

The background of the cover is a complex, monochromatic illustration of mechanical gears and technical drawings. The gears are of various sizes and are arranged in a way that suggests a complex mechanical system. The technical drawings include various lines, circles, and text, some of which is partially obscured by the gears. The overall aesthetic is that of a technical or engineering drawing.

How to Think

like an

Inventor

Written by a
successful inventor

Warren Wilson

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Part 1

Gather Information

‘Necessity is the mother of invention.’

Plato

‘Lemme take a minute and tell you my plan.’

The Mothers of Invention

Like so many products we now take for granted, my BetterBlocks invention came out of necessity. Then, to my surprise, it turned into a \$45 million idea. Commercially-speaking, it was my biggest shot. In its prime—I am proud to admit—it gave Lego Corporation a bit of a headache.

At first I didn’t know what to think: was I a smart cookie? A one-hit wonder? Or just a failure who got lucky?

Looking back, I guess I was all those things and more, though what always set me apart was my obsession for analysing whatever situation I’d find myself in. I started by making lists and writing everything down, which gave me the backbone to this book. I was always thinking, *What could I do differently? What is the opposite point of view?* I used to drive people crazy.

I was an inventor, I didn’t think I’d have to be a presenter too, until I realized that, to get anything off the ground, I needed financial backing, and I had to make presentations to get that. This was another eye-opener. So I attended self-improvement seminars to

build the confidence and skills to enable me to ask business people for their money.

That was a huge step for me, because I had spent most of my working life making things in my father's engineering workshop in the backyard. Just like Dad. Now, here I was in my late-20s wondering whether the world had passed me by. Sure, I knew how to make and fix all types of things, I had plenty of work, and I made reasonable money fixing things for my clients. The problem was, as time went on, more and more of these people switched from 'clients' to 'friends' and you can't charge your friends the full whack. Everybody knows that.

So there I was age 28 wondering whether I was going to continue like this—like Dad—for the rest of my life, or whether I should throw the workshop doors open, let the sunshine in and see what was happening in the big world around Adelaide.

And so I decided to invent something.

All my life I'd adapted various bits of metal and plastics, why not now as a commercial venture?

So that's precisely what I did, and it was a comprehensive failure. Awful. Next, I was broke, ashamed and embarrassed. And that—to me—was the famous 'turning point' you read about in people's stories: *Do I quit now or do I keep going?*

Not only did I keep going, but I also kept a record of what I learned from the depths of failure to the joy of success. In examining my goals I found myself analyzing my motives, and to my surprise I learned something about myself: *BetterBlocks wasn't just about the money, it was also an emotional success.*

Press, Proud Parents, Photographers!

Fast forward a decade later: I'd sold the patents to Kelvin Claney, a New Zealander who had a successful direct selling business in America. We became friends, as I seem to do with most of my business associates, and he'd occasionally call me. One day, he rang up to tell me he'd organized a 'BetterBlocks Day' in Florida. As Kelvin had often done before, he hired a hall in which he displayed BetterBlocks models made by customers. Prizes were awarded and the event never failed to impress the local press, proud parents and photographers.

So there was Kelvin, on the line telling me about his BetterBlocks Day, which I'd heard about before, except this time he was speaking in a 'meaningful' tone.

What's this about? I thought and Kelvin continued.

He said, 'I was speaking to one of the dads who came up afterwards and he thanked me for bringing BetterBlocks onto the market.'

Why would he be so grateful? I wondered.

'I asked him why,' said Kelvin. And then his voice cracked a bit and he continued, 'The dad replied, "Because it's the first time in four years I've sat down and played with my son.'"

I'll never forget those words: ***the first time in four years I've played with my son!*** It might sound corny, but unless you have been through breakup or divorce, or seen a friend go through it, you don't know what it's like to hardly ever see your kids. When Kelvin told me that story, I too became a bit emotional.

Afterwards, I thought, *Why the sentimental tear?* I suppose it was because I had never before seen the joy a simple toy can give. My self-image was that of an inventor, dealmaker, businessperson—not a relationship-builder—and suddenly Kelvin’s little anecdote caught me out because it made a difference to someone’s life. Despite the money and the glory, this was the most powerful thing that I got out of BetterBlocks.

The exact definition of ‘making a difference’ is hard to pin down because, as you travel through life, you’ll never fully know what difference you’re going to make. Furthermore, you seldom see the results.

Well, thanks to BetterBlocks, in this instance I did. BetterBlocks gave me the opportunity to catch a glimpse of how I succeeded in making the world a slightly more amusing place.

From Back Shed to Boardroom

Turning an idea into physical reality is a remarkable act of creation. Most people have had truckloads of great ideas in their lifetime but very few have taken the final step that turns it into commercial reality. There are actually six steps between invention and commercial success, because the invention process doesn't stop until your product is on the retail shelf.

1. At first, ***it flits into your head*** and it's nowhere else. You have come up with a thought. You can instantly put it behind you or you can dwell on it.
2. The more you dwell on it, the more real it becomes because the next step is to ***tell people about it***. If they reckon, 'It's really good,' it could be a worthwhile idea.
3. Later, a combination of self-talk and social pressure forces you to ***actualize your idea***. Those forces mightn't leave you alone until you do it.
4. And instead of getting everyone off your case because 'you've done it' all you've really done is ***create a prototype*** of something that could be bigger than you imagined.
5. Suddenly, what was only between you and your imagination is commanding enough respect that you probably should ***consider selling the idea!***
6. So that's what you do, ***you sell it***.

And you thought you were nothing more than an inventor!

To get your idea off the ground you'll need money. The wheel has taken yet another turn, and you may find yourself talking more about venture capital than about the workshop that was so important when all this began. One day, you look in the mirror and realize that, if you want to proceed, you'll need to pitch to the

money-people, and to do that convincingly you might have to learn presentation, like I had to.

It's irrelevant what the idea is: it has to be *great* otherwise it would not have caught your attention. The idea itself could be writing a book, building a house or creating BetterBlocks. Only you can decide whether or not that particular idea deserves a life. (After all, there are plenty of other great ideas in your head.)

I believe *everybody* has had great (certainly 'good') ideas. The difference is that most people let them slide, whereas a few push on and say, 'What must I do to actualize that idea?'

Believe me, from the back shed to the boardroom is an arduous, but adventurous, road.

Gather Information

The first step in turning a great idea into reality is to gather information. No matter what the challenge, simply increase your knowledge by gathering all the information you can around your subject area.

The information-gathering process can be likened to building a sports team. (1) First assemble all potential players. (2) Next observe what they can do. (3) Having studied them in action you can make decisions. There is no need for judgment during the information-gathering stage. Judge not, until you reach stage 3. There will be plenty of time later to decide what is useful and what is not. Right now you're just collecting, observing and learning.

Don't judge it—store it. It sounds simple but wait until you start collecting data. That little voice in your head will be assessing every piece of information you receive. It is going to repeatedly tell you, 'That's useless/that's great,' 'That can't work/it'll work,' or, 'It's crazy/it's fantastic.'

Surprise, surprise! What seemed unsuitable at first glance may turn out to be the starring role. Or, as reggae singer Bob Marley put it, 'The stone that the builder refuse will always be the head cornerstone...'

Take a similar example from the movies: well-known comedian Jim Carrey was booted off the stage after his first performance as a stand-up comic. It took him two years before he rebuilt the confidence to try again. He's certainly successful now (*The Mask*, *Ace Ventura*, *Batman Forever*...) yet when he got off-stage after his debut it looked as if his show was over forever. To rebuild his confidence, he overwhelmed his emotions with logic, strengthening

himself with information that made him on-target when he came back.

So gather all the information you can. Here are four ways to get it:

General media

The general media is a total reflection of what people are talking about, which might be social change, economic matters, government policy, even developing attitudes. It's full of topical themes, so catch the mood of the times if you want to be as 'informed' as the next person. Your news-on-the-hour, daily newspaper, Internet news page, and weekly magazines provide easy-to-access information.

Industry media

Your sector probably has its own magazine on the newsstand, in the specialized section. Other publications are produced for association members and parties on their mailing list. The Internet has made a real impact in this area, allowing small and specialized media a chance to express itself to its own community. Trade shows are another venue, bringing together all major players including spokespersons for the sector and innovators who want to tout their wares.

Local information

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) provides first class local demographic information. You pay for what you get, and this is much more comprehensive and objective than anything else around. Of course, much local information can be gleaned from

regional newspapers as well as newsletters and blogs from local voluntary associations.

Contacts

Some people are in-the-know, usually because they have inside links to more than one company. For example, suppliers and contractors. They know what people are buying, what they've stopped wanting and whether or not your idea has commercial potential. You will also need strong financial backers, which could be your local bank, venture capitalists or a partnership.

Opportunities for alliances could include shared advertising, reciprocal promotions, piggy-backing anything (from direct mail to distribution) and other forms of cooperation in non-competing areas.

The more knowledge you have about your venture, the easier it will be for you to identify what you've got to find out. To compete with Lego I gathered all the information that I could about the company, which I found readily available online, on display and in print.

More isn't always better. How much information is too much? When it comes to gathering data, distinguish between the information and the process; don't turn information-gathering into an endless habit. Gathering information is just one step to success in the process, not the whole process.

And when it comes to making a choice, don't make the mistake that some people do when they give in to their short-term memory, which best recalls what is most recent. Don't (out of frustration) choose the last thing you checked out. Just work through your list rationally, contrasting the strengths and the weaknesses of all options, and measure the opportunities presented.

Having gathered the information you need, *let's go!*

Part I

Understand Your Challenges

*Information-gathering leads to knowledge,
knowledge leads to understanding;
understanding leads to clarity of thought;
clarity of thought leads to power.*

*And power means you can take action without having to
beg for assistance, which is the position you need to be in
to make workable decisions.*

To gain understanding you must have:

- 1.** An *affinity* with (or liking for) what you are doing – because that makes your efforts genuine,
- 2.** A sense of *reality* – because facts earth you in the truth about what you are dealing with, and,
- 3.** *Communication* – to enable you to share your understanding and build a winning team.

Inventors are trailblazers who create new ideas or improve existing ones. Because they work in unexplored terrain, inventors don't have all the answers. Mistakes and misunderstandings are the price they pay on the road to discovery. At best, they may have foreseen the end result in their imagination, but that doesn't tell anyone how to get there.

Let's take a look at a personal example of a misunderstanding between my partner at the time, Helen, and me in our property investing business

- Her focus was to renovate the houses as *cheaply* as possible.
- Mine was to renovate them as *quickly* as possible, even if it cost more.

At times, we would argue because our priorities were out of sync. We didn't really listen to each other until we came to understand that our priorities were not aligned. Once we accepted that, we had a clearer understanding of our differences. As a result, I changed my ideas in line with hers, after which we were no longer at loggerheads.

For things to change, we needed to reach an agreement, and in our instance the three areas of potential tension listed above worked this way:

- 1. Affinity** – our mutual intention was to make money on properties.
- 2. Reality** – we knew we could make money buying low priced houses, renovating them and renting them out.
- 3. Communication** – when we both understood the idea behind each other's actions we worked together much more easily.

That triple combination applies to any challenge.

In the case of creating BetterBlocks, I had a natural affinity for children's toys because I love kids. After gathering information, I think I had a reasonable grasp of the reality of what I had to accomplish. What I lacked was communication, so I worked alone until I realized I needed to break out of my shell.

Through gathering the facts I learned that Lego's basic patent ran out in 1983. With that profession freedom confirmed, I felt free of any legal impediment. So I thought a bit deeper and realized the Lego blocks were predominantly rigid. Why? Could I exploit this characteristic? I thought I could, so I worked on developing model-building blocks that bent and moved. The problem of rigidity in building blocks was a problem I felt I could solve.

In this way, my focus shifted from competition (i.e., 'can Little Me compete with the formidable Lego Corporation?') to creativity (i.e. 'can I develop a moveable building block system?') The answer to the second question is between me and what is inside my head. That is much easier to contemplate than worrying about how a big business might respond because, in reality, I had no idea how they would respond—from trying to squash me flat to buying me out!

Furthermore, Lego wasn't the only one in that marketplace. It also had a me-too clone created by America's third largest toy manufacturing company, Tyco, who have been around since 1926. To their range of train kits, slot cars, radio controlled trucks, dolls and *Sesame Street* products, in the 90s they added an excellent Lego-style product whose main area of differentiation was its price point. As you can see, there was a lot going on when I entered that market. Thinking about all that would discourage me, so I focused on the basic problem, which is all I could really handle by myself at that stage.

Fortunately, there is usually more than one solution to any problem. The solution will depend on the viewpoint and experiences of the seeker. By totally understanding the problem (through the three areas of affinity, reality and communication) I discovered what I could change to bring about the solution I wanted. For Tyco it was the price point, for me it was to innovate the product.

I next discovered a key to make the project successful was to involve other people. This required communication. Part of communication is firstly being able to observe accurately, otherwise how can we make valuable comments?

One Man & His Dog

The ability to conquer a challenge is directly related to our powers of observation—our ability to notice things as they are, not as we assume they are.

Here's an example of how, by noticing a simple, everyday occurrence, one man and his dog changed the way we fasten our clothes. I discovered this story while browsing the *About Inventors* website: <http://inventors.about.com>, which I recommend.

George de Mestral, a 43-year-old Swiss engineer, was a naturally inquisitive man. The idea of the Velcro hoop-fastener came to him one summer's day in 1950 when he was walking his dog through fields. To de Mestral's constant annoyance, both his dog and his socks would get covered with burdock weeds, which were extremely difficult to remove.

'How did this weed stick so well?' he wondered. Back home, de Mestral put the burrs under the microscope, took a close look and saw that they comprised hundreds of tiny hooks that caught on everything, like his clothes for example, and his dog's fur. De Mestral realized that, if he could duplicate this synthetically, he could create a 'zipperless zipper'. He foresaw a possible market in the clothing industry that was hitherto dependent on buttons and zippers.

Originally, his idea was not taken seriously, not even when he took it to the centre of weaving in Lyon, France. However, de Mestral did manage to get the cooperation of one weaver who made two cotton strips that worked. That was the beginning of the legend.

After a series of further experiments with cotton, nylon and infrared light, de Mestral patented Velcro in 1955 and in 1957 he opened his factory. Today the hook and loop fastener is manufactured in the

United States, Britain, Germany and Spain. It has replaced belts, buckles and zippers worldwide on items ranging from shoes to spacesuits.

All because someone was curious enough to observe why a burr stuck to his dog!

Noticing the world around you is one of the first steps towards creation and it doesn't have to be a physical item. Someone invented Pop charts, someone invented Alcoholics Anonymous, someone else invented direct selling; these are all *concepts* not things you buy across a counter. However, De Mestral invented something you do buy in a shop and so did I. But first I had to come up with a system that would allow the blocks to clip together firmly, yet still be able to rotate.

One day, while getting dressed, I clipped together the top of my jeans and noticed that the press-stud rotated. Hmm.

I had never thought about that before.

For those who have never seen BetterBlocks, imagine a little plastic block with one male part—like a press stud—instead of the eight studs like Lego. The male part is on both ends and on the top and underneath there's a female part also at each end. When the two blocks clip together they can rotate, thus forming a flexible building block system. (Pic here)

Obvious, isn't it? As you can see, the answer to my problem was always right before my eyes—more accurately, right in front of my bellybutton—and although I had been wearing jeans for at least 20 years it took that eureka moment for me to connect the press stud with the building block I was about to 'invent'.

Lesson: The real obstacle to problem solving is not that we don't have the answer but that we may not be seeing it. In my instance, the real key was to observe my whole environment, starting from

what my thoughts were telling me, right through to what my jeans were telling me, and then clicking the two together.

True observation is not passive; it involves all the senses, not just sight. It involves studying the object of your attention closely enough to allow yourself to make the connections that turn a burr into Velcro and a press stud into a toy.

Great artists are very keen observers. They observe objects in minute detail.

On the subject of gathering information, Russian painter and art theorist Wassily Kandinsky wrote, 'The ideal of all research is:

- 1.** Precise investigation of each individual phenomenon in isolation
- 2.** The reciprocal effect of phenomena upon each other in combinations
- 3.** General conclusions which are to be drawn from the above two divisions.' (1)

My wife, Karen, is also an artist and a great observer of shadows, colors and form. She notices subtleties I simply do not see. When I look at a tree, all I see is a tree! Karen, however, will notice the way the light falls and the way the leaves are moved by the wind. It really comes down to 'precise investigation of each individual phenomenon' and her breaking up an object into all its different components as well as seeing it as a whole.

Being a great observer is a characteristic of great artists and actors. I note Barry Humphries' ear for Aussie expressions that he brings back to haunt us—like the dreaded 's'cuse I' and the 'flex' (which is what we used to call extension cords). Likewise, actor Bryan Brown

plays the quintessential Australian in all his roles. You'd think he'd been plucked straight out of a pub.

Well, creativity isn't the private domain of artists and actors, successful business people are great observers too. They can spot opportunities as well as ideocracies and problems. And after gathering information and ruminating on their findings, they too have a good nose for ideas, which is where money is made and profits increased.

Where's the Advantage?

James Harrison, a 36-year-old publisher of the *Geelong Advertiser* was another great observer. He happened to notice that as ether evaporated it made metal cold. He used this principle to make the first mechanical ice machine in 1851. Refrigeration didn't exist before the mid-19th century, previously it was only provided by ice, which had to be imported into Australia from Canada. So, obviously, creating ice could become very profitable.

By 1857, he was producing three tons of ice a day and, although Harrison (who died in 1893) never reaped the big rewards that Kelvinator did in the 1930s, it was from Harrison's simple observation—connected to an idea—that refrigeration was born.

So, coming back to my challenge—it was all about a press stud on my jeans. The next question I asked myself was, 'How can I use this observation to my advantage?'

Do Not Quit

When gathering information, never confuse fact with fiction. There's plenty of gossip in the air, plenty of 'inside talk' floating around, but your decisions, time and dollars have to be based on information not speculation. If you don't know fact from fiction, ***find out!***

Consider Aiko Morita, the inventor of the portable CD player known as the Walkman. No one believed in his idea, all the people he asked reckoned that no one would buy a portable CD player. But the negative feedback was based on nothing more than subjective opinions and personal prejudices. Morita wouldn't quit, he ran his own tests and discovered the true facts. Without testing the market himself, the Sony Walkman may never have been invented. What a missed opportunity that would have been!

Thomas Edison said he tried 1000 times before he got a working light bulb and, according to legend, was not discouraged by his failures, instead proudly claiming to have identified 999 ways *not* to do it before finding the solution. By eliminating what didn't work, Edison focused all his attention on finding what did work.

Viewpoints and opinions can be variable but never confuse them with the facts. My emotions were telling me that I could never compete with the mighty Lego, but the facts showed otherwise.

Part 2

Problems vs. Challenges: The Power of Positive Wording

The difference between people who achieve what they want and those who don't is not physical, it's *mental*. Overcoming challenges happens first and foremost in our head, because before any action can take place, we have to have clarity of thought.

The way we think and the language we use when going through things in our minds (the 'self-talk') is essential to our success and is why we need to protect our minds from the rubbish that society tries to stick into it.

Remember the last great movie you went to? I bet it was great because of the words used by the actors. In building the script, the directors, producers and actors have an unusually broad command of language, knowing which words evoke each desired response.

The power of perception is incredible. Because humans are emotive beings, we can select different words in order to achieve the responses we want, whether happiness, sadness, inspiration or anything else. Similarly, the words we use inside our heads can also instigate different responses, sometimes from widely varying extremes.

A simple choice of words can create an inconsistent frame of reference. Take the word 'executive', which is a loaded word if ever there was one:

- An independent small business person might read it as ‘the overpaid enemy’, whereas,
- A medium-sized business person might read it as someone s/he’d like to one day become, and,
- Someone in a corporation might read it as their boss, their leader, their hero.

Words can stop us in our tracks, or they can inspire us to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Because becoming successful is firstly a mental game, it is of the utmost importance that we use the suitable self-talk language that leads us to achieve our desired thought. Let’s focus on two often-used words, ‘problem’ and ‘challenge’, which are synonyms with different shades of meaning and evoke quite different feelings:

Problem. Suggests negative thoughts like physical and mental struggles to overcome obstacles.

Challenges. Suggests confidence and eventual success.

Both these words can be used variously to describe the same situation, but, as you have just noted, they don’t have quite the same meaning.

I could have interpreted competing with Lego as either a *problem* or a *challenge*. I chose to see it as a challenge simply because it gave me more hope that I could succeed, and therefore the energy to do so. One of the most important elements in conquering any challenge is the way we speak to ourselves, that ‘self-talk’, the voice inside your head, feeding you the power you need to take on challenges successfully.

Lesson: By simply changing your choice of words, you can evoke a whole different attitude that will reflect your ability to resolve, and even conquer, the situation at hand.

There is no 'problem' that can't be changed into a 'challenge' simply by changing the word.

Try it.

Next time you think you have a problem, don't call it that. I suggest replacing it with the word 'challenge' and see how you go with that more encouraging strategy. The chances are you'll have greater success because you will approach the situation with far more confidence.

Emotion in the Equation

E-motion is simply energy in motion. Getting control of our emotions is a way of taking control and positioning our business direction precisely where we want it to go. It is important because our emotions don't simply drive our thoughts; they also generate the energy that brings them into reality.

Emotion is pure energy. It doesn't understand whether the feelings it creates are constructive or destructive. What matters to you and me is the answer to the question, 'How can I harness it to get what I want?'

Let's take our emotion out of the equation and find out exactly what the word 'problem' means with no emotion attached.

A problem is a source of perplexity. It means that there is something here we do not know yet, something new to be discovered. That's good, isn't it?

Often our emotions tell us otherwise. They tell us that a problem is a source of failure, that it's too hard, that it will only lead to doom and gloom ... *which is hardly inspiring!*

But emotions are not insurmountable, and, like everything else about us, 'what goes in must come out' so emotions respond to 'what goes in', and you can control that. That means, if you put a certain type of thinking in your mind—say, positive thinking—you can have positive emotions. So, when defining the word 'problem', how can we change the emotion in our thinking, when it controls so much of our actions?

- When I negotiated the sale of BetterBlocks, I was desperate to do the deal. There was high emotion. Under those

-
- circumstances, do you think I did the best deal I could have?
No way!
- I remember Robert Kiyosaki said in a workshop that the higher our emotion in a negotiation, the lower our IQ, therefore the less likely we are to get what we want. (I should have listened to him!)

When confronted with a big challenge, two contradictory thoughts appear:

- What's the solution? And,
- Better give up now, I'm doomed to fail because I'll never find the answer.

Sensory overload: The second one is formed because we are overwhelmed and/or confused by the amount of new information on hand. *We actually have no known reference point to work from.* This confusion is created by contradictory thoughts, which we believe. Here's how we conduct ourselves:

Lack of belief

We want a solution yet we believe we can't have it—now that *is* a problem.

Emotion beats logic

What is even more of a problem is that the thought with the greatest emotion attached usually wins. Because we've all failed before, all this previous stored emotion is remembered and attached to 'I can't...!'

We stop

When we have no idea what to do, we stop trying. (A 'problem' can be defined as: *a point at which we have given up.*) And if we use such self-talk as, 'I don't know what to do,' or 'I can't solve this,' then we will run ourselves out of steam.

Momentum

How can we start the momentum rolling again? The most self-assured way is by changing something we do have control over: our thoughts, and then our words.

From problem to challenge

Start the self-talk by changing the word *problem* to *challenge*.

Challenges Problems Emotions

It may seem simplistic, but there is sound reasoning behind this. The definition of **challenge** is: ‘a difficulty which stimulates interest or effort’, this is a definition that gives us hope. And hope will usually lead to an action plan. We have an interest in solving the challenge (or it wouldn’t be a challenge to us because we wouldn’t care) and we *can* do something, it’s only a matter of finding out what.

Whereas to overcome a **problem** is weightier:

1. You really need to be interested in solving it
2. You’re probably forced into solving it
3. You therefore need to make an effort

If we substitute ‘problem’ with the word ‘challenge’, our attitude changes because our emotional response is different. It’s all a question of whether the glass is half-empty or half-full. It also changes the thought processes that are standing in our way. Having cleared out those cobwebs, only then can our mind focus on finding solutions. We are now in a frame of mind that allows us to move on to constructive, progressive thoughts.

The beauty of thoughts is that we are the ones who create them so we can change them if we want to!

