate the vision and mission; how might this be done with a football team?

So to start with, in business you need to have *a clear vision, a clear mission and clear goals and objectives.*

## **MORE FOOD FOR THOUGHT...**

### **The Rope Analogy**

When we do live training sessions we get people to hold a rope up 6 feet high and we ask the audience to tell us: How can people get over the rope?

Now there will be the usual wags who will say:

“Go around it. Lower the rope. Go under it.”

But what we are actually asking is: *How do you get over the rope?*

The usual suggestions come up; if you are athletic you could jump over the rope, if you are not you could get a chair and then jump/leap over the rope. You could get someone to give you a leg-up. You might even get a ladder and climb over the rope that way. All these would achieve the objective of getting over the rope at six feet high.

Now, let us put the rope at 100 feet in the air. If we asked the same audience: How will you get over that rope? – They will come up with suggestions like:

“Hire a helicopter to take you over the rope.”

Or they might say:

“Get a fire engine ladder and climb it and get over the rope that way.”

Some will talk about hiring a crane and going up the crane and getting over the rope. Some people even suggest being fired out of a cannon over the rope.

All these actions achieve getting over the 100 foot rope. And the point is that how you get over a rope six feet high and how you get over a rope 100 feet high are quite different processes.

So you need to start out on your journey using methodologies that are going to get you to your vision (your big idea) and not just take steps that will get you somewhere short of it.

An example we had recently, a woman came to us who wanted to set up a chain of restaurants. When we started talking about it she told us how she had a vision for a chain of restaurants.

So, as part of the consulting process, we were going through all the normal steps she would need to set up the first one. And we were going through what staff to hire, how we would organize menus and so on and so forth. And then we said to her: “We had better set some human resource policies.” And she said to us: “Why would I need those? I’ve only got one restaurant and I only will have about eight or 10 staff.”

What she forgot was that her vision was to have a chain of these restaurants and if she is going to build a chain she has to start as she means to go on, because she will need to have robust human resources policies to properly select staff and appoint managers for a chain of restaurants.

Another concept that's important when you are setting your vision is what is called:

### **The B.H.A.G**

It is not our original idea. It comes from an article by James Collins and Jerry Porras called: *Building Your Company's Vision* and later developed in their book "Built to Last"

B.H.A.G. stands for:

- B**..... **Big**
- H**..... **Hairy**
- A**..... **Audacious**
- G**..... **Goal**

What we are proposing here is that when you set your vision don't set it too timidly, you need to have a **big** vision.

A simple example of this is a client who owns a Deli in south-east London. Her *vision* is to be the food queen of south-east London. It doesn't mention anything about owning a Deli because that is just a part of her mission.

So when you set your vision, set it big because it will become a unifying focal point of effort; and the bigger the vision you have the more effort you are prepared to put in.

A big vision becomes a catalyst for team spirit. It can help the team focus its efforts on what it needs to do to get there. It also provides a clear finish line to know when your **ultimate goal** is achieved.

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For more tips, tools and resources go to:

[www.businesscookerybook.com/resources](http://www.businesscookerybook.com/resources)





## *Chapter 2*

Her vision crystallized at 9.37am on a crisp Monday morning. Jenny was walking Buttons, the family's chocolate Labrador through the park on the way back from school. The timing could have been better. Her 'Eureka!' moment coincided with Buttons' decision to leap through the air into the murky, green pond to chase the squirrel he had spotted on the other side of it.

Usually she would have lost her temper. She knew shouting wasn't the best way to coax him out of the pond, yet she always felt she had to do something to avoid the judging looks from the other dog walkers who pointed to the sign about keeping dogs on a lead near the duck pond. To date, Jenny had never seen a duck on the pond.

As she came to her realization on her vision, she felt elated, "I've been playing far too small."

What triggered her breakthrough was thinking about what she had really enjoyed about being an interior designer. She remembered a project she had worked on when she was the designer-in-residence at the town's department store nine years ago. She was asked to work on the refurbishment of a rather shabby independent hotel which had recently changed hands. The new owners wanted to create a unique environment for their guests which would be a fun weekend retreat for tourists and locals alike.

