

Greetings:

In our “**Overcoming Overload Workshops**” and in our book “**From Overload to Balanced Living**” we encouraged the need to seek after simplicity as a way to overcoming overload. We also recommended Jack Trout’s book “**The Power of Simplicity**” as an excellent resource. Our friend, Ross Rains, President of The Navigators of Canada, prepared the following highlights of this great book. If you are too busy to read the book we hope these highlights will impact your life for good.

By the way, we are on a mission - “**Simplify and help others simplify**”. Over the coming year we will be researching for **Thoughts and Tips** to help us and help our clients simplify. We would be delighted to hear from you. Please share with us your thoughts and your experiences.

Baha and Margaret Habashy

bh@integrity-plus.com or Phone 905 – 294-0380

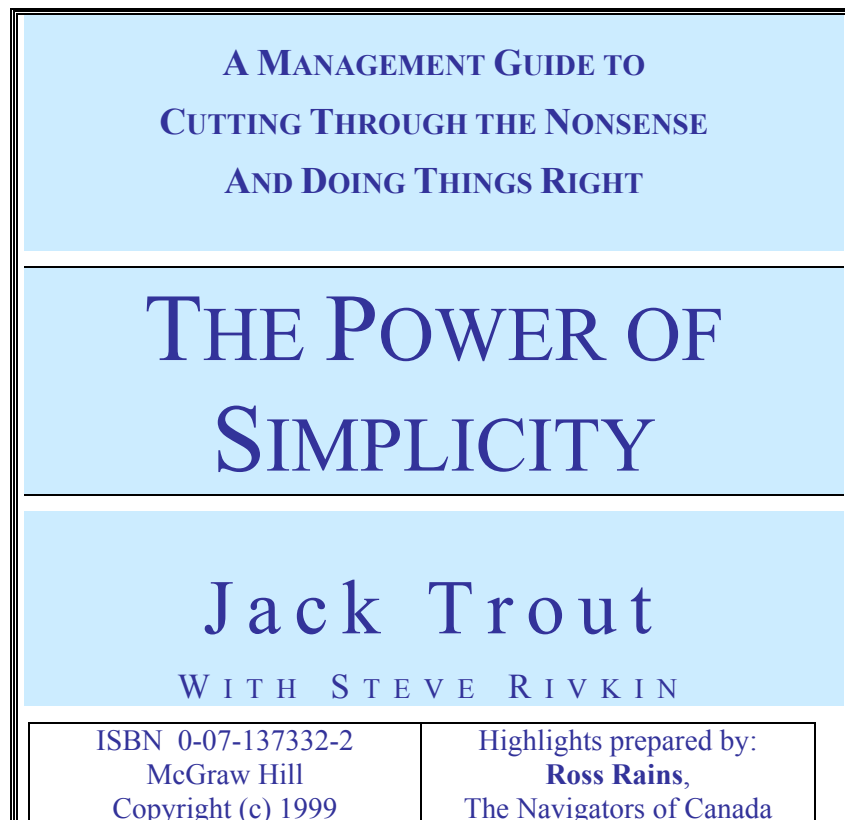


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Introduction

John Sculley (while still head of Apple Computer) ... “*Everything we have learned in the industrial age has tended to create more and more complication. I think that more and more people are learning that you have to simplify, not complicate. Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.*”

Business is not that complex. It’s just that there are too many people out there making it complex.

The Power of Simplicity

The Basics of Simplicity

Chapter 1 – Simplicity

Audiences “do not want complicated and emotionally complex stories that remind them of their own frustrations and powerlessness.” Columnist Richard Reeves.

By oversimplifying a complex issue, you are making it easy for people to make a decision without too much thought. Consider the complex trial of O.J. Simpson and how Johnnie Cochran put the essence of his argument into one memorable line: “If the glove doesn’t fit, you must acquit.”

Simplicity requires that you narrow the options and return to a single path.