It is important to understand the role of emotion in our response because it really is the driving force behind turning thoughts into concrete reality. And our emotions will either encourage or discourage us from performing the action necessary, which could be the difference between failure and success.

Emotion is indifferent. It is simply an energy that needs to be expressed. It doesn't care whether it is driving towards a goal or away from it. So it's important to focus this energy towards a solution to your challenge.

The crucial point here is to ***channel your thoughts and emotions in the same direction***. Only then will the desired solution happen. It sure worked for me.

The vital factor that enabled me to get out of debt and compete with Lego was simply that I thought:

- *Challenge? Maybe I can, instead of*
- *Problem? I probably can't.*

I just kept thinking, There must be a way around this...

When I came up with the flexible building block, I was in debt at the time, and I read about other people who paid off much larger debts than mine and had successfully competed with much larger corporations.

If others could handle it, maybe I could too.

This gave me hope (triggering more aspirational thoughts) and, in my experience, that's what was needed to tip the scales of success my way.

Listen for the Answer

The key to overcoming challenges of any kind is to listen. Listening is a skill learned by paying strong attention to our thoughts, the environment, and other people's views. Have you ever met a salesperson who doesn't ask any questions and does all the talking instead? Probably not, because people like that don't usually stay long in the business because listening is the key to successful selling. Finding solutions is what selling is all about. Find their problem, offer the solution and, of course, they'll buy!

This is how the skill of listening (and/or observation) works in overcoming a challenge:

- 1. Ask a question** about what you want to know.
- 2. Look and listen for the answer** either externally (in your surrounding environment) or internally (in your thoughts).
- 3. Take action** using the answer you received to discover if it works or not. If it does, keep going. If it doesn't, go back. Try a different question.

This observation and following action may be instantaneous or it may take some time. It depends on you.

What stops me listening is when I have made a premature judgment or have convinced myself that, 'I'm right and they're wrong.' This right/wrong mechanism is a concept that really hinders our sense of discovery.

The only way to find opportunities and answers is by listening and observing. And the more we listen and observe our own thoughts,

other people's thoughts and our environment, without judging prematurely, the quicker we will find the answers and opportunities we seek.

When I can take what other people say simply as information, and decide later if I can use this information or not, my ability to solve problems and overcome challenges increases dramatically. Interestingly enough, my relationships with people also 'magically' improve.

The idea of BetterBlocks was born because I listened to what people were saying while attending a toy fair. I overheard a problem that business people were not able to solve, which was: how to compete with Lego. The difference was I didn't buy into their emotional stories of not being able to compete; instead, I started to look for an answer.

Tip

Gather Information. What's stopping you from creating your next great idea?

List any information you know about your challenge.

Keep adding to it – you never know what morsel of information will become the missing piece to the puzzle that is preventing your idea from becoming reality.

(1) Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, Dover Publications, NY, p.21

Investigate Unusual Paths

'Gee, there's been some clever bastards!'

Ian Dury

I realized I'd actually 'made it' when Helen and I saw my product on the shelf in a big retail store in Sydney.

BetterBlocks was mostly a TV direct selling product in America, not a retail product. So seeing it on a shelf would be a novelty for me. Toys R Us stocked it, so I made a point of calling on them in 1992.

And there they were on the shelves—my BetterBlocks! Physically there, being checked out by customers; someone bought one right before my eyes! Believe it or not, notwithstanding millions of dollars of sales in America, this was the first time I'd seen public response.

Miniscule though it was, I was grateful—excited even—for that tiny applause. In fact, I was a bit awestruck.

Helen and I stood back and watched until she went off somewhere, while I stood and watched for five minutes more. Then I went away, came back and watched all over again, conscious I had seen my idea turn full cycle.

That cycle was: first, an idea to create a kid's toy flitted into my head. Next, I told friends who said, 'That idea's really good.' A combination of self-talk and social pressure forced me to create a prototype; I got financial backing ... this is like running a marathon ... we manufactured it and sold it to America where it became a

product that sold largely through TV marketing... We did all that and only now, after all those exhausting efforts, did I get my full reward by seeing it on a shelf. And I thought, *Wow! My idea has become real! They actually do sell these things!*

I thought of all hard the times leading to this point, times when I had just a few dollars to buy a sandwich for lunch. Other times I'd borrow Dad's car, because I had no money to buy a car—and suddenly all those tough times didn't matter because there was my product on the shelf with people touching it and buying it for their children.

All of a sudden I started exclaiming, 'Hell, I've done it! These things are on the shelves and people are buying it!' at which point Helen whisked me out of the store before I drew any more attention to myself!

Innovation

Innovation alone does not equal success, and no group has a monopoly on creativity. Some people think creativity is all about the arts, others think it's something you are born with and many behave as if it's a gift from the gods. People get tagged as 'very creative' or 'brimming with ideas', but most people forget to add, 'The more I worked the more creative I got.' Yes, like everything else in life, you have to work for it. You innovate because you've learned how to innovate.

Here are a few pointers:

- Take charge
- Ask, 'Is there a different way of going about this?'
- Alter your thinking process
- Change direction
- Filter in all pertinent information
- Filter out the crap
- Harness the power of imagination, and
- Be flexible in your approach

In short, take control and plot the course in whatever way you reckon will work best, no matter how unconventional.

Be Different

If you want to make your product/service sell faster than it ever has, do something that attracts attention to it, something different. Start thinking outside the box because new ideas always arise from outside the normal sphere of thinking. Marketing people call this your 'point of difference'.

One way of thinking outside the box is by taking the information you have gathered and working backwards until you identify its opposite characteristics, maybe those will work for you. That approach certainly worked for me when I gathered information about Lego blocks. When checking my list, I saw the words 'rigid shapes' whose opposite led me to 'moveable shapes', which ultimately became the key to my success.

Again, I observed that Lego blocks were produced in primary colors so I chose as differently from Lego as possible, mine were glow-in-the-dark colors.

A well-documented example of marketing opposites was Andrew Loog Oldham's management of the Rolling Stones. He did the conscious opposite of everything done by Beatle's manager, Brian Epstein. Where the Beatles wore suits, the Stones dressed down; where the Beatles were pleasant, the Stones were surly, etc. Many bands tried to challenge the Beatles' supremacy in the '60s—Manfred Mann, the Dave Clark Five, Herman's Hermits—but people quickly stopped talking about them. Because of Oldham's strategy, it was always the Beatles vs. the Stones.

Looking for opposites is a great way of coming up with great ideas. When you do, probe deep with your questions.

Ask:

What else can you use it for?

Work back from 'What is it?' rather than 'What should it be?'

What other ideas does it suggest?

Does it resemble anything?

What else is it like?

What is it used for by others?

What else can it be used for if modified?

Other uses if modified slightly; other uses if modified greatly.

Can it be magnified?

Multiply? More? Add? Larger? Heavier? Stronger? Thicker?
Harder? Deeper? Bigger?

Can it be minimized?

Fewer? Subtract? Eliminate? Smaller? Lighter? Shorter? Thinner?
Shallower? Compress?

Substitute?

What else instead? Who else instead? Other place? Other time?

Rearrange?

Other layout? Other sequence? Vertical? Horizontal? Open?
Closed? Change proportions?

Reverse?

Opposites? Backwards? Upside down? Inside out?

Combine?

A blend? Combine ideas or purpose? An assortment?

Separate?

Fractionate? Assemble? Disassemble? Preform?

Change time factors?

Faster? Slower? More frequently? Less frequently? Synchronize?
Renew? Recur? Alternate?

We have a built-in system in place that is automatically looking for answers, in every possible way, and it's on the lookout 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We can tune in anytime we want. Inventors like Albert Einstein and Thomas Edison used this ability to overcome their challenges.

We all have the ability to question everything.

Leave Your Comfort Zone

"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

-Albert Einstein

Doing something in a different way could just be the key to creating that million-dollar idea. Yet, for some, this step is so difficult. It's easier for them to behave according to old habits rather than take a risk and change. Yet the commercial world is constantly changing, surely you want to keep pace?

Change is both rapid and ubiquitous. CDs were new and exciting in the mid-80s, now people use memory sticks and iPods. Electronic mail (e-mail) came in the mid-90s, the Internet became commonplace around the same time. Before that people used letterboxes. Events also cause change, like the Crash of '87, the Tech Crash, 9/11, the WorldCom Enron scenario, Afghanistan, Iraq, the credit crisis, all this with the share market in the background going up/down, up/down. The only thing we can count on is change. Therefore, you too must change.

Alter your thinking process, be flexible in your problem solving and change direction.

Next time you sit at the dinner table with your family, try a different seat. It might upset the kids, 'That's MY seat!' but why is that so? Next time you travel by car take a different route. You may find yourself resisting this new route with your thoughts telling you, *This is a mistake*, but these are the very type of thoughts that stop you from finding a fresh approach to problems. By taking a path

you aren't used to taking, you are also leaving your comfort zone. In checking out different scenery, taking a different route gives you a chance to broaden your outlook and raise a line of questions that provoke creative solutions.

The answer may come in the first thirty seconds or not. It may take a week, a month, less time or more, but it will come. The real key is to recognize a good idea when it pops in. Train your mind to be flexible so that it creates new directions in your thinking. Somewhere in this list of opposites is sure to be the answer to your challenge.

Nokia CEO Jorma Ollila turned the Finnish company into an international mobile phone leader an unorthodox, even chaotic, style of unconventional management. Its approach is nothing like IBM who built its business on a conservative, even stodgy reputation. Nokia's management did the exact opposite. While IBM was selling and servicing machines over a five-year period, Nokia noticed new mobile phones were coming out every month and therefore Ollila applied a radical new management approach that kept pace with the times.

Top Nokia managers were asked to swap jobs on spec, research and development staff met directly with customers and, for no apparent reason, staff roles were switched around to see what outcome this would produce. The company's chief phone designer is on record likening Nokia's management style with the way a jazz band improvises.

My personal example of asking, 'What is the opposite of the information I have?' is that I gather a group of people ranging from children to business executives, hand them two Lego blocks, and then say to them:

1. Tell me everything you know about the blocks in your hand.
2. What is the opposite of every piece of information you just said?

Within 18 minutes or less (I time it) this 'opposite' information sparks enough new ideas to enable them to create their own multimillion-dollar idea, like BetterBlocks. Anyone can copy this approach. Actualizing it is another matter, but the idea is there in less than 20 minutes.

This has little to do with my innate ability and a lot to do with knowing the appropriate questions to ask myself and others. Achieving my result revolves around this simple yet powerful concept:

- What do we know now?
- What can we do differently?

Seeking Solutions

You may have a challenge in your life (not a ‘problem’, it’s a *challenge!*). The question you’ve probably asked yourself is, ‘What’s the solution?’ You didn’t get the answer you wanted, yet you keep begging the same question.

I have to smile when I catch people continually doing the same action in anticipation of a different result. What was Albert Einstein’s definition of insanity again?

Similarly, the author of *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*, Robert Kiyosaki, expresses this concept by saying, ‘Communication is the response I get.’ He means the response I get won’t vary unless the question varies. This will depend on how I communicate, so if I’m communicating with the people and not getting what I want, I shouldn’t hold them responsible for their ordinary feedback; I need to do something different, maybe by asking a different question.

Other people may be part of the solution, but I am always responsible for starting my own wheels rolling, as you are responsible for yourself.

Remember the example I gave earlier: The challenge I was given was, ‘How to compete with a \$1 billion a year company called Lego, which totally dominates the children’s building block market.’ I had no idea how to respond to this challenge.

It wasn’t until I asked myself a different question that I started to resolve things.

- The question I couldn’t answer was, ‘How can I compete with Lego?’
- The question I could answer was, ‘How can I design a block that moves?’

See the difference?

This final question actually gave me the answer to my original question, and gave me the tools to effectively compete.

If you're not getting the solution to the "big picture", ask more specific questions about the smaller features until you arrive at a solution.

Then take action!

Be confident you can achieve what you want. As I've mentioned before, there are many different solutions and you're bound to find one.

When Tyco approached the challenge of competing with Lego they did it differently to me. Where I changed the block design, they changed the price-point. Lego had a product mark-up of 20 times! Boy, that gave Tyco room to move. Do you think these profit margins motivated people to develop a competitor to Lego? Absolutely!

Lego had previously kept Tyco out of the marketplace through legal force, but being a big company and seeing Lego running out of patent-time, Tyco had the necessary resources to win in the courts. After three years (and millions of dollars later) Tyco won the right to be able to produce an exact copy of Lego.

If you are not achieving the results you want, start asking different questions because that's the only way you'll get a different (and hopefully better) understanding of how the pieces fit together.

Tip: Make the questions easier until you get an answer. Work with bite-sized chunks.

My daughter Sheena was five years old when she wanted to develop the skills to shoot netball goals, and the goal ring I made her was of adjustable height. I set it for her at a height I thought was okay and asked her to take a shot. Before she did anything else she lowered the goal ring until she was almost certain to score every time. Once she mastered that, she raised it. Over time, she gradually lifted the ring to normal height until she became an excellent goal shooter. What interested me was how she intuitively went about achieving her goals.

The principle she used is summed-up by the well-known riddle: How do you eat an elephant? Answer: One bite at a time.

It is much easier starting from a base of success than a base of failure. Sheena set herself a series of small, achievable goals and gradually made them more challenging. Make the pieces of your challenge smaller and smaller until you get your answer, and then expand from there.

Your Reticular Activated System

Now that we have gathered our information, we need to ask, ‘*How* does this information provide the solution?’ Note the choice of words, not ‘can’ but ‘how’.

This is a subtle yet extremely important point. The word ‘can’ usually elicits a yes/no response. (Probably a ‘no’.)

The word ‘how’ is positive and will set our Reticular Activated System (RAS) in motion to find information that will provide us with an answer.

You’re probably wondering, ‘Our *what* system?’

It’s something I alluded to a few pages back when I spoke of a built-in system we all have that is automatic and on the lookout for answers 24/7. I wrote that inventors like Albert Einstein and Thomas Edison used this ability too. Well, just as we have non-physical attributes, like intuition and logic, nature has also given us the *Reticular Activated System* (RAS), which is a built-in radar that keeps all our senses looking out for the things we need. It is a programmable filter that we literally control through the choices we make, because our choices indicate our preferences.

We need some kind of sorting system because we see and hear thousands, maybe millions, of messages per day but we don’t recall them all. For example: you don’t recall the type of car that was beside you at the lights this morning, yet you definitely saw it. But you remember the things that interest you. Some interest arises from necessity because it relates to your job, business or investments. Other things interest you for no apparent reason, like chess, music or speedboats.

Each day you cop 900 ‘buy’ signals from ads, you see all the people on the pavement, all the cars and buses on the road, all the houses you drive by—and suddenly there’s a speedboat on somebody’s front lawn. You’ve forgotten everything else, but you remembered that boat. It was a Shark Cat, mostly white, with a yellow stripe. Why did you remember that and nothing about the Ford in front of you?

It’s because your senses acknowledged your interest in boats and brought this information to your attention. It’s called ‘selective memory’ and no one can explain why it chooses certain recollections and wipes others. Either way, it’s good news for you and me because we can use it to effectively question ourselves. And, like facing the oracle in a gypsy tent: the more specific the question, the more specific the answer/s. In this instance you are both the gypsy and the querent. Your brain is a supercomputer, processing information and making decisions as required.

Another way of explaining the RAS system is that it is similar to having your personal Google search engine inside your head. Ask your brain a question and your RAS system will automatically set about finding an answer, scanning everything you see, hear, smell and touch until it comes up with *something*, the quality of which largely depends on the input of the material you fed yourself before reaching the conclusion you are about to make.

Here is an example of how it works when purchasing a car: from the moment I decided to buy a Holden Monaro, I saw them down side streets, in garages, on the freeway, I saw them everywhere.

They’ve always been around but because I had little interest I never noticed them much. Suddenly, I saw it reviewed in magazines, advertised on TV and parked in driveways. It was as if the other brands didn’t exist, because once I made my decision to buy a Monaro the other brands were of less interest. My attention focused

on the car I wanted and my interest was aroused every time it presented itself. That is how your RAS system works.

Your attention is directed towards a particular something because of your desire to know. It is this desire that leads us to ask questions. Ask the relevant questions and your RAS seeks the required answers.

For businesspeople, asking the appropriate question is another key to solving challenges. Be observant of your total environment because the answers sometimes come in unexpected forms. As I said, ask very specific questions so that your RAS can give specific answers in return.

Our RAS system just presents 'stuff', evaluates nothing and works purely from the subconscious. Figuring out whether it's useful/not useful, good/bad, constructive/destructive or working towards/away from what we want is done by another department in the brain of which your subconscious is in charge. Your RAS doesn't have a mind of its own, it simply follows instructions.

If things are not working, it means a more powerful subconscious thought is overriding what you consciously desire. However, a battle between the subconscious and the conscious mind is too Freudian for me. It's the RAS that I want to highlight.

BetterBlocks was a result of my RAS system looking out for me. I needed to find a commercial idea to sell so I could pay off my debt.

Weakness in Lego

I saw the opportunity when I overheard two business people discussing Lego. That's all it was, two guys talking about problems with Lego.

Problems with Lego? Until that moment I had never entertained such a thought. *Lego seemed okay to me ... when I played with it, with the kids.*

That conversation sparked ideas in my RAS system, and next time I fiddled with Lego I wondered what those 'problems' might be. I was looking for problems and trying to solve them before I properly knew what they were!

One day, I saw the weakness in Lego. It happened when I stopped thinking of it as a corporation but just a little plastic object in my hand. Hmm, if I could make a better one... I'd probably make money, which is the perfect example of necessity being the mother of invention. I needed to get out of debt, so I invented something.

Did I know what I was seeking? No.

Did I know the process I would follow (what I'm telling you in this book)? No.

I didn't know anything; I didn't even know how to talk to venture capitalists.

But I had a few things going for me—enthusiasm, faith and a bloody good imagination.

Imagine: Walking on the Moon

‘Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it now. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now!’

-W.N. Murray. The Scottish Himalayan expedition.

On 25 May 1961, in a special message delivered during a joint session of the American Congress on the topic of urgent national needs, President John F. Kennedy said, ‘I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to Earth. I believe we should go to the moon’. His powerful vision focused the whole nation towards achieving this goal.

It was a huge challenge because at the time America had neither the technology nor the knowledge to do this. Yet Kennedy’s vision was so strong that, on 21 July 1969, astronaut Neil Armstrong stepped onto the lunar surface with just 193 days to spare before the decade was out.

John F. Kennedy was assassinated before he could see his dream come true. But his vision enabled the space development process to be empowering enough to evolve well beyond his lifetime. In fact, one of the most significant dates in the history of space settlement is October 2000, from which point there have *always* been humans living off-the-planet, usually on space stations on onboard shuttles.

Thanks to JFK, in a roundabout way.

The Tip Not the Top

In his book, *The Seven Habits of Successful People*, author Steven Covey listed as one of his seven habits, 'Begin with the end in mind.' This is precisely what I did, because BetterBlocks was primarily about me getting out of debt (the emotional success came later). And my success was due to harnessing and fostering the power of my imagination. It was a conscious and disciplined action on my part.

I didn't drift along as before, making occasional jottings when the mood caught me; every day for 12 months I set time aside for my imagination (or 'visualization' if you prefer to call it that). I would imagine the end result I wanted, which was getting out of debt. This changed along the way, until I settled on the big visualization of families playing with the toy I created. I had no idea how these things were going to happen, I just believed they would. The imagination is a strange thing, sometimes you expect it to follow a certain path and it takes a u-turn and you finish up where you'd never have expected. For some it comes in a dream.

When inventor, actor and entrepreneur Isaac Merritt Singer developed his first patent in New York City, he made \$2000 with an invention that drilled rock so he got into a business that interested him. He formed a performance troupe and spent his next five years as an actor. After this he developed a second invention, a wood block carving device that worked well, the only problem was the original prototype was destroyed.

Third time lucky. He next developed the first commercial sewing machine. The early sewing machines had been invented *four* times before Singer came along, so the basic concept was hardly original. Singer's modifications only added to the list.

Why Singer became the legend and the other four names are forgotten is because—unlike his competitors—the prototype that made him wealthy and famous had the hole at the **tip** of the needle. It had come to him in a dream...

One night, Singer dreamed about natives throwing spears at him, spears with holes in their tips. That's all it was, really. When he awoke, he had the answer to how he was going to make his sewing machine work: *put the needle in the tip not at the top.*

Sewing machines began to be mass produced. The Singer Sewing Machine Company manufactured 2564 machines in 1856 and 13,000 in 1860. Singer then expanded into Europe, establishing a factory near Glasgow, thus becoming one of the first American-based multinational corporations, with agencies in Paris and Rio de Janeiro.

Furthermore, Singer's method of distribution makes I. M. Singer & Co. the first business franchise system. Most people believe that the current system of 'franchising' began in the mid-1950s with McDonald's. Not so, Isaac Singer did it 99 years before.

What a useful dream! What a great imagination!

Imagination is the seed from which all great achievements grow.

Our imagination is the silent driving force behind any idea we create. Some people believe one of the challenges confronting contemporary society is that we don't think *enough*. Certain people (usually 'leaders') are said to be 'great decision-makers' because

they make snap decisions. But the speed of decision-making is usually inconsequential. Other factors are much more significant.

Making time for the imagination to work was so important to people like Einstein and Edison that they would set time aside each day for daydreaming. And so did I.

Encourage your imagination because it is the source of all your best solutions.

My secret: Best ideas come in the shower.

Insight is the Essence of Simplicity

Remember the last time you had a blinding flash of the obvious? I bet it was a simple the solution! The greatest ideas, inventions and discoveries are invariably the simplest. My father used to say, 'Most people can find a solution to a challenge, but the cleverest find the simplest.'

Albert Einstein is a good example of someone who came up with the deepest concept expressed as simply as possible. I'm speaking of his equation $E = MC^2$. This formula leads to quantum physics, black holes, eternity, infinity and other concepts that are mindboggling to earthlings, so getting it down to $E = MC^2$ is certainly impressive.

Insight is the essence of simplicity. Einstein could only come up with that equation because he understood the guts of his science. Once the idea behind the way something works (or doesn't work) is grasped, you can figure out how to come up with your own variation. This solution gives you a clear, simple goal on which to concentrate all your efforts towards progress. Continuing with BetterBlocks as my example, it wasn't until I fully understood the concept behind Lego that I was able to come up with an alternative. The answer is always simple, but getting there may take a big effort.

When I was chasing venture capital, I kept phoning potential investors, knocking on doors and constantly refining my approach. After each call I would analyze what worked and what didn't. I did it formally, on paper. This analysis enabled me to focus on how I could improve my approach before tackling the next one. At first I was gauche, made stupid mistakes, stumbled over my words, I did everything wrong. Until eventually I got it right, which is all that matters.

When it came to finding people to manufacture and market my invention, I used the same approach.

Remember George de Mestral, the man who observed the burdock weed clinging to his socks from which he created Velcro? Remember how Isaac Singer perfected his sewing machine after dreaming up the solution? Remember how my BetterBlocks clip was inspired by the press-stud on my jeans? The solution to the weed, the needle and the blocks was simply a matter of observing the surrounding environment then asking how the information could be used in another context.

You may go through many I-don't-know-yet thoughts before reaching your Aha! moment. You may have to write lots of notes and do a lot of thinking before finally unearthing your desired answer, but you've got a lot of support—like your RAS, which is on the job 24/7 *yessir*. It is up to you to decide how to use the information received. But be warned, the answers may come in *very* unexpected ways.

Outsourcing

Overcoming the necessary challenges while on the road to success often requires a combination of skills, many of which we all have to varying degrees. Like: dealing with organizations, raising finance, production, management, marketing, etc.

The real skill in overcoming your challenge is knowing when to ask for help.

So what do you do in such a situation?

Answer: *You hire the appropriate professionals.*

All I brought to the project was my vision. That was my biggest contribution. When it came to having the skills needed to bring BetterBlocks to fruition, I only had some of them. So I had to find people to help me. Thank God for outsourcing!

My difficulties were in getting into a suit, calling at offices in the CBD and asking hard-nosed business people to provide financial backing to my idea. Like talking to the taxman about poetry, talking to hard-nosed financiers with \$5 million to invest is pretty tough going, especially when all you've got in your hand is a little plastic block with an unusual clip.

Times were tough, I was \$100,000 in debt, I was not a fast-talking sales-guy and I wanted for credibility. So I started looking and learning. I walked out of offices and analyzed my 'performances' until I found a way to address financiers in a manner they found convincing.