Over the course of eight months she had worked with them to design and renovate the 12 themed bedrooms and shared spaces. They had been delighted with the result. So were the critics and travel writers, earning the hotel top recommendations in prestigious guide books.

When she started her own interior design business 14 months ago, she'd begun with high hopes, but a few months in found herself

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settling for much smaller projects. The odd dining room here and nursery there. She didn't feel fulfilled, but reasoned that as a mum working from home it was the best she could hope for. It didn't help that the only referrals she'd received through networking groups were for people looking for a new sofa or choosing wallpaper. They took her advice and then bought the items cheaper on the internet. She learned not to give away any more of her time for free.

Her confidence had definitely taken a knock, however her renewed vision inspired her.

Her mother's words about organizing dinner parties were echoing in her ears. On the phone Barbara had explained to her the need to get the guest list right, "There's no point inviting the wrong people to your party - if you're taking the time to put on the party, don't just settle for 'bums on seats' and invite people to make up the numbers. Also, don't think small and assume that someone's too important to want to come to your party; if you don't ask them, you'll never know. People appreciate being asked, even if they can't make it that time."

"This is exactly what I've been doing," Jenny whispered. "Time to get the right people to the party."

At that moment, she made a pact with herself to focus her attention on those who would help her to achieve her vision of:

*"Creating memorable weekends away for 5,000 or more people a year."*

Unless her local small business networking groups were going to be filled with hotel owners with thousands of guests each year or could connect her with them, they were a distraction and would delay the realization of her vision.

She pulled out her mobile phone and called Debbie, her virtual assistant. "Debbie, have you got 15 minutes?"

"Sure," said Debbie.

"Great, we need to talk about how we market our services. I've been thinking we should take a new approach."

All by himself, Buttons climbed out of the pond, shook himself off and stood at Jenny's feet with an expectant look on his face that said, "OK boss, time to get going." They started walking as Jenny continued to talk.

By the time they reached the house, Debbie was as excited about the new direction as Jenny was and had come up with a few ideas of her own.

Until Debbie suggested it, it hadn't occurred to Jenny that she could go back to the owner of the hotel she renovated and ask them if she could use their re-fit as a case study. She also realized her website would need an overhaul if she was going to attract the kind of clients she was looking for. Luckily she'd had her site designed on a platform she could edit herself, so that didn't need to hold things up.

She unlocked the front door, Buttons pushed past her into the house and her keys clattered as she tossed them into the bowl in the hall. She went straight to her 'study' taking her jacket off as she walked. Yes, the study was a corner of the sitting room, but calling it her study made it feel like she was going to work in the morning. She rummaged through old drawers and files and finally found what she was looking for. While she was on a roll, she wanted to do something about it. There's no time like the present.

“OK”, she said, “deep breath”. The butterflies in her stomach were doing back-flips as she held the business card in her hand. She dialed and got straight through to the person she was after. “Good morning Nathan. It's Jenny Richardson. You may remember we worked together on the refurbishment of your hotel a few years ago...”

“Jenny - of course!” Nathan replied. “How are you doing these days?”

Twenty minutes later Jenny was on cloud nine. She'd called to ask if she could photograph the hotel for a case study to put in the portfolio section of her website and she'd been overjoyed to hear how the hotel's popularity had grown after the refit. With an appointment to see the owner next week she couldn't believe she hadn't thought about doing this sooner.

Throughout the journey to work, Simon had been pondering how to get the message across to his directors. He'd noticed since he started that all but one of them had barely spoken to him and

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appeared to side with the UK Sales Director in every meeting. The decision to appoint him over the Sales Director clearly had not been a popular one, but he was here to improve the profitability of the UK office not make friends, he told himself and buried his feelings.

In his career to date he'd been required to make some tough calls. He knew the world of software publishing was a small one, so it was hardly surprising they had heard about his last role and what he had done. He hadn't wanted to make so many redundancies after the merger, but it just didn't make sense to duplicate roles, especially at the senior levels. The organization was top-heavy and, thinking about what he and Jenny had talked about over the weekend, too many cooks were indeed spoiling the broth.