The next challenge was to market BetterBlocks and I lacked these skills too. So I found people who did have these marketing and manufacturing skills. Eventually, I attracted a person who could both market and finance BetterBlocks.

I think you're beginning to get the point!

I'm not the only person who has been in this tricky position:

- The Mars Bar wouldn't have gone beyond being a small operation if Forrest Mars hadn't delegated the marketing and production.
- Smalltime chemist Lunsford Richardson wasn't ready for the success of his Vicks VapoRub but his support group had the skills he didn't have.
- When he talks about this process, Olivier Boulay, Head Designer at Mitsubishi Motors, uses the phrase 'a fresh pair of eyes'. That's what we all need, eyes that see our limitations so we can ask for help where it's needed.

Progress is only achieved by continually solving your challenges, either through your own or other people's creativity. They are of equal importance, the only issue being the result not the process. When looking for advisors, talk to people who have done it themselves. They're easy to pick because they say, 'This is how *I did it*,' not, 'This is how *you do it*.'

It's important to make sure that everyone who contributes to the creation of your idea gets rewarded for their efforts. Acknowledgment is a powerful motivator and will encourage people to make your idea a success

Certainly, there will be times when asking people for help may be difficult. For me, asking for help seemed to be somehow linked to being a failure. I could hear one of my internal voices saying, 'You won't be respected as a businessperson if you go asking (not begging, asking and begging are vastly different attitudes) for help.' Yet it was only by asking for help (in manufacturing, marketing and financing) that BetterBlocks became successful. When I finally learned to ask for help, my project became successful much faster and with less effort.

Question: Are internal voices keeping you stuck on a problem?

Asking for help to overcome our challenges is the same as going to the doctor for medical advice or having a coach teach us the skills to play a sport. We simply haven't got the skill yet, so we need to find someone who has.

People are very willing to help out, some will expect payment; others will do it gratis. Such people are a great asset. Their mentoring advice provides a new insight, which gives us new options, more choices and more freedom. And the more choices we have, the less we are confined by the challenges that appear on our road to success.

Advice may come from professionals or friends. But whatever the outcome, the responsibility always remains with you. It is your idea so you are always the pacesetter. Without you, there can be no real outcome.

Contacts, however, are not the only source of information. The surrounding environment is always offering us answers via the

general media, industry media and local information. They all communicate online, in print and by word-of-mouth. Stay tuned.

Fast Track Your Business Growth for Free!

In 1994, to complement the success of BetterBlocks, my partner and I wanted to publish a children's magazine but we knew very little about children's magazines. Our one-year-old daughter, Sheena, was too young to be an analytical source of feedback. Yet in the space of just seven days we went from knowing hardly anything about children's magazines to accumulating a surprising amount of good ideas and great information.

How did we do it?

Answer: We invited 25 of our friends to visit one evening and we explained our objective of creating a children's magazine to complement BetterBlocks and that we would really appreciate their input. We wanted all the information our friends were prepared to give.

We organized them into groups of four or five, gave each group a large sheet of paper and each person a pile of Post-its. We then asked them to brainstorm any ideas relevant to a kid's magazine and to write them down. As a result, we got hundreds of valuable ideas relating to articles, games, new marketing concepts, potential advertisers and raising financing to cover 12 months' worth of subscriptions—and we did it all for the price of a few drinks and nibblies.

The key to the brainstorming session being such a success was not only thanks to receiving lots of ideas, but also due to requesting that they did not criticize their own, or each other's, ideas. They were just to discuss and write them down. We got the answers we wanted

and everyone had a fantastic time. To this day, those friends remember what an unusual evening that one was.

In the end this project did not proceed, but it did prove the power of the approach and later provided the structure for us to raise the necessary funds for a Nepalese school through World Youth International. Again, the results all came from people who were simply interested in being involved.

Many people are looking for a chance to make their lives more interesting. They will often jump at the opportunity to air their ideas. People love to know they have been included in the process and love to be acknowledged for their work.

Use and respect your resources wisely.

Real Life Exercise 1

Take the list of information you gathered in Exercise 1 and start creating a second list of opposites, i.e. opposing features, objects, ideas, information, etc. As you do this exercise, you will probably not only come up with opposites to your information in List 1, but also with more alternatives. Include these in List 2 as well.

Part 3

Decide Which Path to Take

‘It works! I’ve finally invented something that works!’

***-Dr Emmett Brown, about the Flux Capacitor in the film
Back to the Future***

Let’s start this chapter with examples of not-so-great ideas, like hedgehog-flavored chips developed in 1984 by a Welshpool publican who got the idea when discussing an old gypsy delicacy with some Romany customers. It tasted like smokey-flavored bacon, customers liked it, but the animal lovers went absolutely berserk!

Another unsuccessful concept was the paddle-shaped child spanker patented in 1953 by George Jorgenson of Norfolk, Virginia. In this instance it was the child welfare officers who stepped in.

Less controversial, but much sillier, was the 1901 moustache guard that came in a choice of silver or gold. Inventor Thomas Ferry said it was ‘designed to hold the moustache away from the lips to prevent the lodgment of food thereon while eating’. Like other dubious body care products, such as the solar-cooled hat and floating soap, it probably should have been discarded as soon as the idea came up.

Your invention is going to commandeer a lot of your time, so don’t be the person who devoted their life to building a better moustache guard. Make a great choice before you proceed.

The Best Idea

Having gathered the material, studied it and plotted a different course to whatever the others are doing, next comes the time to make that all-important decision as to how you are going to proceed.

By this stage, you've probably gathered a lot of information, which may seem overwhelming, and your inner voice may be screaming, 'But I don't know *how* to decide!' Narrowing down the pile isn't as difficult as it looks because in a pile of 100 only a handful will stand out, and they are all you want. You don't need to give the other 95 a second glance, if you didn't remember them then, or if it means brutalizing hedgehogs, that's a fair clue as to how strong they are as ideas.

Scan your remaining list carefully; at least one idea will stand out. It will do so because that particular 'opposite' will be something that appeals, because you know you can do it. In this sense, the best idea will often pick itself, just like designing a moveable building block system picked itself for me. As soon as I saw it, I knew that moveable building block and I would make a great team!

The solution to every person's challenge will be different (because we all have different abilities). This is how you will solve your challenge:

Analyze yourself.

Pick the solution that suits you by analyzing your strengths, weaknesses and interests. Remember: you don't need to know how to do everything yourself; asking for help is allowed.

Settle firmly on your decision.

Indecision is the quickest road to failure. So make a great decision and stick with what you've chosen. Place your entire focus and energy onto it. Your interest keeps you motivated.

Indecision

I don't have **to preach to you about the consequences** of indecision, so I'll relate a tale about how the best known brand in reference books lost the plot and, with it, its empire.

The culprit?

Indecision.

The victim?

Encyclopedia Britannica. In the 1960s, every proud household had a set in the lounge room alongside the stereogram, under the lava lamp and beside the night 'n' day settee.

After being the indisputable market leader for decades, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* company was slow to respond to technology, especially CD-ROM in which they were late on the market. This allowed Microsoft's *Encarta* and others to take huge market share as sales of printed encyclopedias dropped to a tiny fraction of the reference market.

Next came the Internet. Everyone saw it coming, I'm sure you and I did. Not the stodgy old *Encyclopedia Britannica*. It charged for access when everyone else was giving it away. The online advertising market collapsed just as *Brittanica* changed its mind and decided to give content too, by which time customers were thinning out.

Next came *Wikipedia*, another big story in itself ... and, at this rate, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* will become as rare as the night 'n' day settee.

No matter what it did, the glorious patent leather reference book company was on the wrong side of the fence, because of indecision based on out-dated information.

Decision Making

First, let me break a few myths about decision making:

Fast is not better

The worst myth of all is that people have to make snap decisions to appear 'decisive'. (There's something macho about that!) Leave decisions until the time is right, which may be at the last moment. There's many a slip between the cup and the lip, and if you leave matters in abeyance you may never have to make that decision. The decision might be made for you through the process of elimination, preference or any other reason. Timing is everything. The best decision may be to wait.

If it's not saleable it mightn't ever work

Most decisions require some form of selling to get the thing kick-started. Can you 'sell' your decision? It might require selling to staff, investors or the general public.

Best decisions don't always come from the top

Accept the decision from anyone, anytime, anywhere. The issue is not 'who made the decision?' What matters is its quality and I've known that to come from a child. Take the Lego example where a child's pet tortoise was savaged by a car. The tortoise had a front leg amputated, so the child got the vet to replace the leg with a pair of Lego wheels!

Clarity Leads to Power

However, having poured in the time and effort, don't turn from your research to back a new idea that flew by. Whatever you do, be sure to base your conclusions on the findings you have made to date. Don't be the stop-start person who says, 'Reading is all too difficult. I'll go with gut feeling and pick this as the answer to my challenge—if it doesn't work I'll go with something else later.'

The problem with choosing a solution other than something on your list is that, one way or another, those on the list have been well considered. They've been ruminated over. They have taken up your valuable time, money and probably, most importantly, your hope and belief in yourself. Discarding these on a whim suggests you could have simply thrown a dice to get to this point.

If that's what you're doing you need to make a firm decision to stop flirting with ideas and make it absolutely clear to yourself to act in line with your initial challenge. Therefore, you need to be clear in what you are seeking, because clarity increases your power to achieve your goal—and it does so significantly!

Remember John F. Kennedy and his vision for a space program? The clarity of his dream made his vision so strong, so saleable, so symbolic that it became reality.

***Clarity leads to power
and the power starts the moment
a decision is firmly made.***

In the case of BetterBlocks, I wanted to compete with Lego but I didn't know how. So, after analyzing Lego blocks, and focusing on the opposites, my solution of moveable blocks became clear. All I had to do was everything else.

A vital point to note here is that your goal needs to be crystal clear so you know your end result before starting. Envision how every step of the process is going to come about; create a plan that can fall into place on its own accord and in its own time (even unexpectedly) as long as you keep your final desired outcome clear in your mind. Nothing will focus the mind on a goal as much as a clear and firm decision.

In order to sell BetterBlocks to the public, I spent two years searching Australia for a marketer without coming to a comfortable solution. One day, my sister's boyfriend, John Wilkie, casually said, 'Why don't you phone my mate, Kelvin Claney?'

There I was, complaining that no one wanted to back me, and right out of the blue John Wilkie said, 'Why don't you ring up my mate Kelvin in the States? He may be interested in what you're doing.' On the basis of that offhand comment, I picked up the phone, and the end result of that call was a partnership that went on to create a \$45 million business! Believe me, I never envisioned finding a marketer through my sister's boyfriend, a carpenter—that was truly unexpected, and that was the turning point for BetterBlocks.

I looked back at the times when I achieved what I wanted from life. At the start of every project I had to remember the good times and make a clear decision about what I was going to do, where I was going to go and how I was going to proceed.

And then, after struggling with my alternatives, my sister's boyfriend said...!

Kelvin Claney

Kelvin Claney was born in New Zealand but when I met him he'd been living in the States, based in Florida for a couple of years, and doing very well in direct marketing. He sells almost exclusively through TV direct response advertising where viewers ring up and order there and then. For example, K-Tel and the Dem-Tel ads on TV—'Buy this, ring up now and you get another free set of steak knives.' He is one of the top people doing that in the States.

Kelvin is great.

He owns BetterBlocks, I sold him the rights.

Kelvin was very good at direct response. We got BetterBlocks into the major retailers, like Toys R Us and Walmart, but it was never in there for a long time. I have learned there is a huge difference between being able to sell on direct response TV and selling through retailers. It all depends where your passion lies.

Kelvin may re-launch it again and I've moved on to other things. However, the whole experience turned into an inspiration for me, pushing me to achieve things I never thought possible.

Commitment Is the Key

There's no point in being clear on your goal if you're not prepared to stick with it. Commitment to your solution is vital.

When I was developing BetterBlocks, I owed \$100,000 to various people and businesses. They were constantly phoning me, wanting payment. I didn't have the money they were demanding. Yet somehow I knew BetterBlocks was the key to making those payments. So I negotiated time payment with all my creditors, and then put all my attention into making BetterBlocks a success.

My commitment to my end result led me through three important stages:

1. First to the idea of BetterBlocks
2. Then right through the creation of BetterBlocks
3. Until it reached a level where it competed well in the market, therefore allowing me to repay my debts

Had I lost heart and given up half way through the project, I would probably still be in debt today.

"My greatest point is my persistence. I never give up in a match. However down I am, I fight until the last ball. My list of matches shows that I have turned a great many so-called irretrievable defeats into victories."

- Bjorn Borg, Professional Tennis Player

A compelling description of the power that commitment has on achieving your desired goal is presented in the following poem:

Commitment

*Until one is committed
there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back,
always ineffectiveness.*

*Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation)
there is an elementary truth,
the ignorance of which kills countless ideas
and splendid plans:*

*That the moment one definitely commits oneself,
then Providence moves too.*

*All sorts of things occur to help one
that would otherwise never have occurred.*

*A whole stream of events issue from the decision,
raising in one's favour all manner
of unforeseen incidents and meetings
and material assistance,
which no man could have dreamt
would have come his way.*

- Goethe's Couplets

Real Life Exercise 2

Refer to the list of opposites (and other alternatives) you created in Exercise 2. Decide which one is most likely to enable you to reach your end result, to fulfill your original challenge. Once you decide, make a commitment to yourself that you will stick with it in order to achieve it.

Part 4

Act!

'Trying is the first step towards failure!'

-Homer Simpson

Thinking, dreaming, visualizing is not enough, no matter how brilliant your thoughts. A solution only becomes reality by taking action. Likewise, an idea will only be successful by taking action. That action can be demanding. It can throw you right out of your comfort zone.

Clarity only shows us the way; to become empowered we have to physically do the action. Velcro, the moon landing, Edison's light bulb and my own BetterBlocks were all successful because of the action taken based upon the decisions made.

Power Makes Things Happen

All right, so I've decided what I'm going to do in order to solve my original challenge. And I have a super clear vision of my end result. Now for the big question: How do I actually make my end result happen?

Diagram 1 illustrates how goals are achieved:

Diagram 1

**Knowledge ► Decision ► Clarity ► Power ► Action ►
Results ► Empowerment**

I mentioned before that clarity leads to power and power is the driving force behind making your ideas happen. When you hear the word 'power' what thoughts come to mind? Look up the word in the dictionary and you'll find that power is not about all dominance and control. Power means having the necessary degree of ability to carry out an intention or desire. This, combined with the motivation to do it, is what 'gets things done'!

Power, therefore, allows us to overcome our challenges, turn our dreams into reality and see our ideas become successful. Or, more simply put, power is the persistence to see your project through to the end. You feel empowered when you have achieved your intentions.

Power is really the ability to go from A to B without letting yourself be sidetracked, and if you are sidetracked, to correct yourself

People sometimes lack this power because they allow themselves to be discouraged or distracted. The reason only one in 600 inventions ever becomes successful is because 599 people let themselves be pushed off course by outside influences after which they never got back on track.

Displaying power is understanding the solution then making it happen.

Thomas Edison described genius as 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration, which makes sense because once you have a solution you can actually control the outcome, as long as you remain persistent and determined. Persistence and determination are the driving force behind power. This is what keeps you doing what it takes in order to get you where you want to go.

If it sounds simple that's because it is.

I never said it wouldn't take a lot of perspiration, in fact work is the energy behind the task, but the solution itself—once grasped—is unlikely to be complicated. There were times when I found a challenge insurmountable, but by keeping at it and having faith in myself, a solution always appeared, it was never complex, but I had to work at it.

***With persistence and belief
you can overcome any challenges
on the path to turning
your idea into reality.***

In hindsight, it's highly unlikely that I was the first person to have an idea for a moveable building block system. However, I was the first who was persistent enough to make it a commercial success.

Knowledge leads to power (as illustrated in Diagram 1) and if you are confronted by a problem, knowing how to handle your options significantly increases your chances of overcoming the difficulties you will undoubtedly encounter along the way.

Your best chance of achieving success, however, is not to focus on obstacles that may arise but rather to be aware that there are available strategies to overcome these obstacles.

Overcoming challenges involves successfully completing a series of small steps. There may be a few, there may be many, but the journey can only begin by taking that first step—***so take it now!***

Also, focus on a strategy you can apply to your project *today* to bring yourself closer to your end result. All feelings of progress will inspire you to keep going.

***'A journey of one thousand miles begins with a
single step.'***

-Confucius, Chinese philosopher

If you are finding it difficult to take the next step (or your first step) it may be because you are listening to the so-called ‘justifications’ as to why you’re unable to achieve. Start believing those negative thoughts and it’s the beginning of the end. The time to pull out was back at the decision-making stage, not here at the action stage where your task is to keep going.

So take control and change your thoughts, which you can do through mind power. There is, of course, a place for the power of negative thinking: that place was chapter two when you were throwing out the 99 bad ideas. Having done that it’s time to focus positively on the good one, and positive thinking leads to productive action that will lead to the result you want.

It is, in fact, a 2-step target, the steps being:

- The invention of the thing itself
- Its marketing

Time after time, in the examples that pepper this book, you will see that the original inventor either combined forces with a marketer or sold the idea. Sometimes—like the Wright Brothers—they did neither. Imagine if the Wright Brothers, Orville and Wilbur, had combined with William Boeing instead of wandering back to their bicycle shop after the famous joy-flight that got them into the history books.

Even though they invented and built the world’s first successful airplane and they made the first controlled, powered and sustained heavier-than-air human flight, on 17 December 1903, we never fly ‘Wright International’. The Wright Brothers saw no potential in their flying machine beyond a novelty item.

It was William Boeing who saw the commercial potential of flight. Although he lacked the technical expertise of the Wright Brothers,

he knew that he could buy the skills he lacked, so he bet his life savings that technology would catch up with him and that he would make flight happen before he went broke.

He didn't wait long; World War 1 started in 1914 and with it a need for flying machines. It so happened that Boeing had a design he thought the military could use.

Control

One characteristic all great problem-solvers and inventors have in common is that they stay on track. This creates lots of space in which to operate. Scattering their energies would not enable them to persist until they get it right. Staying focused gives them the freedom to make unconventional decisions for which they can confidently take full responsibility.

The word ‘leadership’ has been bandied around so much that one can be forgiven for thinking anyone who sits in the head chair is a leader. This presumption is false. True leadership generates confidence, and the only one way to evoke that is to **take responsibility** for whatever the action is. That’s the only definition of leadership that makes sense.

We usually associate the word ‘responsibility’ with burden, entrapment or being tied down. Well, this is not correct. The dictionary definition of responsibility is: *the ability to respond to a given situation*. You see a child who needs help crossing a street so you offer assistance. You’re showing responsibility here because you’re able to see what is needed and respond to this situation by helping the child.

The deal is simple, take responsibility and you’re in charge; do not take responsibility and your idea will not progress.

Show responsibility—demonstrate the ability to respond.

New Zealand poet RAK Mason wrote *Song of Allegiance*, which goes like this:

Shakespeare, Milton, Keats are dead

*Donne lies in a lowly bed...
...Though my song have none to hear
Boldly bring I up the rear.*

I reckon one thing Isaac Singer, Albert Einstein, Georges de Mestral, the Wright Brothers, Richard Branson, Bill Gates and I all hold in common is a system to respond positively to our challenges. And the more it works, the more confidence we gain in taking on larger challenges. ‘Boldly bring I up the rear...’ It’s only a matter of *doing* and you, too, can add your name to that list.

Such confidence is gained by practice, and the more you practice, the better your ability to solve larger and larger challenges. Interestingly (and fortunately), as this ability increases so does your income.

When you decide to act or respond, you are taking back control of the situation, rather than letting it control you – this is a very powerful thing to do.

When you respond productively to a situation, you gain control of it. And when you gain control, you become the motivating force that keeps the wheels on. You also become the person who lays his or her cards on the table and makes a play.

Without that leadership role, nothing actually happens. Everyone just looks at each other, shrugs, says, ‘Boy that was a good idea,’ and then they go back to their homes. Control is the **process** needed to solve problems. It means having a vision followed by a strategy,

followed by action. That requires the ability to invite other people to join in, though if no one else will do it for you, you'll have to handle that job yourself—as I had to—because being in charge means making it happen. Remember the old saying, 'If it's to be it's up to me.' That's leadership.

Here's another: 'When placed in charge, take charge.'

Control is the ability to:

- Have an idea
- Grasp the concept of how you can make it happen
- Take action
- Produce the result you want
- Stop (and celebrate) once you have achieved your goal

Let me give you a really simple example. The car metaphor is perfect for business because there's a driver and a journey, and that journey can be done in actuality or on autopilot. As in business, there are potential accidents along the way, as well as traffic lights, traffic, pedestrians and fines. The person in charge has to respond to all these variables. That driver also has a high degree of control of the car.

Having control over your challenges can become just as automatic by using what you learn from the 'Five Real Life Lessons' I share with you. You will get to the stage where you will meet a challenge

and automatically start a system that you know will work to overcome it.

The more practice you have using the system, the better your ability to solve challenges will become. This will give you more freedom to do whatever you want; to make your business life become whatever you dream it to be. It will put you in full control.

Courage

Courage is a frequently forgotten characteristic of leadership, and, with it, pushing your idea through. There are times when it takes courage to take the action required to make it all happen.

Courage: “The quality that enables people to meet danger without giving way to fear.”

-Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary

Author Robert Kiyosaki has defined courage as, ‘to have fear, to have doubt and still take action.’

That is:

- 1.** Fear
- 2.** Doubt
- 3.** And action

Whichever is the most powerful of these three elements in your mind will be the one that will win control. So, if you’re not progressing towards your goal, take the time out to acknowledge which of these ingredients is winning. *Is this the one you want to win?* If not, you need to refocus on the aspect you do want to win.

When you invent something, you’re doing something you have never done before so, of course, you will have doubt and fear but you also will never know the outcome unless you keep going.

To do this you need to:

- 1. Acknowledge** that your mind is currently not focused on the aspect of courage you want
- 2. Take small steps** to change your thinking towards action, rather than fear and doubt

This will lead you to achieving the desired results.

BetterBlocks succeeded because I had the courage to take many small steps (such as developing the product, finding a marketing person, finding a manufacturer, sourcing finance, etc.), rather than trying to achieve everything in one big step, and I continually kept refocusing my mind on action rather than failure.

Bloody Great Big Risk

When you create ideas you are bound to make mistakes and therefore there is always a risk of failure. There is no guarantee that your idea will ever become successful but by not trying you've guaranteed failure before you start. We only learn from our mistakes, not from our successes. So, although it appears like a paradox, we need to make mistakes so we can learn. After experiencing the results, we clearly get to see what doesn't work so we can put that behind us. Success goes hand in hand with failure. The more success you have the more failures you've had to achieve it.

Have the courage to risk failure and I promise, unless you're a watercolor artist, at the end of the day there isn't a single mistake that can't be corrected.

Edison had over 1000 failures before being successful with the light bulb.

'What's the worst thing that can happen?' is a question you should ask before being afraid of taking a risk. If you can face that demon, you won't be biting your nails. One of the worst possible things that can happen is that you come up with an invention and someone else gets all the money. Well, you wouldn't be the first; in fact, all the big brands were started by independent people just like you and me.

There's the McDonald's Bros who sold their idea to entrepreneur Ray Croc; there's John Pemberton the drug store owner who came up with the first recipe for Coca-Cola known as Pemberton's French Wine Coca in 1885; there's Laszlo Biro and guess what he invented?

Like the McDonalds, Lazlo Biro may not have made as much money as he should have out of his invention but at least he had the satisfaction of knowing that his surname has entered the vocabulary of countless languages.

Mr. Biro made lots of mistakes. While visiting a printer, this Hungarian sculptor, hypnotist, journalist and editor of a government-sponsored magazine began to consider the principle of the printer's quick-drying ink to pens and he produced his first prototype before the year was out.

Wishing to avoid the Nazis, Biro set up his production company in Argentina where he was quite successful. But he made two awful mistakes, the first was that he sold the rights to Britain much too cheaply, (sales in Britain in the first year were 30,000; he'd have done better if he'd taken a royalty). Having made that clanger, he compounded the error by forgetting to patent the invention in the United States where in New York alone the biro pen sold 10,000 in its first day.

Did you know that, on average, a business owner has two major failures before becoming successful? How many creations do you think inventors make before finding something that becomes successful in the marketplace? I have had far more unsuccessful ideas than successful ones. Yet the successful one is the only one that matters and I am a 'success' because of it.