He didn't blame his new team for being cautious around him. In their position he probably would have felt the same way, especially when their new Managing Director was a former Finance Director with a reputation for cost-cutting. The frustrating part of it was he needed their support. All the time that they were either opposing him in meetings for the sake of it and then behind closed doors nodding and acting like 'yes' men and women to safeguard their jobs, they weren't making progress as a company.

As Simon pulled into his reserved space at the company car park he found the prospect of walking into the building daunting. Knowing the area was covered by CCTV and the receptionist would be watching him sat in his car thinking, he knew it wouldn't look good, so he emerged from his car, grabbed his bag and stood up straight. He strode confidently towards reception. He said Good Morning, signed in and made his way to his office.

There was an hour before he was due to have his morning meeting with his PA Angela, so he closed the door and walked to the window. He'd been stuck in traffic for an hour and knew he thought better standing up, so wondered if this would literally give him a different perspective on things.

He continued his train of thought about the team. The only person who seemed on board was Karen. To say he was surprised would be to put it lightly. She was the HR Director. He hadn't expected her support, given his previous track record. If he'd been a

gambler, he'd have put money on her being the person to block his every move.

As it turned out, she didn't seem to play political games and spoke her mind. "Funny how other directors don't invite her to the meetings they chaired", Simon thought as he stared out of the window at nothing in particular. "They say it's because she's part-time, I wonder how true that is."

Whenever he asked her opinion, Karen gave it to him. She clearly relished the opportunity to have an input. He wondered how discrete she would be if he confided in her about his concerns about managing the directors. He usually kept his cards close to his chest. Simon wasn't used to opening up to people he didn't know and he'd only known Karen for a matter of weeks. Even friends he had known since school didn't really 'know' him, Simon thought. He'd had to be guarded about business and personal matters in the past in order to progress in his career, yet he had the nagging feeling that his people skills and leadership skills were about to be tested and that made him feel decidedly uncomfortable.

As his eyes wandered down towards the road outside, his subconscious mind noticed a van stopped at the traffic lights. The catering company's logo caught his eye and his train of thought shifted. He thought back to what he and Jenny had talked about over the weekend. "Am I trying to cook a meal without knowing the recipe?" he asked himself as he mulled over his challenge with the team. "I want to get them on board with a vision for the future, but I'm not even clear about what that vision is and what we're trying to create."

He rationalized this was something outside of his skill-set and there was no shame in not having the skills to do something he hadn't had to do before. "I know that, but admitting I don't have all the answers would be seen as a sign of weakness...wouldn't it?" he thought. Simon could feel the tension building in his body. The familiar knot in his stomach was coming back and as he turned towards the desk and sat down in his leather swivel chair he noticed his hands were clenched into fists.

## Business Cookery

“There must be a way to get help and still save face.” Thoughts raced through his mind, although to anyone peering into the office, he would have seemed calm and reflective. “Maybe I could read a book, and then no one would know. Or I could go on a course. No that wouldn't do. I couldn't sit in a room full of people and risk being put on the spot. How about an audio book? I could listen in the car on the way to work. I learned Italian like that; could it work with managing people?” He started to feel overwhelmed when he realized he didn't even know where to start with choosing something to listen to. “Maybe Karen's got some ideas. She's the expert in people; she might be able to help. But I couldn't ask for help directly...” He had an idea.

He picked up the phone and the sheet of extension numbers. He dialed Karen's number as he knew she came into work early. “Karen, could you come into my office please? I just want to run through some numbers with you.”

Ten minutes later Karen appeared laptop in hand ready to go through the hastily prepared budgets and spending for the last 6 months. She looked a little flustered. Simon started off. “Thank you for coming through so quickly. I've been thinking about the managers and directors. I'd like to see whether we can get some sort of course for them so they're all pulling in the same direction. They seem to be all over the place. Do we have any budget to get a trainer or motivational speaker in?”

Karen bit her lip and took a moment to think before replying. She'd wanted to tackle this issue for a couple of weeks now, but from an entirely different direction. She'd been waiting for an opportunity. Now was her chance and she didn't want to mess it up.