Some think being successful is associated with being 'intelligent' and having the right qualifications. I don't see being successful as having anything to do with qualifications.

In terms of ingenuity, I regard BetterBlocks as an 'average' product. I have seen far greater ideas than BetterBlocks never make it to the marketplace. However, because I was carrying a lot of debt at the time, maybe that's what made me desperate. Maybe I realized that had I stopped I would never again have this chance of success!

Maybe I realized that if I was going to go, the only way was to go hard. Maybe I felt the only way forward for Warren Wilson was to take *a bloody great big risk*.

Remember the statistic that one in 600 new ideas actually makes it to the marketplace? I would estimate that of the 599 that didn't make it half were probably cleverer ideas than BetterBlocks.

Their inventors gave up when their challenges became too great. Many of the stumbling blocks for these inventors were not external, but personal challenges that knocked them flat, whereas I stuck with it.

I have seen inventors who needed financial assistance yet they refused to come to an agreement with people who were offering them the money they so badly needed because they were afraid of getting 'ripped off'. What kind of puerile reasoning is that?

Ego, that's what.

I was around that crowd, I used to talk to people all the time whose products never got off the ground. I would often wonder, *Was the deal they refused really unworkable or did their own paranoia prevent them from successfully negotiating it?* It's like saying to your would-be investor, 'My abstract idea is worth more than your physical \$million cash.'

Here's a simple business rule that usually works—from the Saturday morning markets right through to the complications that the corporations bring on themselves.

My rule is: *when the cash gets thrown on the table, pick it up somehow.* Especially when the odds are running 600:1 against you and someone is saying, 'Here, take this...'

‘Only a few million, by jeez it’s not enough!’

Don’t say that.

Bring in a professional negotiator if that’s your attitude, but never lose the deal. It’s better to have a smaller slice of a large pie than a large slice of no pie.

Only the players get to score the goals, spectators never ever register on the scoreboard.

In the world of business you become a player by making a deal, even if it’s not ideal. The agreement I made with Kelvin (on a paper napkin over a breakfast of grits) was probably not the sort of deal I’d make now. But so what? It was not a ‘smart’ deal and we could have both made more money if we’d been sharper, I’m sure Kelvin would say the same. It’s much easier being wise after the event. But we did it, and we both wound up with more money than if we hadn’t.

It mightn’t be a big deal to someone like Richard Branson or Rupert Murdoch, it mightn’t be a big deal in the corporate world, however because I made that deal a whole new world opened up to me. On one occasion I saw \$100,000 worth of product sold to the general public in 12 minutes! In just 12 months my idea went from \$0 to \$15 million in sales. To me that was big money and a deal worth doing. Is your glass half full or is it half empty? Which way do you look at your situation?

Tomorrow the sun is gonna shine ready or not. Make the most of it. Muster up all the courage you have and go for it! Do what you must in order to give your idea the success it deserves.

Heroism

To achieve success requires a kind of heroism. We all have it inside ourselves; it's a question of bringing it out. This heroism comes out when *the going gets tough and we still do what needs to be done, keeping on track and moving forward.*

Weirdly, I enjoyed a taste of heroism being the one with the desire, passion and courage to do whatever it took to push BetterBlocks across the line. I sold what was left of my back shed business to fund my overseas trip in the hope I might sell the idea. If I failed to do so I'd come back to no money, no business and a bloody huge debt. I'm not sure I'd do it again. I guess that's why I'd still call that 'courageous'.

I started to surround myself with a team of successful people with whom I could share the load and these people all stood up as heroes.

David Williams was one, the owner of the New Zealand manufacturing company that manufactured BetterBlocks. I submitted sketches of BetterBlocks to him, simply asking for his opinion. Within a week he had full production drawings done at his cost, which he airfreighted with a note saying, 'Is this what you want?' Outstanding service! Needless to say, David Williams became our manufacturer.

Kelvin was another hero. He said, 'I'll invest in your project. I'll produce and test a direct response commercial. If it works we have a deal, if it doesn't we'll shake hands and walk away'. Kelvin was smart, knowing that—like direct mail, space ads and radio—direct TV response is something you can test. Such media lets you conclude stuff like 'This headline pulls 2% whereas that one pulls 3%.'

The cycle goes like this:

(1) Manufacture

(2) Test on a sample group

(3) If the sample is demographically representative, you should get close to the same percentage response.

Smart people know how to hedge their bets and Kelvin reckoned that BetterBlocks came up trumps. He committed risk capital on a deal written on a paper napkin.

Aussies and New Zealanders can be honest like that.

Stuck!

A sticking point is like writer's block, it is a point where you stop and don't know how to get started and back on track again.

Cause: Usually an external influence.

For example:

- 1. *Distraction.*** You have let an outside influence break your concentration and steal your interest.
- 2. *Problem:*** There may be some confusion going on in your private life or at least within your sphere of focus.

The solution is to block them before they block you. In the first instance the initiative rests with you. You know what interests and distracts you, it could be anything from computer games to sport, so shut out that subject matter. In the second instance sometimes the world comes to your door with a big personal or family problem you can't ignore. The best thing to do in this instance is to deal with it thoroughly, and then it's DONE and you can get back on the case.

Here's a familiar example: the 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle in a pile on your table. You know the outcome you want but have not worked out how to get there. My partner at the time, Helen, successfully solves puzzles with the following strategy, which is equally applicable to turning great ideas into reality:

Order: Order is brought to the confusion so that it makes more sense and is therefore easier to solve. Helen finds the edge pieces first because they are easily recognizable; she then groups all the similar colors together. She does the easiest first. Remember the example of Sheena shooting goals? Building on her successes?

Simplifying: She simplifies the overall picture by breaking up the pile into smaller and smaller recognizable chunks, starting with the easily recognizable pieces.

Trial and Error: She tries one piece and, if it does not fit, she tries another and another until something fits. When she makes a mistake—so what? She simply tries again.

Helen has developed a step-by-step process, which centers around her gradually creating order out of chaos. Lots of people do this and lots of people don't. Some will throw up their hands in horror and, not knowing which way to turn, they claim they are permanently 'stuck'.

Once I understood how the Lego block actually worked, I saw the opportunity to compete by developing another type of block, a block that moved.

Like a single edge piece of the jigsaw, developing another product was the smaller problem to solve what became the solution to the larger problem, which was how to successfully compete with Lego. I started by bringing order to the confusion. That put the steering wheel in my hand; I simplified what I could, worked through trial and error and ultimately placed my actions in order and gained control.

If you are stuck, go right back to your information where you will probably find the solution, which is either (1) you need more information or (2) you missed something.

Mistakes Are Okay

Most people are intolerant of mistakes. However, author and businessperson Robert Kiyosaki, says, ‘The reason I am wealthier than most is because I have made more mistakes.’ Mistakes give us knowledge by showing us what doesn’t work so that we can therefore discover what does. And knowledge is power.

If we make 50 decisions in a week and—say—half work for us, we will have certainly had more achievements than if we didn’t make any decisions. If we make 100 decisions, that ratio would mean we’d have made 50 good ones. Essentially, we’d have either achieved our goals and/or learned a considerable amount. We made twice as many mistakes but we have had twice as many successes. And no one remembers the 999 failed attempts; they just remember the successful one that created the light bulb.

The key to growth is the ability to make decisions and to correct them quickly if they are not working.

Take note of how many decisions you actually make in a day. You’ll take many of these for granted, such as what to eat, when to wake up, where to go shopping, etc. Yet you actually make many hundreds—and excellent decisions at that. It is just that you have become so rehearsed with them that you don’t even realize you’ve made them.

Learning to make decisions, analyzing whether they work or not and being able to correct them is like any other skill—the more you do it, the better you become at it. The more you get used to making

certain decisions (for example, those involved in creating or expanding your business) the quicker you become at making corrections where necessary. The outcome of that is that you grow faster.

Making mistakes will not necessarily prevent you from reaching your goal. For example, in 1969, when Neil Armstrong journeyed to the moon for the first manned lunar landing, he was off course 96% of the time. This means that 96 decisions out of 100 weren't correct. Did NASA dwell on these mistakes? *Of course not!* They simply corrected them as quickly as they could, got back on course and achieved their goal, and, with it, America's sense of destiny.

Neil Armstrong and his team successfully completed a safe journey of 800,000 kilometers with only 4% of the navigational decisions being correct.

We grow larger and more powerful by discovering what we **don't** know.

Since creating BetterBlocks, my next challenge is not to develop a new product but to share the knowledge I've learned so others can fulfill their dreams more easily.

Will I be successful?

I believe so.

Will I make plenty of mistakes?

Absolutely!

That's nothing to be afraid of.

I've learned not to be so hard on myself.

I've also learned that the quicker I admit my mistakes the quicker I can correct them.

What the Wealthy Do

Problems provide us with an opportunity to learn more, to expand our knowledge, business and our wealth. They allow us to learn something we didn't know before and thereby enrich our lives.

If you want to increase your knowledge and your wealth, do what successful business people do: take on more challenges. Look for new ways to expand your business or ways you can improve existing products—*take on more responsibility!*

Like billionaire entrepreneur Richard Branson. His first challenge was a student newspaper. His second, a successful record store followed by a chain of record stores, a recording business and currently an international airline, a credit card business, space tourism and much more.

As he gained knowledge, Branson took on more responsibilities, which, in turn, increased his knowledge of how to run larger and larger businesses, which vastly increased his wealth.

Though tough going for him at the time, if Branson wanted to start a student newspaper now, or a record store, he'd probably find it no challenge at all because he's taken on much bigger responsibilities since.

You've grown! Recall the challenges you conquered when you were younger. They probably seem much smaller now because you've overcome much larger ones.

***The size of a challenge
is always relative to what we know***

BetterBlocks has inspired me to teach other people how to reach their goals. This additional responsibility will increase my knowledge even further, which will allow me to help people even more.

Be 71% More Productive

Milton Olsen wrote a great story about a scientific discovery that established that teams work better when there are no egos involved.

This story (about geese) identifies a huge improvement - a 71% better flying range. I'm calling it, 'Honor others as geese do'. Next autumn, when you see geese heading south for the winter, flying along in a "V" formation, you might consider what science has discovered as to why they fly that way...

As each bird flaps its wings, it creates uplift for the bird immediately following.

By flying in a "V" formation,
the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own.

People who share common direction and sense of community

can better get where they are going more quickly and easily

because they are travelling on the thrust of one another.

When a goose falls out of formation,
it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone

...

and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the
'lifting power'.

**If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in
formation**

**with those that are heading in the same direction as we are
(and willing to accept their help as well as give ours to
others).**

When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back into formation,
and another goose flies point.

It is sensible to take turns doing demanding jobs.

**With people, as with geese, we are interdependent on each
other.**

Geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up
their speed.

**We need to make sure our honking from behind is
encouraging
and not something else!**

Finally, and this is important...

When a goose gets sick, or is wounded by gunshots and falls out of formation, two other geese fall out with that goose and follow it down to lend help and protection.

They stay with that fallen goose until it is able to fly again, or it dies.

Only then do they launch out on their own, or with another formation, to catch up with their group.

Lesson: All of us is better than one of us.

If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in formation. People who share common direction and a sense of community find it quicker and easier to get where they want to be by traveling on the thrust of those who are heading in the same direction as we are.

It's interesting that the best examples of how to do things more efficiently often come from nature. Frequently it holds solutions to our problems and shows us how to grow and create. The simple act of being observant of nature has created billion dollar businesses. Velcro is just one of many examples.

Real Life Exercise 3

Now that you have decided which solution will enable you to reach your desired goal, list all the actions you will need to carry out in order to make your idea a reality.

Part 5

Constant Evaluation

'If you can measure it you can manage it.'

Bryan Smith, property developer

Constantly evaluate your actions. You are either on track or off track.

The evaluation you make of your efforts tells you if the direction you are taking is worthwhile or not. It also indicates how to correct it if it's not working. That's the key to ongoing success.

Ideally, true evaluation must be measured objectively. Numbers are usually the best indicators of what is really happening. To determine whether or not your solution will lead to success means evaluating your actions through measurement. Statistics are probably the most objective tool we have; they provide us with data about people, businesses, conditions and whatever else we want to know. You can obtain stats from:

1. The general media
2. Advertising media
3. Australian Bureau of statistics, or
4. You can commission your own research

BetterBlocks is a perfect example of this. Had I taken the time to study the numbers, they would have clearly indicated to me that I needed to take immediate corrective action. This would have made

a significant difference to my financial state. The statistics in Table 1 are the royalties I was paid for the sales of BetterBlocks. The numbers tell the story:

Table 1

<u>Year</u>	<u>Product Developed</u>	<u>Royalties (\$)</u>
1993	Regular BetterBlocks	0
1994	Bigger BetterBlocks	133,472
1995	BetterBlocks Accessories	89,945
1996	Glow in the Dark BetterBlocks	64,433
1997	Magic Color Change BetterBlocks	62,044
1998	Nil	68,383
1999	Nil	17,463
2000	Nil	9,667
2001	Nil	9,155
2002	Nil	1,086
2003	Nil	0
Total five products developed		459,648

I generated income by producing new ideas and products and then from being paid a royalty from every product sold. I only started to look at the statistics once the numbers had reached zero and I was getting no income from my invention. It wasn't until my royalty stream had dwindled to zero that I asked myself, 'How the heck did that happen?'

Upon hindsight, it also clearly pointed out what I was actually good at!

In order to avoid reaching a similar situation, here is a simple formula that relates to all areas of a business, the relationship between the different areas and the effect on profits. I came across it in the book *Instant Cash Flow* by controversial entrepreneur, multi-millionaire, author and investor Brad Sugars.

Like all great formulas, it's simple and it's commonsense:

Measurement = Management!

- ***Leads x Conversion rate = Customers***
- ***Customers x Transactions x Average \$ sale =
Turnover***
- ***Turnover x Margin = Profit***

Note that the five key areas are: leads, conversion rate, transactions, average sale and margin.

Consider: if you increased each of the five highlighted areas by only 10%, how much do you think your profits would increase by?

Answer: Not 10% it's 61%.

Play with these numbers. Imagine if you doubled each of the five key areas over time. How would it affect your profits?

It would increase them by 3200%.

By understanding the statistics, Sugars knew exactly which areas were the most profitable and which areas he had to improve. And he could easily and quickly measure the results using this formula. No wonder Sugars could financially retire at age twenty-six! (1)

You can use these same formulae to measure your business performance.

Measuring tells you if your solution is working or not and points to the areas in question, thus providing the direction for change. Always examine the statistics of your venture closely. They will tell you factually the direction you are going in.

So if it is working, great, keep going.

If it isn't, change what you are doing **NOW**.

Facts on Stats

Statistics are great for evaluating solutions and providing an indication of where you need to go to reach your goal. But to turn statistics into results you need skills.

By analyzing BetterBlocks' statistics, I discovered skills I needed to develop. Coming up with answers to problems was not really a challenge to me, nor was taking the answer and converting it into real product. People skills was the area that challenged me the most and is still an area I do a lot of work on to improve.

You need good communication skills to succeed. You need to speak out when necessary, listen when required and charm all the right people while doing so. I had difficulty with this; therefore I had difficulty selling my ideas.

Early in my business/inventing career, I knew that what was being said about my product did not make total sense. I also believed some of the decisions were less than ideal, but I did not have the conviction to speak out and, consequently, I didn't get the results I had hoped for. For this, I had no one to blame but myself.

To be honest, dealing with people used to scare the crap out of me. The ability to communicate with people is fundamental because it's the essence of negotiation and you can't close a sale without it. To get wherever you want to go you've got to open that door, which I needed to do to get to where I wanted to go. That all happened in my late-20s, which is when I came to realize that working at 2.00am by myself in my backyard shed wasn't much of a lifestyle. I wanted something different, but to achieve it I had to get out of my comfort zone. I had to gradually become a different person.

Communication is about listening to what people have to say, being able to speak up confidently, being able to disagree with them and

not get them riled. Those who have happy and successful lives are very good communicators. So I started doing some work on myself. I'm still learning.

Author Robert Kiyosaki says, 'All great leaders are leaders because of their communication skills.' Observe any great leader and you will discover this to be true.

Great communicators are in tune with both their subject and their audience. Philosopher Aristotle, singer Paul McCartney, artist and inventor Leonardo da Vinci and people in their league were such brilliant communicators that their message will be remembered throughout the ages.

The skills required to make your business successful revolve around your ability to communicate what you want so that others may clearly understand and assist you in achieving it.

Shortcut:

- If your statistics are negative, and you have good, proven systems in place, start by evaluating your people skills, it may be the problem area, or,
- Evaluate the skills of the people involved and the systems in place. Are they helping people communicate with each other and do their job easily and efficiently?

Good people skills require the support of good systems.

When a company is developing a new product there is a tremendous amount of product testing to be done.

The following questions need to be answered:

- Where is there a market niche to fill?

- Does our competitor have a hole in their product line, or do we?
- What do consumers want?
- What improvements would they like in products already in the market?

Revolution vs. Evolution

Does an idea have to be revolutionary to be worthwhile?

From my experience, no!

In fact, revolutionary ideas are seldom as successful as ideas that seem to follow natural progression. This is because the greater the change in thinking that's needed on the part of the consumer (as is required with revolutionary ideas) the more resistance you will meet because people aren't ready for it!

Here are three examples of revolutionary products that should have been instantly welcomed, but weren't.

Example 1: Refrigeration

In the mid-19th century, the man who invented refrigeration, James Harrison, went broke because people were reluctant to buy his ice. Transportation was the only thing they thought refrigeration might be good for.

In the 1870s, Australia had a meat surplus, which could not be transported overseas without refrigeration. A company that could export this surplus would reap huge financial gain. So, to prove the commercial value of his idea, in 1873 Harrison built a refrigeration system for use onboard a ship. He arranged for a refrigerated shipment of meat to be sent from Melbourne to England aboard the sailing ship Norfolk. Due to reasons beyond his control, the meat was ruined and Harrison was left penniless. It took another six years for the first successful arrival of a cargo of meat.

Harrison died in 1893 so he wasn't around in 1913 when the Domeltre (short for Domestic Electric Refrigerator) went on sale in Chicago. But there were still problems, including the noise, the cost (\$900) and the mechanism itself. The history of the refrigerator drags out to 1923 when two young engineering students presented a design for a cooling machine that converted heat to cold by absorption. At last, in 1924, Frigidaire marketed the first UK model, and the appearance of the US Kelvinator in 1931 saw the cooler become a cabinet from which it has become a standard kitchen appliance.

Example 2: The LP (long playing) record

You would think that storage of music so you could play what you want when you want would have always had a ready market. No so, the LP (long playing) record was another idea that took some time for people to appreciate. The earliest attempts to develop the concept were made in 1904 by the Neophone Company of London, after which the idea lay dormant for 25 years.

Then the American company RCA-Victor revitalized the idea and selected the playing speed of $33 \frac{1}{3}$ rpm and, by doubling the grooves per inch, they were able to offer two sides, each playing to around 14 minutes. However, there was great resistance within the company, certain executives despised the LP, but by 1950 they were forced to accept its arrival and, with its acceptance, RCA-Victor promptly sacked all the executives who had opposed it. LPs, cassette tapes, CDs, iPods and MP3s are all examples of the evolution of the LP.

Example 3: Shufflebug

My experience of introducing a revolutionary product was another bumpy ride. Prior to BetterBlocks, I had developed a children's ride-on toy that I named the 'Shufflebug'. The idea was that children would sit on it and, by using a swaying body movement, would propel themselves forwards.

We tested it in schools and the kids loved it. The only problem was that it wasn't particularly attractive when it was seen on shelves in retail shops. Children could not see how much fun it was so they did not buy it. By the time we changed the design to make it more eye-catching, we'd run out of money. Consequently, the Shufflebug was an expensive lesson about attempting to introduce a great product that no one could see the value of. Poor communication!

The above are three examples of revolutionary products. They are 'revolutionary' because people had to take a big leap to go from their current understanding to being able to realize how these products could benefit their lives. ***To do this often requires time and a great deal of advertising dollars.***

In comparison, **evolutionary** products receive a more willing response from consumers who require a less challenging shift in thinking because the concept is grafted onto something they already understand.

An evolutionary product is often accepted much more readily in the marketplace because people perceive it adds value to what they already have and know, rather than making what they currently have redundant.

Evolutionary products are much easier to take. In some instances the consumer is literally waiting for the next-phase development,

like the way would-be buyers of plasma TV are holding back, waiting for its next phase.

Evolutionary example 1: DVDs

VCRs and DVDs are perfect examples of evolutionary products. People easily perceived the application of those products. Rather than making the TV set redundant by broadening the range of viewing, both products added value to an already popular product that their prospects already owned.

VCRs and DVDs had a welcome entry into the market as viewers were clearly frustrated by a mere handful of channels, whereas videos and DVDs allowed them to choose what they wanted to watch at their convenience. Therefore, they quickly found marketplace acceptance.

Evolutionary example 2: Correction fluid

Like DVDs, correction fluid is another good example of added value. It was invented by secretary, Bette Nesmith Graham. Even though she could not type, Bette applied for a job with a Dallas law firm when she was 17. The company liked her and, although everything else was going well, her lack of typing skills was a constant niggling problem.

Having observed how artists painted over their mistakes, she thought, *Why can't typists do likewise?* Using her kitchen blender, Bette mixed up her first batch of liquid paper from water-based tempura paint. She took this to work and her boss stopped noticing her typing mistakes.

Soon other secretaries wanted to use her 'Mistake-Out' so Bette turned her kitchen into a laboratory. The profits she made were

small until a blessing in disguise happened: she was fired from her job. A wise inventor friend of mine often says, ‘Turn your lemons into lemonade,’ and Bette Nesmith Graham did just that. She devoted her time to selling what we now know as Liquid Paper.

In 1967, it had grown into a million dollar business. (1967 was a good year for the Nesmiths; it was the year that her son, Mike, repeatedly topped the Pops as a member of the Monkees.) By 1969, Bette had her own plant, nineteen employees and had sold a million bottles. In 1975, Liquid Paper moved into new international headquarters that could produce 500 bottles a minute and the following year produced twenty-five million bottles. Its profits were \$1.5 million.

Bette Nesmith Graham sold her company in 1980 for \$47.5 million dollars. She left a legacy of two foundations to help women find new ways to earn a living. This is an excellent example of a woman who had a solution to a problem that consumers would find useful and she made the most of all the business opportunities along the way. She built her simple idea into a successful business by taking one small step at a time, starting in her kitchen laboratory.

Evolutionary example 3: BetterBlocks

Having learned from the Shufflebug debacle, my next product, BetterBlocks, was a variation on a respected product. For that reason, BetterBlocks is an evolutionary product that is instantly recognizable for what it is, it had joiner blocks which connect to Lego and had an extensive advertising campaign behind it to tell people that it was not static like Lego.

I didn’t have to educate anyone, as I did with the Shufflebug. People could relate to BetterBlocks straight away, therefore they could see the value of this product.

Lesson:

The more people are required to change their habits to accept your product, the greater the challenge to achieve marketplace success.

So if it's revolution you want, be prepared to meet the challenges.

Real Life Exercise 5

Look at your list of actions. Are they taking you towards your goal or away from it? I.e. are your actions working or not working? Analyze them in order to determine the results. If there are actions that are not working, write down the adjustments that need to be made. If these adjustments don't work either, write down more until you discover actions that do work and lead you to the end result you want.

Keep Your Eye on the Ball

It's important the solution to your original challenge remains your focus point at all times. Place your attention on that because it keeps you moving in the direction that achieves your aim.

Another invention, the shopping trolley, highlights this point. One day, in 1936, Sylvan Goldman, owner of the Oklahoma-based Humpty Dumpty grocery chain, was observing his customers because he aimed to find ways to increase their spending. His observation showed they stopped buying when their shopping baskets got heavy.

So he asked handyman Fred Young to attach wheels to a folding chair and fix a basket to the top of it and the supermarket shopping trolley was born! Soon, demand for these trolleys became so great that he started a company to manufacture his invention.

***Be very specific in what you want and
you'll get exactly that.***

Mind Power

Through a combination of daydreaming and visualization, I, too, remained focused on my end result. For 20 minutes per day, for 12 months, I visualized happy families playing with BetterBlocks, which is exactly what happened.

Many Olympic athletes will visualize executing their performance perfectly before they step onto the track or field. Why do you think they do this? They do it because through visualization they are showing their Reticular Activated System (RAS) exactly what they want to happen, to the point where their minds don't know any different, so the result they want just happens.

‘When you visualise then you materialise.’

- Dr Denis Waitley Psychologist & Author

We are constantly hearing about mind power yet I'm often amazed at how infrequently business people use this extremely effective skill.

Just talking about your goal has a powerful effect. I can remember walking on the beach with my financial backer Kelvin who spoke of BetterBlocks becoming part of his public company. He did this long before either of us had gotten our acts together. At that stage he didn't even have a public company. He just knew that someday he would achieve his dream.

At some stage in our lives we all think about our future. Why not think about it positively? It requires no more energy than negative thinking. No greater skill. No more intelligence. Just imagination.

Yet to control our thoughts can be one of the most challenging of all challenges. Try to focus on something for the next two minutes without being distracted. Be easy on yourself if you find this difficult!

Starting any new venture, in business or in life, happens in our minds long before it becomes physical reality. So make the time and create the environment for your imagination to work by setting aside 5, 10 or 20 minutes each day for visualization and notice the difference it makes in your life.

Start with what you can handle, with accomplishments that are believable, give yourself credit for achieving and work your way up to bigger things. I have trained myself to put as much detail and feeling as possible into my thoughts and mental pictures. Remember, the more real you make your visualizations, the more likely they are to happen.

***Our thoughts and feelings
are the scripts
we use to create our lives.***

The thoughts and images we have about ourselves and what we want to happen are very powerful, so detail, color and emotion will enhance their impact, making them seem that much more realistic to us.

Imagine planning a holiday. If you think only about 'taking a holiday somewhere', it will probably never happen. It's too vague. However, when you visualize the destination (Paris), the method of travel (flying), the accommodation (Montparnasse) and the time of year you'll go (Spring), the idea becomes solid, real and achievable.

Remember, you can add to or improve your desired goals at any time.

Summary

A challenge always starts in the mind and can only be solved when you discover what you don't know, discover the answers and put that knowledge into action.

You'll make this discovery by observing all the parts of the challenge exactly as they are and understanding how they work. Then, more importantly, having the courage to admit to having made a mistake frees you up to move forward in a different direction.

My life has always changed for the better whenever I've been hit by a blinding flash of the obvious and acted on it. I knew I would never become wealthy until I acknowledged my mistakes and changed some things about myself.

So take action, do what needs to be done, and make sure you are heading towards the successful outcome you want.

With BetterBlocks, I found potential backers in America and Belgium who were interested in buying the idea from me. I didn't have the money to go over and meet them, so I sold my small engineering business to finance the trip. This was not an easy decision; if I didn't successfully close the deal on BetterBlocks, I'd have no business to financially support me when I came home. Fortunately, it did pay off and BetterBlocks became an internationally successful product.

I don't necessarily advocate going to such extreme lengths to overcome your challenges (there are usually easier options), but you must be willing to take risks to achieve your goals. To back yourself.

The ability to solve and conquer your challenges is the key to your financial and personal freedom. And the way to do this is to follow

the Five Real Life Lessons, which are the five opening chapters of this book. Treat these lessons as you would a guide map:

1. Gather **information**.
2. Do something **different**. Start listing all the opposites to your existing information. (No evaluation yet!) This is training us to think outside the square for solutions.
3. **Decide** which solution is right for you.
4. Take **action**.
5. Continually **analyze** your thoughts and actions to ensure you keep on track.

(1) For more details on the above formula, read *Instant Cash Flow* by Brad Sugars or check out his website:

www.action-international.com

Part 6

Obstacle Course

‘Clarity leads to power.’

Robert Kiyosaki, Money and You

Laurie Wilson is my dad and he loved creating things. He used to race motorbikes in the early '60s and he built his own fuel-injection system when fuel injection was quite a new thing.

My dad had an engineering workshop in our backyard in Edwardstown, Adelaide and he became quite well known around Australia for his innovations. He was one of the first people to regrind and modify camshafts for performance engines. He built his own machine to do that job. He always looked to do better.

My dad ground camshafts for a living and he raced motorbikes for pleasure. He preferred English bikes like Nortons, BSAs and Rudge. Dad loved racing as a sport but he also enjoyed racing as a way of testing out the things he'd made to see if they worked as well as he'd hoped. His own bike was nothing like anyone else's. Dad rode a sidecar motor cross bike that used his own fuel injection systems, his camshaft and whatever else he was working on; it was his way of testing things out.

One thing about my dad, he was absolutely determined. If he wanted to do something he'd always come back on track. And he mished and mashed a bit, he did a lot of adapting, like the time he put a 4-valve Rudge cylinder head on a BSA bottom end.

Because of the motorbikes, Dad was the first person to inspire me with the idea of inventing and I started hanging around the workshop building stuff when I was six. These days, I still love making stuff and seeing an opportunity where I can make something better. I'm a great believer in *if you don't have a go, you never really know*.

I was 10 when Dad had a stroke. He was hospitalized for 12 months. The doctors said he'd never walk and talk again, but he proved them wrong. They even said he was going to die but Dad was very determined and he actually got better.

My mother, Linda Wilson, was one of Australia's top dressmakers at the time. She was a very creative person and gave Dad a reason to get better. But when I was 12, Mum died of a heart attack and Dad never really progressed much after that. I lived with him for the next 22 years.

He helped me out in my business and with my inventions and I certainly helped him out as well. I did my best to look after him and he did his best looking after me.

Dad's workshop must have made an impact on me because I started modifying bikes as well. In my late teens I got into drag racing. We held Australian records with one of the bikes I helped build.

When I was younger, I used to race pushbikes. In fact, the first thing I built of wood and steel was a sidecar for a pushbike. It was quite a neat little thing actually, my dog used to ride in it until I crashed it, after that he wouldn't ride with me anymore. I used to do a lot of work on my mates' bikes too. That's how I spent my teenage years until my late-20s when I realized maybe there was more to life than having the fastest racing bike.

I really loved my engineering and my bikes; I still do a lot of things for people for nothing. But at that stage I realized that I didn't want to spend the rest of my life building racing bikes. Unfortunately, I'd

narrowed my world to the things I could do in an engineering workshop. I was good at that side of things but my ability to have a relationship with people was very poor. Something inside told me I needed to develop as a person if I was to have a successful business, a happy life and all the rest of it.

After that I really spent a lot of time, even up until today, improving my people skills because, to me, the key to becoming successful is not how good your product is, it's your ability to form a team of people around you to get something done.

Only one in 600 inventions is ever successfully commercialized, and mine was it. Not because mine was better than the other 599 but because I formed a team of people around me who could get the job done. In my opinion, BetterBlocks was a good idea but it wasn't a **great** idea, yet I succeeded where other people had not.

In my late 20s, I felt that if I wanted to get bigger and better, and stop developing racing bikes, I needed to develop ME. Before I got into developing product I spent a lot of money and time doing various programs that worked on bettering me. You might say I became the experiment.

When BetterBlocks was successful, they interviewed my dad for the *Who* magazine. He told them I was 'selfish'. I didn't comprehend that straight away, but then I thought about my past and felt that when I was younger a lot of my ambitions were very self-centered. It was about me having the best bike—me, me, me. Then my daughter was born around the time BetterBlocks became successful, and all of a sudden my world wasn't all about me, it was about helping and supporting other people, especially her.

Before that I had a product called the Shufflebug which I spoke of earlier in this book. Some friends came back from the States where they'd seen this ride-on toy at a sideshow. They told me about it and I thought, *That's a really cool idea!*

So I further developed the product, but then I went wrong. When I brought in other partners I told them the Shufflebug was my idea. (Well, the innovations were but the core product wasn't.) I learned from that you can't expect a venture to succeed if you don't tell the truth. The Shufflebug wasn't my idea—it was an idea I'd pinched, whereas BetterBlocks genuinely was my idea. It's not different-colored Lego, it's not static like Lego, it's a completely different concept. BetterBlocks was the first thing I developed that was a major commercial success.

Obstacles

All obstacles start in our minds and they always start like this: we have two opposing thoughts. Both have equal strength and we believe them both.

For example, I thought, *I will compete with Lego*, followed by, *I can't compete because they are a billion dollar company and I'm \$100,000 in debt!* If I had remained there in my thinking, believing both with equal strength, I would never have succeeded.

Eventually though, one of the opposing thoughts will win out. If the positive thought wins—as it did for me—then you're on your way to overcoming your obstacle. However, if the negative thought wins, it actually stops you dead in your tracks.

Which thought usually wins out for you?

The key to solving all our problems is to, firstly, have mastery over our thinking.

Choose to disbelieve the reasons why you can't and decide that you can. Whenever I hear people saying, 'I can't do this because...' I bring to mind a statement by author Robert Kiyosaki: 'The reasons for our treason (to ourselves) are our reasons.'

He's saying that whenever we justify our limitations we are simply selling ourselves short. It's an excuse that justifies our failures. We deserve better!

Think of an action that creates **something** rather than **nothing**.

To be successful at anything you need to master the ability of solving problems, overcoming challenges. Learning this skill will rapidly see you on the road to success. This will start you on the journey of creating what you want in your personal and business life and you can begin to turn your idea into reality.

You can only overcome challenges with the appropriate thinking. And only you can control whether your thinking will be positive or negative.

Success Killer

Do you think that finding the solution to compete with Lego was the end of my problems? Do you reckon it was all smooth sailing after that? Absolutely not!

Sometimes the idea is the easy part.

The business people who wanted to compete with Lego had a problem. They did not even know where to start.

It took me many years to realize I did something naturally that ensured my success. It was something other people did not do and remained blocked by the obstacles standing in their path. It was something I learned from being involved with engineers.

What did I do differently that the other 599 people did not?

I would break the problem up into **recognizable** chunks.

Let's look at how a problem creates confusion and how, when the confusion is handled, the problem is resolved.

Think about a time when you walked into a room to meet a friend only to find yourself in a room full of total strangers. Were you momentarily confused? Probably. Your problem was that you couldn't see your friend.

Then, out of that sea of faces, you recognized your friend, or at least someone else you knew, and you began to settle down. The more people you recognized, the more confident you felt until eventually you were comfortably enjoying yourself.

The same sense of confusion that happens when you walk into an unfamiliar room is the same feeling that blocks your ideas:

- **Why** are you confused?

- **What should you do** to solve it?

Definitions: ‘Confusion’ comes from the Latin word, *confudere* (‘con’ meaning together and ‘fudere’ meaning to pour): **to pour together**. And ‘problem’ is a form of **disorganization**—which is a major obstacle that stops us dead in our tracks.

This disorganization creates confusion—gives us unknowns—which, in turn, causes a problem.

What can we do to handle this destructive disorganization?

We can do what engineers do—break the problem up into **recognizable** chunks.

You started to bring order into chaos by locating familiar reference points. In this way you regained some control of the situation. What stops people from becoming successful is that they don’t break up their disorganized thoughts into more recognizable patterns and therefore they stop—or, worse still, they give up!

Problem solving: Originally started by Barclays Bank in 1967, the cash dispenser was subject to endless teething problems, not always of its own making but always leading to some sort of chaos. One by one the bank officials solved each irritating problem at a time: (1) customers forgetting to pick up their cash, (2) they also left their shopping and their valuables at the ATMs, (3) the original machines were prone to attacks by chewing gum vandals, (4) the introduction of protective shields brought a new set of problems with instances of fish and chips and even a set of false teeth being trapped behind the shield. Barclays Bank solved each one and the ATM is now a standard fixture of all banks.

Other than being packed with explosives and blown out of walls, the ATM is secure enough to make consumers feel it has overcome its shaky start.

Staying on Track

Lego seemed like one huge obstacle. Just check out Lego's dominance in any toy store! When my thinking was about challenging Lego's marketplace dominance, I was confused and overwhelmed. All I could see was a company that totally monopolized the toy building block market. How could little ole me compete with such an industry giant from a backyard shed?

And then I remembered the joke: *How do you eat an elephant?*

Answer: One bite at a time.

I started to break the Lego company and its product into smaller pieces of information, ones that were more easily recognized and therefore more easily understood. My confusion started to dissipate and windows of opportunity about how to compete started to open up in my mind and only then did I realize how I could be a contender.

If you want to create new products, new services or new ideas, ***start with what you know.***

***To create new ideas,
begin with what you know.
This way you are bringing order
to the chaos
and starting to make sense of the situation.***

I realized I already knew a lot about the company. Lego had an impressive record. It turned over \$1 billion per annum with sales growing annually at 5%. Lego had never made a loss in its 45-year history; its size and might had kept all competition out of the marketplace. I started listing all these facts and after studying them I realized I couldn't find any weaknesses or opportunities in their marketing area, so I looked at the product itself.

Could a product be designed that would be different enough so that I didn't end up in court for copying their design? Could my building block product be similar enough to take advantage of the marketing and recognition that Lego had established in the marketplace?

I started listing what I knew about the Lego building block. Then—and this was a very important step—I started to break that building block down into as many separate components as I could.

Breaking the block up into more easily understood parts gave me amazing insight into areas where I could compete.

- What does a Lego block look like?
- What shape is it?
- What color?
- What shapes can you make when you join the blocks together?
- Are the shapes flexible or rigid?
- What are they like to touch?
- What do they smell like?

I looked at all of these parts separately and listed down my answers.

When I dissected the product into smaller and more easily understood pieces, the sensation of being overwhelmed by Lego was displaced by a sense of understanding the company and its product.

It was from this understanding that I started to discover possible answers to my original problem and I started to believe that I could achieve my goal.

To stay on the road to success

you need to overcome challenges as they appear.

Regain control over them by breaking them up into smaller parts and listing what you already know about each part.

A Clear View of the Solution

The word ‘solution’ comes from the Latin, *solutio* (‘solvere’ meaning to loosen or dissolve). Finding a solution means to dissolve or break down the challenge into manageable chunks. New ideas will evolve from these smaller, more easily understood pieces of information and they will seem to magically appear.

At first, it doesn’t matter what information you come up with, when you don’t know anything it’s all relevant. The important thing here is that you come up with it, so be sure to list even the seemingly unimportant information. (Remember from Part 1, you do not yet know how valuable each bit of information will be.)

Don’t be selective with information.

That one small piece of information could be just the key you are looking for, but you simply haven’t recognized its value yet. The breaking up of your challenge into smaller pieces will help you to see it more clearly. And the clearer you see all the separate parts the easier it will be to find a solution.

When I realized that Lego blocks built mainly rigid shapes, I figured I might be able to design a block that built models that could bend, shape, curve and move. Eventually, that’s exactly what I did.

When one solution is discovered, it often brings with it other challenges to be broken down, understood and conquered. As I’ve written before, coming up with the idea of BetterBlocks was the easy part; how to finance, market and manufacture it was much more of a challenge.

Upside of Problems

You establish your directions by having written goals without which you would end up like a rudderless ship. Every goal on your list represents a challenge.

The advantages are that written goals give you purpose, choice, chance and opportunity. Like this:

Purpose, direction and a reason to get out of bed in the morning and gets your adrenalin pumping

Choice, a decision to help you find a different, possibly better, alternative

Chance to discover what abilities you have (some that you may not have even known about)

Opportunity to be a player in the big game, which is something employees never get

To overcome a challenge and achieve your goal you have to clearly define your intention to do so and then move forward with specific actions in order to complete the task. Once you have set your intentions powerfully enough, the help and answers you'll need will appear.

The right people and opportunities may present themselves on cue when you embrace challenges as opportunities and clearly set your mind on overcoming them.

This happened with BetterBlocks. I had tried unsuccessfully for two years to find a financial backer and marketer for BetterBlocks and I didn't give up, I continued believing that the right person was out

there. I knew that if I continued looking I would find him/her. And I did: Kelvin Claney.

If you know exactly what you want and combine this with the power of persistence, you will achieve. This is the greatest advantage of overcoming each challenge one step at a time, your self-confidence grows with each hurdle you jump, as do your abilities. So you back yourself and take on more challenges, which allows you to have more and more of what you want in your life and business.

***Challenges will always present themselves; it is how you
overcome them
that will generate measurable
growth, success and profits.***

People Power

The pace at which your business will grow is directly related to your ability to solve the challenges you meet along the way. The faster and greater your ability to recognize and conquer these challenges, the faster your idea will become successful.

This particularly applied to BetterBlocks.

1. One question was, 'What type of campaign can make BetterBlocks well known?'
2. The other was, 'How long will it take to turn a profit?'

Direct selling on TV resulted in positive answers to both questions. Prior to BetterBlocks, no toy had been successfully sold by direct selling on television, traditionally only retail stores sell toys on television. Despite this, the BetterBlocks business went to \$15 million turnover in just one year through TV selling. None of this could have been achieved without certain key people.

The sum value of human capital is three times greater than all financial and manufacturing capital.

-The World Bank

In business it is the **people** who create the profits and the expansion you want. The money and manufacturing facilities are just vehicles to make ideas happen. If you do not have the capital or

ideal facilities, it doesn't matter first-off because the core energy focuses around the person who will bring it into reality.

People create the solutions to your challenges. Treat them with generous respect. They can only produce great results if they have great people as well as great management systems in place. *Great, great, great!*

People solve problems.

Here's the famous McDonald's story of how the ability to solve a simple problem led to a billion dollar business:

- In 1940, two brothers, Dick and Mac McDonald, founded a restaurant in San Bernardino, California.
- In 1948, they gained fame by implementing their innovative 'Speedee Service System', where hamburgers were made on a car-style assembly line. It was the same principle that Henry Ford had pioneered earlier in the car industry.

They had devised an automated system for making hamburgers and running a restaurant. Their problem was that they had a multi-million dollar idea but a one restaurant business that never looked like expanding.

- In 1954, milk shake mixer salesman Ray Kroc had a burning desire to build a chain of franchised businesses, but the problem was he had no business to franchise.
- Kroc learned of the McDonald's restaurant's amazing capacity to service large amounts of customers easily and quickly. After visiting the McDonald brothers' restaurant in 1954, he approached them with a proposition to franchise their system. They agreed.
- On 2 March 1955, McDonald's Systems Inc. was founded.

- In 1960 the name was changed to McDonald's Corporation.
- In 2005, McDonald's operated more than 30,000 restaurants in 119 countries with revenues of \$21 billion.

The McDonald brothers were able to make great profit by coming up with a system that would overcome their obstacles. One of the challenges was to find somebody who would franchise their business and make it popular—and they did.

The hamburger itself a meat pattie with sauce, lettuce and a pickle, there's no mystery there. It is the people and people management systems that fast-tracked McDonald's success.

Million Dollar Ideas

Those who have succeeded in building profitable businesses have solved problems that other people have either experienced or were about to experience. (Sometimes we call such people 'visionaries'.)

In the '70s, Bill Gates envisioned billions of potential users for computers, which needed to be easy to use and without requiring much training to reach mass market proportions. Gates' subsequent efforts towards this goal resulted in the billion dollar business Microsoft.

McDonald's mass produced food and business franchise system resulted in another global enterprise. Barclays Bank, Coca-Cola, Velcro, Liquid Paper, all of these multi-million dollar ideas resulted from observing perceived and existing needs and then continually taking the appropriate actions to create a product or service that would solve the particular problem for the public: your customers.

BetterBlocks' evolutionary aspect provided a complementary building block system to the popular Lego system. And BetterBlocks made \$45 million. Not bad for a 'small' business.

Get Real!

The reason most people won't overcome their challenges is that their urge to win is not strong enough, that is 'they don't want it badly enough'. This results in them not having enough oomph to do what it takes. Their incentive for solving the problem is not important enough for them to do anything about it. And in this competitive world you've got to have that hunger, if you want the spoils of victory.

I was the same way once. I wasn't hungry enough, yet I used to talk about wanting to make money by inventing something. It was just talk, I never did anything about it until I owed \$100,000 at a point when, if I sold all my possessions, I would still have fallen \$90,000 short!

It would have taken me years to repay the money I owed by simply working for a wage. The only way I could repay the debt in a reasonable time was by selling one of my ideas. Up until then I had only *talked* about selling one of my ideas, I hadn't taken action.

I never really wanted it badly enough until the reality of going bankrupt hit me, then, suddenly, I really, really wanted to—needed to—*get real*.

If you are doing nothing about turning your ideas into reality, ask yourself honestly, 'Do I really want to do this or am I just pretending?' If the answer is in the affirmative, ask, (1) 'What is really stopping me?' and if not, ask, 'Should I be turning my attention towards more worthwhile ventures?'

The important thing is to be honest with yourself and decide what you really want.

Then take action.

Formula for Failure

People who are unable to achieve what they want use this unfortunate formula for failure:

- 1. Feel overwhelmed.** They get overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenge.
- 2. Feel discouraged.** They listen to others' opinions about how difficult the challenge will be and so focus on the many obstacles.
- 3. Feel inadequate.** They believe that it really is too hard.
- 4. Give up.**

This was the exact formula I followed when my first toy business failed. It was easier to cling to the vain hope that my existing business would be successful (and avoid facing the pain of failure even though the facts showed otherwise) than to face the prospect of taking a chance on something new, like BetterBlocks.

I knew what I needed to do, but I rather stupidly thought it was easier to live in indecisive hope. It was not until my personal finances smacked me straight in the face that I changed my mind. I needed to focus my thoughts in a clear direction and take action. Wishful thinking was not working.

Formula for Success

To turn failure around, you need to do exactly what investors do to build their wealth: *start small and gradually keep building and expanding*. The typical path of any good investor is to take many small investments and, over a period of time, these will compound to create a larger and larger portfolio.

As I mentioned before, most people give up because the reason for moving ahead is not clear enough for them to give it a go. One of the most important things you will learn in this book is that the reason for taking action is really your mission, your motivator.

Your ‘why?’ is your greatest motivator.

Author Robert Kiyosaki writes about the importance of this in his book *Before You Quit Your Job*. He says that if you focus on the ‘why’ it will add power to your intention and will encourage you to do what it takes to make your ideas real. When you have a concrete goal based around a reason that has strong meaning for you, it will help you keep going when the going gets tough.

Truly successful people always have strong reasons for doing what they do, they have a mission which drives them, often becoming more refined over time. Professional motivator Anthony Robbins expands on the true power of the little word ‘why’. He explains that the ‘why’ (the reason) you take action empowers the ‘how will I do it?’ The ‘why’ comes from the very depths of your soul. The reason

why you actually want this in your life is what brings a sparkle to your eye.

Remember the first time you fell in love? You feel the same inner passionate excitement when you tackle a project you really believe in. Everyone has a unique talent to offer, many people simply do not know what it is yet. You can tell the ones who do because they radiate that inner strength, that confident glow. Everything they do has a purpose. They know what they want to do in life and why they want to do it. They are motivated. Life turns them on.

When I postponed developing BetterBlocks, my fear came about simply because the reasons for going ahead with BetterBlocks were not powerful or passionate enough at that time. I had bad memories of my Shufflebug experience and this fear of failing again resulted in me remaining stuck.

When we have a challenge that has a strong enough ‘I-want-this-solved because...’ message attached to it, we will do whatever it takes to achieve it. Eventually, I developed strong enough reasons to want to overcome the obstacles involved with making BetterBlocks a success. The ‘whys’ are usually simple and basic. In my personal example they were quite critical, they included, ‘How am I going to pay my debt?’ and ‘How am I going to eat?’

***If you address a challenge with a strong enough
‘Why do I want to overcome it?’
attached to it,
you will achieve it.***

Law of Attraction

If you possess passionate enough reasons for wanting to achieve something, you will find that you will attract the things that help you find the right people, education, professional aid and money you need to achieve that goal.

It's called the Law of Attraction and it works like magnetism in all areas of your life. What happens is something gets inside your radar—a car you want, information you're seeking, a project you wish to complete, a home you want to buy, or whatever. Once that clicks into your consciousness, you'll notice things that relate to that subject matter.

It is not limited to personal achievement. For example, suppose you want to move to—say, Bellingen NSW—you'll notice Bellingen in the real estate section of the *Weekend Magazine*, hey there it is again in a *Great Holidays* magazine, and then your friends say they're taking a holiday. 'Where to?' Answer: Bellingen. What a coincidence!

Explanation: Either the universe turned itself inside out to your advantage or you're noticing things you didn't notice before.

This passion is the driving force that brings ideas and patents to life. It allows creators, business people like you and me, to become successful.

Nine out of ten new businesses fail in the first 12 months of operation, and of the ones that do succeed, a further nine out of ten fail in the next 5 years. Similarly, only *one out of six hundred* ideas for inventions ever becomes successful.