“That's a great idea. It would make such a difference having everyone working together,” she said. “In my experience these kinds of initiatives go down well and have more of a lasting impact when they come from the top and cascade down. Otherwise, there can be a bit of a 'them and us' attitude going on if the leadership team isn't involved.”

“Exactly. That's why I want the directors to go on this course,” said Simon.

“Yes, that's true. I've found coordinating everyone's diaries to get them all together for a one-hour meeting can be a nightmare, so getting them all together for a course could be tricky. It sounds like this is something that might be better handled one-to-one. Did you use any executive coaches or mentors at your last company?” asked Karen.

“No, I don't really know much about them. I think one of my colleagues had one to help her work through a personal problem, but I don't see how that would work here,” he said.

“It sounds like she might have worked with a counselor or therapist rather than a coach. Executive coaching is different because it's about taking people who are already good at what they do and helping them to be even better. For example,” she explained, “take someone who's technically very good at what they do, but they've never needed to learn how to be a leader. They change roles and suddenly find their technical skills aren't as important as the ability to influence others, manage political situations or get them on board with the strategy for the future.”

She paused before continuing, “I actually trained as a coach last year and as part of my training, I worked with someone who had been an engineer all his career and then became head of his department. Over a few months he worked on how he managed the very different personalities in his team. He'd been clashing with someone in particular and I helped him to understand how to get the best out of them by adapting his management style.”

“This sounds interesting,” said Simon. “Could you do something similar here?”

Karen seized on her chance to broach the subject of Simon having coaching but without causing any offence.

“It would create a conflict of interest if I did the coaching, but I've got some good contacts and know experienced executive coaches who could be completely objective and discrete. Of course, if we were going to suggest something to the directors, it would carry more weight if you had a coach as well...”

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Simon did his best not to let his sense of relief and excitement show. This gave him the perfect excuse to get support in private and not lose face. “Well, if you think it would help to get the directors' agreement to this, I'd be prepared to have coaching myself. How quickly could we get started?”

“I can make a few calls this afternoon and get some proposals back to you by the end of the week. How does that sound?” she asked.

“Sounds great,” said Simon.

As Karen packed up her things and left his office, Simon retained his composure. When she was gone, he walked to the corner of his office, pretended to examine a picture hanging on the wall and almost inaudibly shouted “Yes!” to himself and punched the air beside him.

This was going to be a good week. He couldn't wait to tell Jenny.



## ***Recipe for Defining and Reaching Out to the Target Market, Soliciting Support from Colleagues***

Cooking a barbecue often seems a casual affair but in reality requires a lot of planning. Finding out what food will suit the attendees best, preparing it and then delivering it, is very similar to establishing a business. There is no point in cooking something that nobody will eat. Like in business we must provide a product or service people actually want and will value. Too often this is not the case. We need to consult people who may be possible customers for their opinion. Extra hands at a barbecue can be very helpful.

There are also other things that will be required at a barbecue other than the food to make the experience enjoyable. The food may be cooked very well but if we do not have the right plates and utensils the experience may be less than satisfactory.

Putting on a barbecue can also move us out of our comfort zone. Cooking outdoors is an entirely different matter to cooking in our well laid out kitchen with everything at hand.

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**Ingredients:**

Meat, poultry, fish, seafood, various salads, oil, bread or bread rolls, sauces and dressings

**Other Requirements:**

Barbecue, plates, serving utensils, eating utensils, napkins, foil, skewers

**Method:**

*Prior to the event clean the barbecues and make sure there is enough gas in the bottle* – Having worked out who to invite it is important to ensure that we will be properly and have the basic resources to undertake the barbecue. People seeing a dirty barbecue may make them lose their appetite for the food that is going to be produced on it. The initial presentation is key.

*Before cooking work out how you are going to lay out the food, utensils, napkins etc.* – It is usually better to serve the food cooked on the barbecue first and then have the people put other food on their plate second. This ensures that there is

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enough room to serve the barbecued food on the plate and that it does not cover other food. In business we have to decide what the most important thing we should focus on is.

*Items needing prior preparation should be attended to* – it is important to marinate the meat in advance, wrap the fish in foil and put items on skewers.