Why do they not succeed?

Answer: Because the majority have no passion, no guts, no driving force to keep them going when times get tough.

An example of this can be found in the investment market. Many people make lots of money during the good times. It is only when the tides turn that you can separate the stayers from the players.

The players are the ones who half-heartedly took up the role, lost their money and are nowhere near the Stock Exchange in a bear market. Instead of admitting mistakes and asking themselves, 'What am I going to do differently next time?' they blame the downturn, the international market, sometimes they blame partners and friends. The stayers take it on the chin, figure out what went wrong, fix it and reenter the market with increased wisdom. Because, remember, money can be made in the stock market if the market is going up, down or sideways, you just need to know how!

Come on, admit it: You wouldn't have bought this book unless there was a challenge that you wanted to overcome. And you wouldn't be bothering with overcoming that challenge unless you had a really good reason for doing so. This shows that you are taking steps to move towards your goal. Acknowledge yourself for this!

Do It Now

Procrastination is the biggest problem many people face. They dwell on small and sometimes insignificant points or they continually put off doing something. Such behavior can be overcome with a big enough ‘Why?’

- Why are you procrastinating?
- Are they truly justifiable reasons?

Avoiding personal bankruptcy saved me falling under the spell of the procrastination monster. The reasons to succeed pushed me into taking one more step, then another and another until I succeeded. The only sure way for me to fail was to stop. I believe that one of the reasons my product succeeded was so I could use it as an example to teach others how to achieve their desires, which is the purpose of this book.

It seems to me that the most successful people seem to have a mission greater than themselves, some give generously to charities while others—like Bill and Melinda Gates—make spectacular cultural gestures, like their \$30 million purchase of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Codex Leicester* (the most expensive book purchase ever), which the Gates Foundation lends to museums and galleries worldwide so thousands of people can see this major historical document they never would have otherwise seen.

Author Robert Kiyosaki went from living in his car to being a multi-millionaire. He felt a mission to elevate the financial consciousness of humanity, to help people regain control over their financial future.

In his prime, the controversial figure John Burley had over 300 properties, stocks and businesses. Retired at the age of 32, Burley

works out how much money he wanted to give away to charitable organizations *first*, and then calculates the income he needs to earn to do that. His stated answer to ‘Why?’ is ‘I want for others too.’

Truly successful people think differently from the general public. Success always involves thinking bigger and helping as many people as possible along the way. That’s karma for you!

Here are some questions you can ask yourself to help clarify your motives:

- 1.** *Who will benefit* from the result of your why? (Children benefited from BetterBlocks therefore my purpose was to create a toy for children.)
- 2.** *What sort of benefits* will you receive from doing what you set out to do? (Wealth and recognition.)
- 3.** *How* will your solution benefit others? (Children will be entertained and their creativity will be fostered.)
- 4.** *What changes or improvements* will be offered to the community as a whole or society in general? (BetterBlocks offers the world a product that expands children’s creativity.)

When clarifying your why? it is most important to *visualize the end result*. Make that picture as big, bright and real as possible. The stronger your visualization, the more determination and passion you will have to achieve the outcome you want. Bring as much emotion into this picture as possible by visualizing the benefits that you and others will receive from your solution.

Take some time now to describe to yourself and visualize what constitutes your why? You will conquer seemingly insurmountable obstacles if your reasons and/or rewards are great enough.

Tap into Other People's Whys

Tapping into other people's why? can be very lucrative. They say, 'Necessity is the mother of invention' yet there are still thousands of people's needs that are presently unfulfilled. You could fulfill these needs and make a tidy profit in the process.

Truly wealthy people acquire wealth by having their money or their properties work for them. The one thing I liked about earning royalties was that the cash register was still ringing while I was sleeping. Today, more than ever, it's obvious that creating wealth is a mindset. The ability to apply the information we have, to take the actions required is a result of what we think.

The road to wealth starts and stops with what we think.

The overcoming of challenges is won and lost by what is between our ears: our mind.

In BetterBlocks I had a clear notion of *selling an idea* to create money. There was no rocket science involved, just simple persistence. What made it happen was that, through planning, I overcame the obstacles along the way. A workable plan generates persistence.

Just like a magnifying glass can focus light on a point so concentrated that it creates fire, if your persistence and passion is

directed solely at your end result, it will make it happen much easier and faster than you think.

Some common whys people have are to:

- Save or gain money
- Save time
- Avoid unnecessary effort
- Gain more comfort
- Attain better health
- Escape physical pain
- Receive praise and recognition
- Be popular and well liked

Tapping into other people's motivation is a sure-fire way to create wealth.

Parents are always looking for ways to entertain and educate their kids. I wanted to create a product that entertained children, encouraged their creativity and gained the approval of parents. Not only did I achieve my purpose but I also fulfilled the purpose many parents have of educating and entertaining their children.

Creating personal wealth by solving other people's challenges is a common element among wealthy people. Take an entrepreneur I know—Andrew. He's in the finance/investment industry. He and his partner wanted to boost their business. They noticed that many property investors with small portfolios were not doing anywhere near as well financially with their investment properties as they could. He'd say, 'Their properties could be working much harder for them, they could make themselves wealthier much faster.'

So they set up a one-hour seminar that educated people about using their investment properties more efficiently, after which Andrew and his partner offered to restructure their portfolios at no cost.

They had 13 people at the seminar. Seven took up the offer and are substantially wealthier because of it. It's a win-win. Over the next 12 months this one seminar alone will be worth well over \$50,000 in income to Andrew and his partner. By helping others attain their goals they created a cycle and actually achieved theirs, which is to become wealthy by educating others to become wealthier.

Part 7

9 Obstacles – 19 Solutions

When you clearly understand the obstacles that you're up against, you will be able to make an effective plan to overcome them.

Let's look at nine of the most common obstacles that prevent people from being successful at attaining what they want in life.

Obstacle 1:

Mind over Matter

What you put into your head is what comes out your mouth. Spend the afternoon watching sport and that'll be your dinner conversation. Work on a doctoral thesis about Franz Kafka and, whether your friends find it interesting or not, that'll be your subject for the night.

However...

You can *direct* your thoughts.

Each day, the founder of the Beechworth Bakery, Tom O'Toole, reads a short improving passage from *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale. That's the first thing Tom does. Given that 'what you put into your head comes out your mouth', Tom's words are positive all day. In fact, he deliberately cuts negative conversations.

Take the time to think about your thoughts. Do they inspire you to greatness or condemn you to the slippery road of failure?

Don't fall into the second category where self-talk is geared towards failure, you don't want a major part of your day consumed by miserable thoughts.

I had to face exactly this conflict. At one point I had the choice:

- Should I focus on the money I owe?
- Or should I focus on BetterBlocks?

Solution: Encourage productive thinking

You can gradually overcome negative thinking by identifying the destructive words you say to yourself and the destructive thoughts you have about yourself and then slowly, thought by thought, acknowledge the positive words you can use about yourself and the positive thoughts you can have if you choose.

The very first thought you have (positive or negative) will determine whether you will take action or give up.

I once met an inventor who had a fantastic idea and great working prototypes for an automatic pet feeder. Two companies were interested in manufacturing and selling his product, yet he never managed to finalize the deal. Last I heard about him he was living in poverty.

With more interest than I had for BetterBlocks, why couldn't he cut a deal? What went wrong? I bet it was because of inappropriate self-talk. A common thought process of unsuccessful inventors and businessmen is, *I don't want to get ripped off*, or, *I could make more money doing it myself*. And then there is, *I want to be in control of everything*. The list of excuses for failure is endless.

The most important point to note in the above example is what stopped his deal going through wasn't a lack of opportunity but a lack of productive thinking.

I'm sure I could have reached a better agreement with Kelvin when negotiating the marketing rights for BetterBlocks, but my thought process during this time was, *It's better to be in the marketplace selling blocks worldwide and making some money than not to be in it at all*. No, I didn't receive as large a financial gain as I might have, but I certainly got out of debt, which was my intention. My thoughts were also to create a strong competitor for Lego—again, I achieved that.

People often believe another person's success is due to having been raised in a fortunate environment without obstacles to overcome.

But is this true? I mean, James Packer has got problems. Another big inheritor, Rodney Adler, did time. Very rarely do you find someone successful who can credit their success to having had a perfect life.

World-renowned physicist Stephen Hawking is arguably one of the most successful physicists of our time, becoming a leader in his field and a noted public speaker. Yet he's confined to a wheelchair and can't speak in a normal voice. Hardly what I would call a perfect life! But he has achieved brilliance and worldwide recognition as a physicist.

Remember: 'Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right!' **Henry Ford**

There is a powerful example of this in Richard Branson's book, *Losing my Virginity*. Branson tells how he was booked on a flight from the Virgin Islands to Puerto Rico, but the local Puerto Rican scheduled flight was cancelled. After making a few calls to charter companies, he agreed to hire an aircraft for \$2000. He then divided the \$2000 by the number of seats on the plane and wrote on a blackboard: 'Virgin Airways: \$39 single seat to Puerto Rico.' By walking around the airport (amongst others who had been stranded by the cancelled flight) he soon filled every seat.

The point is that Branson wanted to get to Puerto Rico so much that there wasn't any room in his mind for negative thought. He believed that he would fly out from the Virgin Islands that day and he did—at no extra charge.

When I first created BetterBlocks, I was still shaken from a failed business venture, yet I firmly believed my new business venture would be successful. (If I didn't believe that, I would not have started it.)

The key thing to do here is to closely monitor your thoughts. Are they your friend or foe?

Remember, they're yours so you can control them!

Your thoughts are yours.

Nobody but you can change your thoughts unless you let them.

It sounds easy, but sometimes the hardest thing for us to do is to control our thoughts. Years of thinking a certain way is not always easy to reverse, so give yourself a break and start with small steps. For example, change the way you describe your obstacle. Stop calling it a 'problem', call it a 'challenge' instead. Can you feel the difference in your belief towards achieving the obstacle?

A friend of mine was telling me about someone she knew who had a recent accident and was confined to a wheelchair. My first comment was that she would have some big challenges to face. And I could tell from the look on her face that she had just had an Aha moment. Rather than feeling sorry for her friend (as she had been up until then), she had changed her thoughts and was now thinking that, yes, she had some hurdles to overcome but her situation was not hopeless. She is friend alive and therefore can now take back charge of her life.

With the correct thoughts we can achieve anything. The power of mind over matter is phenomenal.

Obstacle 2:

The Challenge of a Problem

Problems are nothing more than a question of definition because: **it's only a problem if you say it is, it's not if you don't.**

In 1970, research chemist Spenser Silver was working on adhesive technology for the 3M Corporation. His brief was to create the strongest glue the market could buy and somehow everything went wrong. He actually created a substance that wouldn't stick to anything for long. It could be reused and left no residue on the material to which it was applied. Nobody at 3M saw it as anything but a failed experiment.

Along came colleague Arthur Fry who found a personal use for it in 1979. He sang in the church choir and was frustrated that the slips of paper he used as hymnbook markers would constantly fall out. Fry found a use for Spenser's dud glue—excellent hymnbook marker adhesive. Wait a sec, if they can do it for hymnbooks, what about...?

3M picked up on the idea and in 1980 the corporation marketed small blank notes with Silver's glue on one edge. That's the story of the Post-it Note, a product that was only a problem by definition.

We need to overcome our problems because:

1. They stop our progress dead in its tracks.
2. They have a ripple effect: one problem causes another, which causes even further problems.

Solution1: Keep progressing regardless

Imagine being comfortably seated in an aircraft and the captain announces there is a problem that has grounded the aircraft.

The problem will have also stopped you and the other passengers from reaching your destination. The field of people affected by this problem keeps going, like the ripples on the surface of a pond when a stone is thrown in.

The people who would pick you up from the airport at the other end will now be affected, and that's just you. There's a plane full of people.

When such problems arise, the captain knows what to do to regain control of the situation. He/she has a very specific fault finding system to work through to get things moving again. If this includes delegating specific tasks, the captain does so. Soon the captain rectifies the problem and the plane can take off.

When we come across a problem that has caused us to momentarily stop, we need to focus all our efforts on solving it, even if this means getting others (perhaps professionals) to help. There is no shame in asking for help.

Having solved the problem we are now free to continue moving forwards towards our goal.

Almost every day while developing BetterBlocks, there would come a point when I wanted to stop because I couldn't see how this could possibly succeed.

Despite this, I would always find something constructive to do, no matter how small the task. I'd push myself to keep going, keep moving forward, I didn't want to come to a complete halt. (It is far

easier to keep a moving object rolling than it is to start-up a stationary one.)

To overcome any problem you need to keep progressing regardless. I lost count of how many prototype blocks I made but I didn't stop until I finally had two blocks that clipped together as I wanted. When I was looking for financing, I would find one more door to knock on; I'd push myself to think of another strategy to use.

Solution 2: *Re-read my book*

If you're having trouble overcoming a problem, turn back to the 'Five Real Life Lessons You Must Know to Make Your Ideas Successful' (particularly Life Lesson Four). These will certainly get you rolling on the road towards success again.

Obstacle 3:

Missing the Obvious Solution

The world's first cartoon animator should have been Spaniard Segundo de Chomon 1902 whose job was translating foreign title cards for the earliest movies. Filming some cards one day, he failed to wave off a fly that had alighted on a card. When the film was projected he noticed that the irregular exposure rate made it seem as if the fly was jumping around on the screen. This was the obvious solution to animation, which he missed. Someone else grasped the idea instead and eventually De Chomon made his first film, *El Hotel Electrico*, but being six years late doesn't really count. The first animation had already been screened.

There are actually several people who nearly made the world's first animated cartoon. The person who didn't miss it was English-born cartoonist J Stuart Blackton who worked for the *New York World* and in 1906 released a film entitled, 'Humorous Phases of Funny Faces'. The film depicted some genuine animation in film sequence with couples rolling their eyes and then the man obliterating the woman with smoke puffs from his cigar.

There are possibly heaps of solutions to whatever your problem may be. Solutions don't have to be product-improvements. To win the marketplace war you don't necessarily have to 'build a better one'.

For example, here are three solutions that are unconventional because they have nothing to do with the product itself. In all three instances someone missed the obvious marketplace solution—while someone else didn't!

Perception

Does anybody remember Alta Vista? It was the search engine almost everyone used before Google knocked it aside. Google did it through perception, which fed into the sharemarket, giving Google massive market capitalization, not Alta Vista.

Bundling

In the late-90s, Netscape Navigator had a far better web browser product than Microsoft Explorer. Plus Navigator had a large and loyal customer base. But Microsoft had a massive cash advantage thanks to its office products, it also had a placement advantage allowing it to bundle Explorer with its other popular software, so if you bought Windows or Office, Explorer was also installed on your computer, not Navigator.

Change the rules

Don't for a moment think David McConnell (Mr. Avon) made his mark in the perfume sector because of his product. The products were probably no better and no worse than the competition. He set himself apart by changing the rules of distribution—nothing to do with perfume—and the housewives sitting at home, getting over the WW2 war effort, found the door chimes of the Avon Lady so heartening.

Old habits die hard! We tend to automatically stick with the same thoughts that we've had before because they are familiar to us.

By prematurely filtering out the information received from your senses, before it has been fully considered, you greatly limit your

ability to overcome your challenges. Our preconditioned thought processes do this.

Sometimes our thoughts filter out information even if it is actually the answer to our problem.

I was trying to solve the problem of how to clip BetterBlocks together. The answer was literally before my eyes every day, yet I did not see it for weeks. How do such things happen? How can answers we are so desperately seeking be filtered out?

Answer: It is actually because of our ‘protection mechanism’. The thoughts that stop us from absorbing or noticing new information have a heavily vested interest in making us right, not putting us in a position where we may be wrong.

Thoughts are tied to self-esteem and the perception we have of ourselves. Sometimes we think more about whether we will look foolish or lose control than whether the solution will work or not. We don’t like to put ourselves in a position where we may be wrong so we tend to follow habitual thought processes that have proven safe for us in the past.

A very convenient thinking process is to play it safe, which sometimes means not doing anything at all. We say to ourselves, ‘That will never work,’ or, ‘I can’t find the answer.’ We say this about solutions that appear before we have even tried them, because they may fail, and if they do we think we might look stupid.

When I told my friends that I was going to develop a product that would pull me out of the financial hole I was in, of course I had a fear of failure.

The little voice in our head is very quick to judge and it sometimes judges incorrectly. This is because those instantaneous thoughts are often so ingrained that they become automatic. In this way we often unconsciously filter out and reject valuable information.

Solution: *Accumulate knowledge*

Knowledge leads to clarity and clarity leads to power. There's nothing sentimental about information. It is either useful or not, it either works or it doesn't; it will show you how to get to where you want to go or not.

Not many people know that when Thomas Edison was working on the electric light globe, he tried a variety of filaments, including burnt toast and orange peel. Imagine what his colleagues must have said! Neither worked, but at least he tried and therefore *knew* what didn't work. This trial and error freed his mind from solutions that didn't work so he could focus on creating solutions that did.

To be honest, most new solutions won't work, but at least by considering a particular path you will be able to accumulate knowledge about it and make an informed and accurate decision about whether to disregard it or not.

When I first thought of the idea to build a moveable building block system, I did not know what I was going to find. Yet if I had suggested to someone that they should study a pair of jeans to find the solution to clipping two toy building blocks together, like Segundo de Chomon our would-be cartoon animator, they, too, would probably have missed this solution.

Worse yet, they may never have found another suitable solution; their original desire would never have been fulfilled.

You can see now how important it is to be sure that the information you're rejecting is definitely not the solution (or 'a' solution).

Obstacle 4:

Is It Really an Obstacle?

The funding of my BetterBlocks operation was my biggest obstacle, not the invention process itself. In Australia, the Federal Government grants funding for inventors via various government-backed bodies. I think there's a clash between creativity and bureaucracy and that a lot of these associations wouldn't know a good idea if they tripped over it.

My research showed that 95% of all Federal Government grant money went into the top half a dozen companies in Australia—large companies like Ford and General Motors, who are now on the ropes. Very little of it went into little guys like me. That doesn't mean the grants system doesn't work for some inventors, but it didn't work for me. I approached these organizations and never got anything from them, maybe I approached them the wrong way.

I don't disrespect what they do but when they tell me they're not interested, I don't beat my head against the wall trying to change the system. I just shrug and go, 'Okay, I'll find people who are interested instead.' These people are often private investors. With private people I can get to the decision-maker, they are the ones I want to talk to. I liked that, because if they said yes we'd be doing business; and if they said no, I'd know that door had closed so I'd go find another one. Governments are very good at leaving doors half open.

When raising money, everything seemed to me like an obstacle. I was inexperienced, I didn't usually wear a suit and I'd come straight from a workshop in Adelaide to big city CBDs. Everything was a challenge, but I really had little choice in what I had to do next.

In the mid-90s, when venture capital was really the go in Australia, I approached certain venture capitalists who didn't want anything to do with BetterBlocks either. I was told later that I would have done better asking for \$5-\$10 million rather than \$500,000 because they can't perceive a \$45 million product evolving from only a \$500,000 spend.

Here is an interesting point to ponder: By definition, a challenge means entering uncharted territory. The question is, 'How do you actually *know* if the challenge you're about to face will be much of a challenge?' It may not be an obstacle at all. I'm sure you can recall a time when you overcame a challenge and then thought, *That wasn't as difficult as I thought.*

Solution: Assess your own thoughts carefully

Challenges are always solved in our minds first, so determine if they are based on fact or fiction.

The best way to do this is to treat your thoughts as though they belonged to another person. So if that little voice in your head says something like, *That's too hard for me to accomplish*, don't just blindly accept it. Question it.

Strengthen up:

- Why is this too hard for me?
- I have gained a lot of information about this challenge, I know quite a bit about it now.
- Actually, on second thought, this challenge is something I *can* overcome!

Quite often we have negative thoughts prior to tackling something but in most cases these thoughts are not based on facts, but on previous experiences. Just because my Shufflebug business failed it didn't mean my BetterBlock business would also fail.

Once again you need to ask yourself, *Is something that happened to me 12 years ago relevant to the challenge I'm attempting today?* If it's not relevant to *now* I'm afraid it's not based on fact, it's based on past experience, which does not necessarily apply now.

Sometimes our negative thoughts are based on the opinions of others. Note they are only 'opinions', not facts. Just because somebody else reckons a particular challenge is too hard does not automatically make their opinion right for me. So, assess what others say carefully and decide for yourself.

Humans are champions at making stuff up so remember to assess your own thoughts carefully too. Make sure your mind is giving you the correct information about whether or not something is really an obstacle.

Obstacle 5:

Meeting Resistance

In the late 1980s I seemed to encounter resistance at every turn. In my microsphere, there was little interest in backing BetterBlocks and in the macrocosm our prime minister said we had a depression ‘we had to have’.

I didn’t take any notice of that. I trusted in what I had and everything worked out splendidly in the end. They say you can either believe in yourself or you can buy into the doom and gloom. In fact, you really have no choice—either you get in there and do battle with your future or you quit.

No matter what the times are—good times, bad times—if I get a great idea, if I think the time is right, I’m going to do something about it today.

The solution to your challenge or new idea involves change, or doing something different.

Change, however, often meets resistance, particularly in the form of disapproval from people who don’t like their feathers ruffled. This is because people like to play it safe and stick to what they know.

Resistive people cause problems by creating unnecessary obstacles for you to overcome in order to achieve your goals. They simply make your life hard by taking your attention (and belief) away from what you are trying to achieve.

Solution 1: Trust yourself

When you meet a resistive person, one of three things may happen:

- You may disregard what they say and continue believing that what you know will work without a moment's thought.
- You may listen to what that person has said, understand and consider their viewpoint, and then decide whether their information is useful or not, if their viewpoint works or not.
- You may believe them totally and give up!

People are usually quick to choose the first and third option, whereas the second one is far more effective. You need to be able to listen and understand what people have to say first and then you can make a choice as to what you want to do.

To understand is neither disagreeing nor agreeing.

When making this choice, it's important to determine what kind of person is giving you their view points. Is this an expert in the field? Does this person have the qualifications to make a good judgment? Does this person have connections that gain access to the correct knowledge? Or is this just a friend trying to be helpful? Once you've established this then you can weigh up more accurately what they have said.

Before Walkmans were around, the co-founder of Sony Corp, Akio Morita's associate, used a heavy tape recorder for personal use. This was uncomfortable, and Morita considered the possibilities of reducing the bulk by creating a tape machine with no capability for recording, the machine only played music.

His engineers and marketing team were convinced no one would buy a music system that had no recording capability. Morita

listened to these opinions but decided that people could be interested in buying a tape player if it was small and therefore convenient enough to carry around with them. He chose to follow his instinct and test market his Walkman.

The results speak for themselves.

Quoting from his book, *Made in Japan*, Morita said, ‘I do not believe that any amount of market research could have told us that the Sony Walkman would be successful.’ Yet this small item changed the music listening habits of millions of people around the world and spawned many imitators. In fact, the iPod follows Morita’s theory that the tape functions are not essential.

Sometimes, despite all the advice you get, the only way you can overcome resistance is by trusting what you believe, standing firm and going against the tide!

Solution 2: Agree with your advisers

Another option is to change your mind and agree with your advisers. Changing your mind is not an admission that you were wrong. It just means you have learned something, found an easier way to achieve your goal or found a way to improve on your original goal.

This sounds easy, but it is a skill that took me many years to master because I thought changing my mind somehow made me look wrong. I was very arrogant, which cost me a lot of opportunities.

By failing to take other people’s suggestions onboard, you may be missing out on huge opportunities that would give you even greater wealth and success—sooner.

Solution 3: *Listen your way to success*

Basically, listening puts you on the fast-track to success. It was an offhand comment by a carpenter that was a key turning point in BetterBlocks' success.

People really want to be listened to. Recall the last time you were really listened to by someone. Remember how appreciated you felt, how highly you thought of that person because they had taken the time to listen to you without judgment?

When we have been heard, we are more prepared to listen to someone else's point of view. If you listen you can gain far more knowledge about the solutions you are seeking and make more informed decisions about what you want to do.

Listen your way to success

Here's an exercise you can do to improve your listening skills. It will dramatically increase your ability to find the answers you are looking for:

- Say nothing except to ask questions for a 24-hour period.
- The only exception to this rule is that you can say yes or no.
- After a whole day of nothing but asking questions, your listening ability has really been tested.

It may be easier to do this in a family situation first for one hour only in the beginning and see how you go. It took me many attempts to work up to one whole day.

I have been in groups of over one hundred people who have been given this exercise to do and only three or four have succeeded; so if you don't succeed at first, don't be too hard on yourself.

With the help of this powerful exercise I can now listen to people far more easily, analyze their information from a factual rather than an emotional basis and discover the solutions I'm seeking quicker and easier. Not only does learning to listen reduce the likelihood of resistance from them, but it also allows you to hear a new thought, a new way of doing something, which may be just what you need to reach your goal.

Solution 4: *Be selective in who you tell*

Sometimes dealing with your own thoughts is difficult enough. But listening to others giving their negative opinions on your ideas can be just too much at times. So be selective about who you tell in the early stages of creating your idea. Select people who you know will give you constructive feedback. Gradually, as you gain more confidence, you can tell more people and not allow any negative criticism to put you off track.

How many people do you think believed me when I said, 'I'm going to create a new idea that will save me from going bankrupt,' particularly when I had no idea what this new idea was going to be?

Not many!

I didn't receive support from many people. And it was hard enough handling my own negative thoughts without having to deal with the negativity offered by others as well.

You don't need this sort of burden, particularly at a time when you need the most encouragement. So if telling everyone about your idea is going to invite resistance and lack of support, then initially it may be best not to say anything to anyone except to the select few who are closest to you.

But it was the support of the key people who believed and supported me that kept me going when the times got tough.

Obstacle 6:

Staying Stuck

In the early-70s, Frank and Pat Fisher were running a successful business manufacturing industrial safety equipment. Then came radical changes to labor laws with regulations that seemed to change almost daily. Labor-intensive industries like theirs were usually knocked out by cheaper imports.

Frank and Pat's business had lots of problems, from 60 machinists they sank to one and a half, and from two factories to one.

With some success they tried other things, like Kevlar products and, later, industrial dry cleaning.

Fortunately, apart from supporting each other, they also surrounded themselves with supportive people. One day, one of them came up with the idea that 'rainwear is protective clothing' and said that he knew an old Australian raincoat company that was for sale. The raincoat was called 'Driza-Bone'—unheard of as a city product in those days—and had a history that went way back.

Driza-Bone was a family business passed down from three generations and owned by a son-in-law who was approaching retirement years and he wasn't passionate about it. So Frank and Pat bought Driza-Bone, a company with a big history but no reputation. At the time it didn't seem like a smart thing to do, because it really was a rundown operation.

This was the late 70s, precisely when Aussie-consciousness was about to become fashionable. A second unexpected boost came from the outback because, being a salesperson with a family background in western New South Wales, Frank took the coat to stores far and wide inland, in New South Wales, Queensland, South

Australia and Victoria. 'We used to wear those 20, 30 years ago,' exclaimed the old farmers, 'where have you been?'

Next, the coat brought out the innovator in Frank who re-jigged the raincoat with the famous 'look' and so turned Driza-Bone into an Aussie icon. Alongside Akubra hats, RM Williams boots, Maton guitars and Vegemite, add Driza-Bone.

Many famous people have been photographed in the coat, including international figures like Prince Charles, Michael Hutchence, the entire cast of *Neighbours* and all the officials and many performers in the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. During the 'Man From Snowy River' sequence at the opening of the Sydney Games, Frank looked at the horse riders and said to his wife Pat, somewhat incredulously, 'I designed that!'

It's a great success story, but a closer look at Frank and Pat's business suggests there is every reason why they should have gone to the wall in 1974-75 like 30 other Australian safety equipment manufacturers did, except they rode out their problems by listening to positive suggestions from a good support group, including the Rotary.

They did not allow anyone to derail their success, and built a \$10 million business by working hard, never giving up and surrounding themselves with supportive people.

A sure way to stay stuck in your problem is to remain surrounded by resistive people. Ask yourself this question: 'Are they offering me any support to achieve what I want?' If not, ask them to change their attitudes. If they won't do that, change your friends.

Solution 1: *Avoid the Quicksand Crowd*

A friend of mine, Darren Simms, calls unsupportive people ‘The Quicksand Crowd’ because they suck ideas and enthusiasm into oblivion, just like quicksand.

Some will overtly eat away at your self-belief while others will be so subtle that you may not even notice it. These people are very dangerous because you may not notice them until much damage is done. The latter is the more dangerous, though both types of negativity will sabotage you. Surround yourself with supportive people instead.

Solution 2: *Don’t get derailed*

Others can say whatever they want, but whether you believe them or not is your choice.

Remember that other people’s thoughts, opinions and suggestions are not necessarily correct or always facts-based. So analyze what is being said, discard what is not useful, then get back on track and keep moving towards what you want.

I believed in BetterBlocks enough not to let anyone push me off course. When others would intercept with their opinions I would willingly listen to them (well, not always willingly!) but I would keep in mind that they were only opinions and not necessarily of any greater worth than my own. In fact, their opinions were often based on a lot less research than mine.

Therefore I avoided letting such opinions distract me and I just kept going on my path to success. However, if their information was more useful than mine, I would take it on board and use it.

Solution 3: *Change your mind*

A solution is a new way of doing something; it requires fresh thoughts that will generate different actions and results. The ability to overcome your challenges is based on the ability to change your mind. The beliefs and thoughts that have created your challenge in the first place sometimes need to be changed.

This is the process that changes your mind from *I can't* to *I can*. It works like this:

1. You tell yourself, *I can't, but...*
2. Gather information anyway to increase knowledge
3. Take action based on the new knowledge
4. Analyze. Does it work?
5. Tell yourself, *I can*.

These are actually the steps from no hope to hope.

Although steps 1-4 may have to be repeated many times as new obstacles and challenges present themselves, you will overcome your challenges and achieve what you want if you keep repeating this cycle.

Obstacle 7:

Get-Rich-Quick Schemes

Quick' may not be a good word when associated with money. Compound interest is the most reliable pillar of the money system, which 'get-rich-quick' undercuts through all sorts of cowboy ways, including pyramid-style selling, not caring for the customer and all sorts of fast and trashy principles that are not built to last.

Correctly managed, it builds up a head of steam and builds tremendous profitability over time. The point is money isn't quick. There's something people who reckon they made their first million in six months from a standing start are not telling us. True success always results from effort.

Former NYC lawyer Jonathan Fields is one example of someone who seemingly enjoyed overnight success but actually it took him a long time. Unwilling to continue his stressful job, Fields quit and worked as a \$12-an-hour personal trainer. Within 18 months he had launched his own facility. He sold that company, took a year off, and then decided to turn his growing interest in yoga into his next business. It grew into one of the most successful centers in the country.

With the studio largely running itself, fields focuses on writing, blogging and online business. And, since people want to know how he made the jump from law to fitness to yoga to online business, he tells his story in print. It took a lot of work, which is why he ironically refers to himself as 'an overnight success'.

I recommend: <http://www.jonathanfields.com/blog/the-dirty-little-secret-to-overnight-success/>

One of the best ways of making solid, recession-proof profits is to build a great business and sell at a profit as a going concern. The guy who invented Coca-Cola did it best. He didn't build a factory and do it himself, so he had no practical complications, the recipe is what he sold.

Get-rich-quick schemes are at their worst when being peddled by fly-by-night salespeople, but even 'fast money' on something as established as the share market is quite a risk, as evidenced in recent times.

Here's one of many examples, going back quite a few years: in 1979, the editor of the (then) *Investment Adviser* newsletter made \$12,000 in one day trading futures. All day he was Mr. Smarty pants. Next day he lost \$15,000 and he was a whole lot nicer when he was down on his luck.

The quick fix, or the easy way out, is often a guaranteed way to turn a challenge into an enormous problem.

This attitude, or thinking process, can set us up to fail, not because we do not know the answer or cannot do it, but because we expect it to happen instantly and when it doesn't we get impatient and give up. We believe that if it hasn't happened by now, it never will.

That doesn't mean you've snookered yourself into a position where hard work is the only solution, indeed it is seldom ever a complete solution, though for any solution to work it appears to need the backing of hard work. What sells a product like nothing else is the *perception* of quality. In fact, perception is what most business is all about—why is gold worth so much? There are plenty of rocks in this world, and gold is just another one. It's the perception of quality, of which the share market provides a board full of great examples.

The rise of Amazon.com was all about perception. Founded in 1994, the company did not see profit for 4-5 years in an era when other Internet companies were expanding fast. The business was losing

money on one hand, while shares were rising on the other. Why? Because the perception always was that Amazon.com would own their marketplace, it was too famous not to.

Amazon finally turned its first profit in the fourth quarter of 2001: \$5 million, just 1¢ per share, on revenues of more than \$1 billion, but the profit was symbolically important. On 31 December, 2008, Amazon entered the S&P 100 index, replacing Merrill Lynch after it was taken over by Bank of America.

Solution: *Be patient*

You have to remember that solutions may take a while to physically manifest themselves, despite the amount of time and effort you spend on visualizing them. Most creative people may come up with their ideas overnight but it takes a little longer for them to manifest.

I can remember becoming impatient on numerous occasions and wanting instant success, especially when creditors were phoning me for payment or when I simply wanted to go out and buy my lunch but didn't have the three dollars in my pocket to do so.

In the back of my mind I knew that to have any chance of success I simply had to keep progressing incrementally until the day came when I finally reached my goal.

To perfect my idea of creating a moveable building block system took only a few months, but to see that idea become a commercial reality took a further three years.

Marketing, financing, manufacturing, distributing and selling BetterBlocks were all things I could not do myself, so I had to find people who could and who would agree to do so. But these challenges all took time to solve.

There was one key element I missed on the list of things I could not do: someone to advise me on how to create personal wealth from my product. I made a considerable sum of money from BetterBlocks but it never made me wealthy, certainly not as wealthy as I could have been had I known how to manage my money better.

To achieve your solution you need to set yourself a realistic time frame. However, many people set unrealistic time frames, don't reach their goal on time and use it as an excuse to justify giving up. Such behavior is self-defeating.

Yes, it is true that some of your solutions can be achieved quite quickly. But it is important to be aware that, in most cases, the bigger the challenge the longer it will take to achieve.

So have patience and don't give up!

Obstacle 8:

Successful Mistakes

The process of dry cleaning came about in the mid-19th century after the maid of French dye-works owner Jean Baptiste Jolly spilled kerosene on his tablecloth and he noticed the kerosene spill made the cloth cleaner. He subsequently developed a service that cleaned people's clothes in this manner, which became known as 'nettoyage à sec', or, literally, 'cleaning dry' (aka. dry cleaning) in English, because the process uses non-water-based solvents to remove soil and stains from clothes.

Early dry cleaners used petroleum-based solvents, such as petrol and kerosene, which were not ideal because they were extremely flammable. After World War I, dry cleaners began using chlorinated solvents. Nevertheless, this huge industry was made possible because Jean Baptiste Jolly *noticed* a mistake and learned from the information he took in.

Robert Kiyosaki, author of the *Rich Dad/Poor Dad* series of books, says that the reason he is more successful than most is because he has made more mistakes than most.

Think about that statement for a moment. He actually says that he has made more mistakes than most people, yet he's a world famous author and multi-millionaire and they're probably not. It seems that Kiyosaki has a more positive perspective on mistakes than most of us.

By adopting this sort of thinking and starting to view mistakes as our friends rather than our foes, our lives will change.

Solution 1: *Study mistakes, and learn*

Mistakes actually give us hardcore answers. They tell us conclusively what *doesn't* work.

Most people get mistakes mixed up with being right or wrong. Then, to make matters worse, they take being wrong personally. They associate the information with themselves and feel that they are flawed in some way. Then, to feel right again, they try to justify their mistakes by blaming them on someone or something. Doing this hands over control of the solution to someone else, which results in us losing control over finding a solution ourselves. Remember, it's only information. It either works or doesn't work.

Making mistakes is how we learn. To make a mistake is simply to err in opinion or judgment. It's not about being right, it's not about being wrong and it's definitely nothing personal. We have simply discovered something that doesn't work; now we are wiser for it because we can eliminate that option and start working on another.

If we are taking action and still not progressing, it's probably because we are making the *same* mistake over and over. We need to learn from our mistakes, not repeat them.

One of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves is the ability to embrace mistakes, learn from them and move on.

Once we do so we will be able to focus on another solution, and in this way we appreciate how mistakes can actually give us an indication of what to do next or where to turn to next. They can provide valuable information for the solutions we are looking for.

Such appreciation gives us a much brighter perspective on mistakes.

Solution 2: Lots of mistakes = lots of information

If mistakes provide us with the answers, it's only logical that the more mistakes we make the greater our chance of finding that particular answer we are looking for.

When I was developing BetterBlocks, the clipping system that allows the blocks to rotate and hold them together was the key component to the system working.

Do you think I got it right the first time?

Absolutely not!

BetterBlocks

I machined hundreds of different styles of clipping systems before I perfected the one that we used, in so doing I made hundreds of mistakes that led to eventual success.

Edison

Thomas Edison claimed to have made 1000 mistakes before he had a light bulb that worked.

Moonwalk

On the first mission to land man on the moon, Apollo 11 was off course 96% of the time. That is 96 decisions out of 100 that were incorrect, yet they journeyed to the moon, landed and arrived home safely again. Only by making so many mistakes were they able to find ones that worked and accomplish such an outstanding feat.

Embrace mistakes (treat them as your friends) and be concerned if you are not making any, because this probably means you have stopped progressing.

Obstacle 9: Losing Control

During the 1980s, Phil Ward ran a highly successful newsletter operation with an active mailing list of around 40,000 paid subscribers. The flagship was an 8-page newsletter known as the *Small Business Letter*, which accounted for around half the company revenue. It was an exciting publication with Ward personally answering subscriber calls and frequently ‘taking on’ the Tax Department and publishing the outcomes.

Ward was an unconventional man whose interests ranged a lot wider than the business he had started, and after establishing several brands he began to spend more and more time away from the office in the Northern Territory trying to solve the mystery of Azaria Chamberlain’s disappearance—*of all things!*

In this period he let go the reins of several newsletters and appointed editors to do his job, none of whom were prepared to pick up the phone, harass the Tax Dept and write about it afterwards with the same enthusiasm Ward brought to the task. Ward failed to understand the success of the publication was wrapped around his personality, so the less his personal contribution the more subscribers dropped off.

However, Ward believed that the principle of delegation did not mean the abrogation of responsibility. Not only that, he was also prepared to reclaim jobs if things weren’t working out, which is exactly what he did one day when returning from Uluru and finding—as he delicately put it—‘the inmates running the place.’

He reshuffled key positions, took back the editorship of the *Small Business Letter* and wrote all the full-page ads in *Financial Review*

himself and got everything back on course. In short, he took back the power.

An international example of similar loss of control is the once-dominant Pam Am Airlines who invested in new planes and new routes just when the market for air travel was about to change. The global energy crisis in 1973 was a critical factor, which came right on the heels of a court battle awarding important international routes to the company's competitors.

Pam Am tried to solve its problems with the purchase of a domestic airline, resulting in huge debts. In short, Pam Am made the mistake of overextending and instead of 'sticking to their knitting' and concentrating on what it was good at doing, the airline tried to diversify, be creative and then got itself into court squabbles, which resulted in further difficulties.

I'm not discouraging creativity, problem solving results from being creative. But when you're losing control is not the time for a creative burst that takes you off at a tangent—a distraction. Doing so will only hasten defeat because being already in a losing position you need to steadily gain ground, not roll another dice. *Reclaim the power* is my advice, whereas Pam Am scattered the power into areas it didn't understand, like the domestic market.

Have you ever blamed your mistakes on someone else? I have. One big problem with blaming someone else is that you are handing the control of the solution over to them. You are no longer in control of your destiny. Handing over control to someone or something else leaves you powerless to achieve the outcome you want.

Solution 1: *Reclaim your power*

Reclaim your power by taking back responsibility for finding a solution.

Remember, the word responsibility simply means the ability to respond to a situation.

I used to blame other people for my failures. It made me feel comfortable because I could use them as an excuse for not progressing. The problem was it never made me successful. There is a lot of truth in the statement ‘If it’s to be it’s up to me!’

Remember Richard Branson wanting to get to Puerto Rico but being stranded on Reef Island? Many of the other passengers moaned and blamed the airline. He simply figured out a way to respond to the situation.

This put him in full control of the situation and allowed him to solve his problem—and theirs as well.

Solution 2: *Trust yourself*

Often it’s only a subtle but significant shift in thinking that leads us to take back control of any situation.

The difference between people who overcome their challenges and those who don’t is in their thinking, which governs their approach to finding an answer. Most people have similar physical abilities and surroundings, but they don’t necessarily use the same thought processes.

Richard Branson and Bill Gates were both born into average families; the difference was that in their minds they knew there were solutions to their challenges; all they had to do was to keep experimenting and looking. Their thoughts and beliefs didn't allow them to give up hope until they found their solutions.

When I thought of the idea of BetterBlocks, my greatest fear was that I would fail again, get further in debt and look like a complete idiot. Yet in my mind I knew I could do it. I had a deep inner faith that I could make this work, and I did.

Such positive thoughts and self-belief will ensure that you stay in full control of situations and obstacles that may arise throughout your journey to success.

Solution 3: Make yourself accountable

It does take courage though to claim that you are going to achieve something and then to make it happen. It's a big risk. When you do this you bare your innermost desires, which can leave you vulnerable to being hurt, especially if it doesn't turn out as planned.

If you make mistakes along the way, it also takes a lot of courage to admit to them. This can be uncomfortable at times, as many successful people have found out along their journey, yet they are still brave enough to move on from the mistake, to keep going.

Making yourself accountable for a mistake means that you (and nobody else) have control over your destiny.

Solution 4: Put this information into practice!

If you feel like you have come to a problem or are facing an obstacle that is taking away your power to achieve what you want, use the information you have learned in this book.

You have gained a substantial amount of knowledge that can be used to bring yourself back in control to achieve the personal and financial success you deserve.

Remember: Everyone has a spark of brilliance. It is the system we follow that determines whether that spark shines through or not.

Part 8

The 11 Steps to Success

‘Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can’t lose.’

Bill Gates

Success comes a whole lot easier if you have a map to get there.

Whenever I have a goal to achieve, I use the following system, which I have summarized into 11 steps because breaking something down makes it more manageable, clearer and easier to understand.

Depending on the circumstances, each may take a few seconds or a few days. Practice them frequently and you will be making guaranteed progress towards your goal.

Remember: the key to achieving what you want is to keep taking steps, just like climbing stairs. The art of becoming successful involves attaining each one-by-one.

Once you master the 11 steps they become automatic, so you’ll progress faster and with greater ease. These are the very same

11 steps that have been applied by the greats to make their great ideas happen, I mean real achievers like Albert Einstein and Bill Gates.

Because it worked for me, in each instance I am using BetterBlocks as my example to illustrate each step. I am also using other examples too. However, the only example that really matters is you. As you climb this ladder you will hopefully find yourself replacing my information with yours, as these steps are all about *you* achieving *your* goals, they're not about me. I've travelled that journey, now it's your turn.

Before you start having doubts, remember everyone has a spark of brilliance. The systems you have in place determine whether that spark shines through or not.

This 11-step system is designed to make your spark of brilliance shine through.

Step 1

Define Your Purpose

Defining your purpose always brings clarity to the cause. Take the famous gravy product Bisto, an idea which started over a dinner between the secretary and manager of the Cerebos Company (producers of table salt) and their wives.

It was the women—Mrs. McRobert and Mrs. Patterson—who raised the subject of lumpy gravy. They felt the task of gravy-making was a fussy job that took the pleasure out of cooking.

A new product was needed!

The women felt it couldn't be too difficult to figure out: *a powdered product that would brown, season and thicken all in one go*. In saying that, they defined the purpose.

The men took to the idea instantly and, being company executives, were in a position to set about creating such a product. The task was delegated to the company chemist. In February 1910, Bisto Gravy packets were on the shelves selling at a penny a pack.

The answer to the question 'Why?' will keep you moving towards when you want to achieve a particular goal and times are getting tough because the answer, which defines purpose, stays with you as it is servicing a basic need. This question is far more important than establishing 'How?'

By keeping the reason *why* you are doing something at the front of your mind, you will feel encouraged to keep working towards your goal. 'Why' sticks in your head, whereas 'how' breeds doubt.

Author and success coach Anthony Robbins reasons that the 'why you are doing something' is the most important step of all. A 'why'

(or purpose) for doing something can continue long after a goal is attained.

My original goal was to get out of debt, achieving that led to me developing a competitive product. I currently have different goals, such as writing this book, but the point is that they all stem from the same primary source, which is: *to build a financially strong business for the benefit of my family and me.*

I've written that in the goal section of my diary and having done so means I am in a position to tinker with my other options, because I understand my primary intentions.

As a primary goal I never specifically wanted to create a successful toy, but that's the way things worked out. That goal became more specific when I settled on the building block. In terms of satisfying my primary goal, another product idea would have also worked for me just as well. I'd have felt just as satisfied if I'd come up with something that revolutionized motorbikes!

However, that wasn't the direction I took.

The Road Not Taken

Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Once I got the ‘why’ sorted out I stopped thinking about motorbikes and concentrated on BetterBlocks until I could cross that one off my goal list.

Nowadays, I satisfy my ‘why’ by developing products that help other people get their own ideas off the ground. Like motorbikes, it might be worlds away from children’s toys, but I’d like you—the reader—to enjoy my book. If it appears to be instructive I’d like to continue to help people. Later in life I may move into educational products, which would require another shift in my secondary goals, though my primary goal won’t change. That’s fixed.

If you come across some uncertainty as to whether your goal is worth achieving, review your written purpose; a thoughtful session thinking it through should reveal exactly why you are working so hard to reach your target and whether it’s worth continuing.

Sometimes it takes a little time and a lot of thought to define your true purpose, but it’s important to identify what it is so that it can act as your motivator when you feel like giving up.

Exercise 1: Write your purpose alongside your goal. Review your goal each day to motivate yourself towards making it real.

Ask yourself:

- *What is my primary purpose?* Mine is to build a financially strong and stable business for my family.
- *Why do you want to achieve your goal?* Is it all about money? Or is it fame? (You don't always get both!) Or is your concern for society as a whole?
- *Then list secondary goals.*

Step 2

Gather Information

As I wrote in the first chapter, the invention of most products starts with gathering information. Like Cellophane, phase one of which was invented in 1908 by a Swiss chemist who created from regenerated cellulose a strip that was flexible and thin. That information was gathered from the outset, but it wasn't enough. To be genuinely useful, the cellulose strip needed to be water resistant.

Phase two came in 1926 when resistance to water was finally achieved by two chemists who worked for Dupont. They added a thin layer of varnish to the film. Having gathered the information in two stages to make the product, the next step was figuring out who would buy it. This required a different form of information-gathering, this time by marketers who researched the potential market and found that cigarette-makers would be big users of cellophane along with confectionary companies.

Likewise, when you've figured out why you want to do something, start collecting information about it. This can be done quickly or it can be quite time-consuming, depending on how obtuse the subject matter. The Internet provides good general information on virtually every subject, but intimate local knowledge may be more pertinent to the specifics of your project, with data that is trickier to track down.

Another factor is how much knowledge you have already acquired. You must have *something* otherwise you wouldn't have an interest. Rarely would someone want to tackle a goal they had absolutely no clue about—why the heck would anyone do that? In most cases you

will have some knowledge about your goal; sometimes you'll know quite a lot, which is what drew you in the first place. You probably know a bit of its history, tangible qualities, how it works, some statistical data and you may even have relevant books, DVDs and other material already in your possession.

It's up to you to fill in the gap between the knowledge you don't have and the knowledge you now need. Remember the old saying: knowledge is power.

The information I needed to gain in order to compete with Lego concerned both the company and its products.

Gathered information, however, is of no use if it can't be retrieved. So get the information into some form of order, it'll make things a whole lot easier when you want to refer to it again. To sort your information intelligently you'll need to study it first.

Sort like this:

- By subject, and
- Chronologically

Physically, that means creating well-labeled piles; on computer it means creating well-labeled files.

In my experience, new ideas stem from previous ideas. So whatever your idea, something has already been achieved or created that you can either compare it to or use to your advantage.

For example, I realized that I could capitalize on the \$1billion market Lego had opened up by designing a moveable building block system. In this way I was able to create a niche market in which Lego could not compete because Lego was in too deep to redefine itself.