*Allocate tasks* – Sometimes the cooking of the barbecue is best delegated to a guest who has the necessary skills. With regard the other food get help to lay it out in a way that ensures a smooth flow for the guests in filling their plates.

*Stagger the cooking of the barbecued food so that it can be cooked to meet the various tastes of the attendees*– people like their steak cooked to different degrees – rare, medium or well done. It is important to have a range of steaks on the barbecue at once so there is no waiting. Remember not all our clients are the same.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT...****Strategy is not a dirty word**

The key thing about strategic planning is you need to ask yourself the question:

*“Where will the business go in the next 10 years?”*

Or maybe three or five years. The length of the period that you are going to plan for will depend on what sort of business you are in. If you are in a business that does not change very much, is not subject to technology and so on, or a service business, you may be able to plan out for 10 years. If you are in the IT or technology type of business you may find that your planning horizon may be only one year because of constant change and technological advances.

So you will need to decide how long you want to plan for. It may be that you want to exit your business in a certain amount of time, maybe in four years time; if so your planning cycle would be four years.

But we all have different reasons why we are in business and how long we want to stay in a particular business, so when we are deciding the period we want to plan for we first must decide what a useful period to plan for is and is it relevant to plan for that period.

When we are planning we want to make sure that we are building an outline framework of the basic principles and targets that we need to take into account.

In strategic planning there are quite a few things that we might want to look at, for example:

- Our competitive advantage over our competitors
- How we add value to the client – we should always be looking in any plan to see how we can add value.
- Whether to focus on the mass market or a niche market
- The best way to get to that market
- Whether to have cost based strategies
- Whether to compete on low cost structure - something which small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can do well
- Whether to have market based strategies where we go out and find a need and then build a product or service to satisfy that need

Often things do not go exactly to plan and we need to have a Plan B to make sure that when something changes we can immediately adapt our strategy to suit.

We then need to develop and introduce our strategy. And having introduced it we need to make sure that we are continually evaluating it and that we have constant feedback on what is actually happening.

What you have to do in your business first is find a *Competitive Advantage*, if you can.

A second type of strategy is *Cost Advantage* which seeks to answer the question “How can I do things cheaper and still provide a quality service?”

Look at how to lower costs, whatever they are and if you can do this and maintain a lower cost structure than your competitors you may have a cost advantage.

A third type of strategy is *Market Dominance* and even though you might think that small and medium enterprises cannot be market dominant, they can.

You can be market dominant in your local area; for example, one of our clients is a picture framer and what he has managed to do is acquire all the picture framers in his area so now he is dominant in that area in that particular part of his city. He had done this through acquisition.

A fourth type of strategy is: *New Product Development* which finds ways to develop products ahead of rivals.

A fifth strategy might be *Contraction and Expansion* which is based on what we are actually good at, and focusing on that. Quite often our businesses grow willy-nilly because we start doing things because people ask us to do them and we move away from our core competencies.

Maybe there are things in your business that you are doing that are not making an adequate contribution and you should stop doing them and focus on what you are actually good at, which hopefully will be more profitable.

A sixth strategy is *Price Leadership*. This is very hard to do as a small and medium enterprise because it is hard to dominate an industry through price and this type of strategy is not often available to SMEs so we will not labor the point too much. However SMEs with low overheads may be able to create a price advantage over bigger competitors.

One of the strategies you could consider is to *Go Global* where you could expand your business overseas. There are many businesses that can do this, service businesses particularly. But there is still scope for products in many markets as these markets become more affluent. Is this an area you should be looking at?

The eighth strategy is *Re-engineering* where you might look at ways of doing things differently in our business, thinking outside the box or looking at new ways of doing what we do, but in different places and doing it better?

In addition to the market-centered strategies, there are some internal strategies we might put into place. For example, we may *Downsize* by selling off unwanted parts of our business and contract the business to the areas that we know better.

A second internal strategy may be to *De-layer* the business, for example where there is too much bureaucracy; perhaps too many levels of management which would slow down the decision making process. This is an area we may want to look at if we decide to be innovative and to change with the changing environment.

Finally, we could think about: *Restructuring* our business where we should re-think the way our business is organized and do it differently. Maybe different people could work in different parts of the business.

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