Once you find an achievement that you can capitalize on, you can then:

- Identify opposites and/or possible alternatives, and
- Categorize the alternatives into groups, thus bringing order to your information

Remember: Disorder means confusion; clarity and order lead to control.

Not only will setting things in order help you to identify all the knowledge that you've collected and now possess, but it will also help you identify the knowledge that you're still missing and need to gather.

Exercise: *Make a list then get more*

List all the information you already have about the goal you want to achieve. Now go and research more information about this object of your focus.

There are many sources: the web, books, other people, the media, even careful observation of the surrounding environment. Be sure not to overlook or disregard any source too quickly.

Once you've done this:

1. Ask, 'Can I gather any *more* information?'
2. Identify as many *opposites or alternatives* as you can, and,
3. Start to *categorize* these alternatives

There are various ways you can categorize your alternatives into groups.

Positives/negatives

List perceived positives/negatives of the alternative action. For example, a positive alternative to Lego may be making a building block that will glow in the dark whereas a negative alternative could be trying to make a cheaper building block.

Complexity

List alternatives in terms of level of complexity.

Gut feeling

Group your alternatives according to whether your 'gut feeling' is reassuring you that you can do something or whether it's warning you against doing something, for example:

Information Opposite Gut feeling

\$billion company	Smaller company	Maybe I can
Expensive product	Cheaper price	Don't think I can
Rigid shapes	Moveable system	I could do this
Primary colors	Neon colors	I could do this

Remember, at this stage you are only gathering and grouping information; don't evaluate yet.

Step 3

Decide on Your Solution

Call it a problem, a challenge or a goal, but during the 1950s the issue in the world of recording was how to reduce the size of the tape recorder and increase its versatility. The first step towards the creation of what ultimately became the compact cassette came in 1958 when RCA put the cumbersome thing inside a single plastic box.

They certainly solved the problem of tape entanglement and the other complications of reel-to-reel, but the RCA plastic recording cartridge was not the complete solution, it was too big for a start.

The next step was refining that solution and while RCA was figuring out what they had—if anything—Philips didn't miss a beat. They accepted that RCA had the right solution but the wrong product and created a compact cassette that was 16th the size of the RCA cartridge.

Lesson: When you find the right solution, hang onto it! Whatever else changes, that won't.

Now comes the crucial step of analyzing your list of alternatives carefully and deciding what you are going to do.

When I was in that situation, I was able to refine my goal from creating a 'toy' to 'designing a moveable building block system'.

Refining my goal gave me something clearer and more specific to focus on.

Once you establish your goal, write it down (your diary is a good place). An unwritten goal simply doesn't exist. It is no more than a dream. It is easy to talk about all the things you wish you'd done, you tend to lose track of them when they are stored only in your mind. When you write something down, however, it becomes far more binding, like making a contract with yourself.

So write your goal in your physical or computer palm-diary, both of which you carry around with you. That diary will also carry phone numbers, address book, appointments and everything you need when you're away from your desk. Check goals on a daily basis. Don't make a big deal of them, just place them in a spot where you will see them regularly, or flick through your goals when traveling or waiting. The more often you review a goal, the more you will focus on achieving it, consciously and unconsciously.

That's what I did. Every day I made a point of visualizing families playing with BetterBlocks.

When you write your goals also include the date. It may take three months, a year, or many years to fulfill but that isn't the point. The important thing is to do it.

Exercise: Quiz yourself

In order to decide exactly what you are going to do, take one of the possible opposite or alternatives you have listed and ask yourself:

- Do I have the skills and abilities to do this?
- Is this a positive solution towards attaining my goal?
- Will this solution hold my interest?
- Is my gut feeling telling me 'yes I can' or 'no I can't'?

Using BetterBlocks as an example:

Information	Opposite	Gut feeling
\$billion company	Smaller company	Maybe I can
Expensive product	Cheaper price	Don't think I can
Rigid shapes	Moveable system	I could do this
Primary colors	Neon colors	I could do this

My gut feeling told me that I could design a moveable building block system.

What's your gut feeling telling you?

- Use it to help you determine what your goal will be.
- Then set a date when you expect to achieve it.
- Write down your goal (the goal that fits in with your purpose), when you aim to have it achieved by and put it in an easily visible place.
- Stick it somewhere you will see it—maybe on your bedroom wall, on your bedside table, in your wallet, on your desk, etc.
- Spend time each day focusing on your goal.

Step 4

Personal Strategies for Success

It's not unusual for business people to take the time to work on themselves.

- A well-respected Sydney gastroenterologist has a regular boxing trainer who arrives as early as 5.00am
- The licensee of a coaching company has a personal and professional coach to walk him through his goals each week
- The founder of Australia's most famous bakery (in Beechworth, Victoria) reads at least one self-improvement book per fortnight, he plays motivational tapes on long drives and reviews his goals every morning/evening

Heaps of successful people set goals, keep diaries and take the time to work on themselves, people like cricketer Max Walker, football legend Ron Barassi, entrepreneur Bob Ansett, the late Slim Dusty—all diary-keepers and goal-setters in their own way. These people all 'worked on themselves' before working towards success.

Once a goal has been defined, the creative process used to achieve it is the same, regardless of what the goal may be. It always involves using effective strategies.

There are various different strategies that can be applied and that will be effective in achieving goals. And they can be used over and over again, there's no limit to the number of times you can use a particular strategy.

A successful strategy I learned in engineering was to break a large project into smaller pieces. The overwhelming feeling went away once I focused on what I could do, not what I couldn't.

I applied this strategy to all my new projects, including BetterBlocks. I kept breaking down this goal into smaller steps until I finally established various small physical actions that I could do every day. An action could be as simple as making a phone call, but every action I performed brought me one step closer to success.

In order to get this book out, I broke down the various stages involved in writing a book into smaller tasks that I would carry out, for example, writing down the thoughts I wanted to include, sorting through my thoughts, getting ideas in order, expanding and providing my ideas with more detail, etc.

Another strategy I applied was locating professionals, in fields such as writing, editing and publishing, who had the know-how to get my book out onto bookstore shelves.

Strategies are best set before you begin working on your goal but you'll find that you'll always pick up a few new ones as you go along.

Exercise: *Reprise past successful strategies*

Recall the successful strategies that you have used in the past that have worked for you. What were they? Can you apply them to achieving the goal you have recently defined?

Some of my successful strategies are:

- Breaking down a big goal into smaller, more easily attainable actions

- Taking one day at a time by focusing on set things that I want to get done that day
- Listing the skills that I have against the skills that are required to achieve my goal
- Finding other experts and professionals who can help me attain my goal
- Persisting, always moving forward, regardless

List as many strategies as you can that lead you to achieving your goal. You don't have to think of all of them now; more will become obvious over time.

Step 5

Give Your Idea Value

Belief makes good ideas succeed, and if you don't give your idea value, someone else—like Elvis Presley's manager Colonel Tom Parker—will say, 'You don't want it, well ... that's no problem' and snap it up. This is exactly what happened with the song *Heartbreak Hotel*, currently listed among the 50 Top Rock Songs of all time.

The writers' credit includes Elvis Presley, who never wrote a line, but pocketed a royalty thanks to the colonel. The song itself was written by Mae Boren Axton and Thomas Durden. It's about the end of Durden's romantic relationship, but he didn't think it was much of a song, so when it came time for crediting the writers Durden gave his idea no value and told the colonel to 'do whatever he liked', which is exactly what the colonel did. Thanks.

Many inventors have failed with better ideas than me. They did not succeed because for some reason they lost their passion along the way. Certainly, I have my down times as well, but through it all I didn't let go of my belief in what I was doing. I knew my idea had value.

Belief overcomes the fear of not having enough money. Belief overcomes the fear of walking into institutions knowing they won't back your project. Belief creates the confidence that tells you your project has a value and until someone comes up with that sort of money, you are prepared to walk away from the negotiating table. That drive makes a difference and kids haven't had it washed out of them yet.

Your idea is what people are going to pay you money for! It is what all your sales pitches revolve around when you approach customers,

potential partners, marketers, retailers and anyone who may assist you. So it has to have appeal. But also don't vastly overestimate your idea's value. It may be better to take the cash on the table and have a smaller share of a large pie than a large share of no pie. Only the players get to kick the goals!

A simple formula can be applied here: the more value your idea has to your customers the more customers will purchase your product/service, therefore the more money you will make.

So try to establish what it is about your idea that will make people pay money. What is its value to people?

This also applies to your business partners and associates. You need to discover what value your idea will have for marketers, retailers, financiers, etc., otherwise they won't be keen to become involved in your project.

When I approached Kelvin to buy the BetterBlocks patent from me, I spoke of the good profit margins he would make because he would have exclusive rights to it and my research indicated that people would be willing to buy my product. This is why, I figured, my idea would be of great value to him and his marketing business.

Its value turned out to be worth \$45 million.

Exercise: List the attributes that make your product valuable

How will customers benefit from your idea?

Determine the value that your idea will have to your business associates and customers. Make a list of features; contemplate those attributes to build confidence.

BetterBlocks possessed two areas of value to customers:

1. They offered parents a way to entertain their children in an educational way (which is something most parents are constantly searching for)
2. They were able to connect to Lego blocks, which meant children could combine BetterBlocks with a product they already had—thus creating bigger and better models, and thus adding a lot more value to my product.

Why do people such as financiers, marketers and retailers stand to make a profit from your great idea? How will your customers benefit?

Step 6

Measure Your Achievements

The person who invented the internationally-famous McDonald's Combo Meal is recently retired Ken Tagg, the only Australian licensee to own 11 McDonald's restaurants, all of which were spread across the Macarthur Region south of Sydney.

In 1982, during his first year as franchisee at Minto, Tagg made some innovative and lasting changes to the way in which McDonald's does its business. As a result, he was awarded the Australian Franchisee of the Year in 1994, NSW Franchisee of the Year in the same year and the winner of the Golden Arches Award recognizing him among the top 1% of McDonald's owner/operators worldwide. And he did it all by 'measuring'—playing with the numbers—because there is very little else a franchisee can tamper with, they certainly can't mess with the product.

Tagg's contribution was the realization that the increased revenue from the Meal Deal (burger + drink + chips) generated more profits because it ups the customers' spend.

Measurement is based on fact, not assumptions. You can only go in three directions: up, down or tread water! And you need to become aware of which direction you are going in so that you can correct it if need be. The only way you can be sure if you are on track or not is through measurement.

Some of the other things you can measure are:

- Whether the tasks on your list are in correct order of importance
- If you are keeping to budget
- Whether you are completing all your daily tasks, and if not then determine the reasons for this
- Whether you need any help from professionals to achieve your next critical step and if so who you are going to ask and when
- How sales are going
- How production is going
- Whether advertising is profitable

These are some of the things that will help you identify whether you really are on track or not.

Constantly reviewing targets is very important, this will make you become quite good at knowing what you can achieve in a day. If you achieve a few of your daily targets this will have a snowball effect, encouraging you to achieve every daily task and every weekly and monthly task because you build more and more enthusiasm with each successful completion.

Statistical measurement is just as important. It tells you whether you are on track with your production, finances, income and profits.

If you do not keep track of what you've achieved and what still needs doing, this is when your project starts getting hard, you become stuck on challenges and lose control.

It's very important to acknowledge all your achievements, no matter how small, and not to take them for granted. Even taking the first action to turn your idea into reality puts you in the elite few as a majority of people don't even reach this step.

Sometimes success is not enough, for example Apple replaced its 'Nano' iPod with the 'Mini'. When replaced, the Nano wasn't simply Apple's best selling item, it was also one of the most popular electronics products ever. Apple didn't wait for other companies to bite into its margins or for sales to slow, it stepped over its own product and released a better one.

Exercise: Measure your progress, do the math

How can you measure your progress?

List the various things you can measure in order to ensure that you remain on track, for example, phone calls, the order of your tasks, sales, whether you've organized help from outside, professionals you require, and, most of all, your budget figures. You can measure everything in its own way.

Step 7

Visualize the End Result

**‘When you visualize, then you
materialize.’**

Dr. Denis Waitley, psychologist and author

Our minds work in pictures. Even letters are pictures. So if we want to achieve something we have to be able to see it with our mind’s eye.

Take the example of Ralph Samuelson, the first person to demonstrate the art of water skiing. He was 18 years old at the time. Stevenson’s story seems to run in cycles of three, that is (1) he visualizes, (2) he fails, (3) he then gets it right. In the words of the song *I Get Knocked Down (But I Get Up Again)*.

While watching snow skiers, Samuelson visualized the same thing on water. However, his first attempt was on snow skis, which were too thin. He solved that then found problems with the tip, which he went on to fix. It took him 24 failed attempts. Through it all he seemed fearless, he said, ‘If there was anything new or dangerous, I could figure it out, I wanted to try it.’

Sometimes, though, it’s easier to visualize the end result when the object is already there in some form and all you need do is improve or adapt it. The electric guitar is a perfect example, with someone visualizing his/her ideal instrument and having it custom-made, the Tommy Emmanuel Maton is just one example of such an instrument.

Another example of visualizing the end result is the invention of the video game, which happened conceptually before it was practicable. The connection was made by engineering student Nolan Bushnell who used to spend much of his spare time playing a game called Spacewar on the college computer, and then by night he'd work in an amusement arcade. One night he made the simple connection, he visualized computer games (like Spacewar) in amusement arcades.

However, he was obliged to wait for the 1971 development of the microprocessor before the technology was available for him to fulfill his concept. In 1972 he and an associate put in \$250 each and formed a company called Atari, which is today a multinational play station business.

Scientific research has proven that when we visualize an action, our brain produces the same patterns as if we are physically doing it. Therefore, if you practice doing an action, for example, shooting goals in your mind, this will produce the same improved results as if you had actually practiced shooting goals physically.

Many people do not believe in the power of visualization and therefore place little importance on it. It is a crucial step that is often overlooked by business people and inventors.

However, all great sporting teams now have psychologists and part of their program is to encourage their team to visualize their end result—the applause, the team song, recognition, gold medals, money and other rewards—in order to achieve it.

Each day, for 12 months, I used to visualize for 5-20 minutes. I would envisage happy families playing with BetterBlocks and other things that gave me satisfaction, and my visualizations are exactly what happened.

I'm not saying that visualization is all there is to it—action is what gets the engines turning—but it certainly puts you in a positive frame of mind to keep moving towards success.

We all, consciously or subconsciously, visualize small goals every day, many times a day, if only for a fraction of a second. Not visualizing our end result, or, worse yet, visualizing ***not achieving*** our end result, is a key thing that stops us achieving our goals.

We attract whatever thoughts we have. The stronger and more focused the thought the quicker and more powerful the effect. So be sure that your thoughts are focused on achieving success.

Exercise: *Visualize the end result*

Visualize, in as much detail and with as much emotion as possible, the end result you would like to see come to fruition. Focus on this often.

Remember, the stronger and more emotional your visualization, the more powerful the effect will be.

Step 8

Analyze Your Current Situation

Many innovations are just a question of someone stopping and analyzing the situation they are in. For example, in the winter of 1928, a cold epidemic swept across the United States that affected half the population. The pharmaceutical company Dr. Miles Laboratories did not escape either, with a quarter of its workforce sick at the height of the epidemic.

However, one day, a director of the company AH Beardsley visited the office of a local newspaper and noted the managing editor had no absentees, in fact he was lending two linotype operators to a neighboring paper to stand in for their sickies. Puzzled, Beardsley asked why there was no sickness in this place. The answer was that when anybody showed signs of flu their editor dosed them up with aspirin and bicarbonate of soda.

These and subsequent observations, questions and analyses led to the development of the effervescent tablet and, ultimately, to the well-known Alka-Seltzer brand.

It's a two step process: (1) noticing, and (2) visualizing, but not necessarily in that order. Sometimes you've got to take things as they come, just like with the improbable creation of the effervescent tablet.

Sometimes it's not just a question of inventing product; the inventiveness may lie in the marketing. Take note of David McConnell who started out selling Bibles door-to-door in America

in the 1880s. He noticed his small samples of free perfume were often greeted with more enthusiasm than the primary product.

After analyzing that situation, he came up with two conclusions that formed the basis of household name Avon cosmetics.

1. Sell perfume instead
2. Sell person-to-person, as you would sell a Bible

In 1886 he founded the California Perfume Company with five agents and five brands that sold door-to-door. The venture was a great success and, in 1939, the year that World War II began, McConnell founded a spin-off enterprise, Avon, in the days when door-to-door salespeople were welcome.

The sales technique more-or-less invented (at least 'refined') by McConnell became huge. He peaked with a million and a half representatives in more than 100 countries.

Development: To get to the end result that you have just been visualizing, you need to analyze where you are right now.

Let's use the following example to illustrate the importance of analyzing your current situation: You want to travel to New York. If you left from San Francisco you would travel east, if you left from Paris you would travel west. Both routes will get you to New York, but you won't know which way to travel if you don't know where you are *now*.

This is why you need to know your starting point, so you can travel in the right direction towards your goal. Who knows where you may end up if you just go?

Many ideas fail because people don't analyze where they are now. They overestimate or underestimate their skills, knowledge and/or

finances. Without analysis of your present situation, your road to success will be much tougher.

Exercise: List all the positives and negatives of your current situation

Where are you at the moment? What are your current skills, resources and knowledge?

List all the positives and negatives of your current situation. When deciding to take on my BetterBlocks idea, my current situation was:

Positives:

I had:

- A small workshop where I could make prototype blocks
- 10 hrs per week to devote to developing BetterBlocks
- Persistence
- The ability to break a problem down into manageable pieces

Negatives:

I had:

- A debt of \$100,000, which I was struggling to pay and live as well
- Limited marketing skills
- Limited sales skills
- No ability to manufacture the final product
- Limited ability to finance the development of the product

There are some fairly weighty disadvantages in the 'negatives' column, but history shows that we did it, and we did it well.

Step 9

Compare ‘Haves’ with ‘Wants’

Since the 1950s, the word Airfix has been almost generic for construction kits for aircraft, ships, cars and railway accessories, yet in those days the company was best known as a manufacturer of combs. It only branched away from its core business out of necessity.

The origins of Airfix go back to 1939, and the company intended to manufacture rubber toys. Due to a shortage of materials, the company was forced into a new line of merchandise and it began producing combs, so that by 1947 Airfix was the largest comb manufacturer in Britain, aided by the founder’s introduction of the first injection-molding machine in the country.

However, sales fell away as the grooming-obsessed Americans were repatriated and the firm had to look elsewhere for profits. They moved back into toys and in 1948 were commissioned to produce a promotional replica of a Fergusson tractor, which they did in kit form.

But they had a big budgetary problem, partly caused by the war effort and the lack of suitable materials.

So they looked at what they *had*—which was scraps really, lots of post-war scraps, including broken fountain pens and rubber tires. So tight was the budget that this is all they had to work with.

What did they *want*? They wanted to make a prototype plastic replica, which they *did*. The cost-cutting exercise worked and the company spotted the amazing popularity of injection-molded

construction kits made from polystyrene DS—a new plastic material. Their first model was of Sir Francis Drake’s ship, *The Golden Hind*; when placed in Woolworths in 1952 it sold out.

In 2009, the company has launched new kits, new gift sets and a new logo. Three new fighter planes are on the market and today Airfix is a household brand.

What do you have? What do you want? These are the steps that will help you determine the obvious areas that need to be worked on.

Refer back to what you visualized as your end result (step 7) and compare it to your current starting point (step 8). The gap between what you want and what you already have is what needs to be bridged.

By comparing the two you will be able to easily determine the type of knowledge, resources and skills that will be required in order to achieve your goal.

Once you identify what’s required, you can then focus on what types of resources you currently have or don’t have.

Concerning BetterBlocks, the resources I had included a small engineering shop in my back shed to produce sample blocks. The resources I needed were people who would be able to finance, market and manufacture my product.

One important resource that is frequently overlooked is the people you have in your life right now. Learn to listen to them, ask them questions. You may be pleasantly surprised what an invaluable resource they can be.

My wife, Karen, is my greatest sounding board.

Exercise: List what you have, list what you want—then go out and get what you require

Refer back to the end result you visualized and compare it to where you are now.

- List all the skills and knowledge you need to bridge the gap between what you have and what you don't have. In my case, I didn't have the skills to market my product so I needed to find someone who did. I did, however, have the ability and know-how to produce prototype blocks.
- List the resources that you currently possess and the resources that you don't have but will need to achieve your goal.

Step 10

Use All Your Resources

In 1923, a clerk, John Moores, who worked for the Commercial Cable Company Liverpool, wanted to start a football pools venture. He had no more resources than any other worker, so he persuaded two others to stake their £50 and between them he reckoned if they got 4000 punters, they'd make a profit. They named the business Littlewoods Pools.

Unfortunately for Moores, their combined £150 saw a £600 loss and, after a few more glitches, his partners decided to call it a day. However, Moores never stopped believing his idea would work but he didn't have much money and he couldn't go it alone. Again he called in his resources, this time his brother, Cecil, helped keep the business afloat until in time it did turn a profit.

In 1928, the total pool for one week was £10,000 and in the year 2000 Littlewoods Pools was sold for £161 million.

In that instance, Moores' resources were people with access to money. Others have used other people's premises and equipment. In some instances your resources are already in your possession; the stock for many a start-up second hand shop was already owned by the owner, the same can be said for fittings.

Exercise 1: *List all your resources*

It's good to formalize a list of your resources because you probably have more than you realize.

Some of your friends may have useful contacts, if you scratch around and recall what each does for a living and what they've told you in the past. Others might have access to equipment or buying groups.

Now that you know what resources you have, the challenge now becomes, 'How can I use these resources to attract what I need?' This is where your RAS system will kick in and help you to filter through the information you obtain from various sources.

The Internet is a great research tool. I used it to research the building block market. It produced concrete statistics on things like the size of the market and the volumes of product sold, which was important information for me in attaining my goals.

Then I used the engineering workshop in my back shed to make sample blocks (I made 5000 blocks at the rate of one per minute!) to show potential partners. These blocks showed clearly how the product worked and also allowed me to do customer testing on the product. I could then provide potential business partners with researched proof that my product worked and that parents would buy it for their children.

In turn, these partners agreed to provide me with such resources as financing, marketing, manufacturing and selling.

Be aware of how you can combine to make resources even more effective.

Exercise 2: Write how you can use your resources to achieve your goal

Refer back to the list you made of resources you have and don't have.

Take the resources you do have and write down how you can use them to help achieve your goal. For example, I realized that I could use the engineering workshop in my shed to produce sample blocks. It would not, however, be sufficient to mass-produce the blocks, so again this was another resource I didn't have and would need to find.

Here's how I used some other resources I had:

- Attorney – I contacted my attorney about patenting my product
- Internet and my own knowledge – to research people and organizations I thought would be interested in BetterBlocks
- Telephone – to speak to people worldwide about my idea
- Friends. John Wilkie who introduced me to Kelvin

There is no reason to use resources in isolation of one another, so see how you can use them jointly and how one resource can lead you to another resource that you need.

Step 11

Take Action

At the turn of last century, a bookkeeper for a meat importing business, Frank Hornby, made toys in his spare time—especially railway accessories—out of sheet metal for his sons. He felt that the only drawback was that his models didn't have interchangeable parts. So he came up with a solution, which was to use strips of copper with perforated holes, the strips being fastened together with nuts and bolts.

Once he got his resources in place, one of which was the day job he retained for financial security, what followed was non-stop action. He filed the patent in 1901. He named his system Mechanics Made Easy. He struggled to interest manufacturers. At last he found an ally in the Liverpool firm of Philip, Son & Nephew. Hornby kept his day job and was run off his feet trying to keep both shows on the road. In 1906 he turned a modest profit of £80, which enabled him to work full time on his concept. In 1907, he came up with the name *Meccano*.

Once you know how you're going to use your resources, start using them. Take action! Taking action means deciding what needs to be done and doing it.

But it doesn't mean doing everything yourself. It may involve delegation of human resources. Human resources are not only professionals, business partners and experts in the field, but also include friends, colleagues and the many people you will meet on your journey.

Taking action means learning how to combine all your resources so that you can get things done. Without some sort of action there is no progress.

Exercise: *Use your resources to make your idea real*

Start using your resources as you have specified in Step 10 in order to make your idea become a reality. You don't need to worry about all the actions you will take in the future, just concentrate on doing one task at a time NOW.

What is the first action you are going to take?

Mine was to research the Lego market.

It doesn't matter what your first task is, the most important thing is that you don't procrastinate and do it today!

Focus on your next task tomorrow.

Happy Traveling!