In hair care alone, by slashing the number of items in half, the company increased its share by 5 points. (Proctor & Gamble). Our friends at P&G certainly weren’t afraid of simplicity.

A simple summation: Complexity is not to be admired. It’s to be avoided.

Chapter 2 – Common Sense

You must draw on language, logic and simple common sense to determine essential issues and establish a concrete course of action. – Abraham Lincoln

Henry Mintzberg, professor of management at McGill University said, “Management is a curious phenomenon. It is generously paid, enormously influential and significantly devoid of common sense.”

Ross Perot, in a visit to the Harvard Business School, observed, “The trouble with you people is that what you call environmental scanning, I call looking out the window.”

To think in simple, commonsense terms you must begin to follow these guidelines;

1. Get your ego out of the situation. Good judgment is based on reality.
2. You’ve got to avoid wishful thinking.
3. You’ve got to be better at listening.
4. You’ve got to be a little cynical. Things are sometimes the opposite of the way they really are. That’s often the case because someone is pursuing their own agenda.

A Simple Summation – Trust your common sense. It will tell you what to do.

Chapter 3 – Complex language.

When Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, he had 20,000 words with which to work. When Lincoln scribbled the Gettysburg Address on the back of an envelope there were about 114,000 words at

his disposal. Today there are more than 600,000 words in *Webster's Dictionary*. Tom Clancy appears to have used all of them in his last thousand-page novel.

Language is getting more complicated. As a result, people have to fight off the tendency to try out some of these new and rarely used words.

What if some famous adages had been written with a heavier hand and some fancier words? Here's a sampling of some simple ideas made complex:

- Pulchritude possesses profundity of a merely cutaneous nature. (*Beauty is only skin deep.*)
- It is not efficacious to indoctrinate a superannuated canine with innovative maneuvers. (*You can't teach an old dog new tricks.*)
- Visible vapors that issue from carbonaceous materials are a harbinger of imminent conflagration. (*Where there's smoke there's fire.*)
- A revolving mass of lithic conglomerates does not accumulate a congery of small green bryophytic plants. (*A rolling stone gathers no moss.*)

TV journalist Bill Moyers had this good advice for good writing: "Empty your knapsack of all adjectives, adverbs and clauses that slow your stride and weaken your pace. Travel light. Remember the most memorable sentences in the English language are also the shortest: 'The King is dead' and 'Jesus wept.'"

Jack Welch, the highly successful chairman of General Electric, put it well when he said in an interview in the *Harvard Business Review*:

"Insecure managers create complexity. Frightened, nervous managers use thick, convoluted planning books and busy slides filled with everything they've known since childhood. Real leaders don't need clutter. People must have the self-confidence to be clear, precise, to be sure that every person in their organization – highest to lowest – understands what the business is trying to achieve. But it's not easy. You can't believe how hard it is for people to be simple, how much they fear being simple. They worry that if they're simple, people will think they're simple-minded. In reality, of course, it's just the reverse. Clear, tough-minded people are the most simple."

You can win the fight against fog by adhering to 10 principles of clear writing.

1. Keep sentences short.
2. Pick the simple word over the complex word.
3. Choose the familiar word.
4. Avoid unnecessary words.
5. Put action in your verbs.
6. Write like you talk.
7. Use terms your readers can picture.
8. Tie in with your reader's experience. (*The essence of positioning.*)
9. Make full use of variety.
10. Write to express, not impress.

Studies show that people recall only 20 percent of what they heard in the past few days.

In a July 10, 1997 article, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that we've become a nation of blabbermouths who aren't listening at all. We're just waiting for our chance to talk.

Never be afraid to say, "I don't get it." You have to be intolerant of intellectual arrogance.

Don't be suspicious of your first impressions. Your first impressions are often the most accurate.

A Simple Summation – Big ideas almost always come in small words.

Management Issues

Chapter 4 – Information

There's no escaping what David Shenk described in his book *Data Smog*, the “noxious muck and druck of the information age.”

The first challenge is to acknowledge that you can't absorb everything you think you need to know.

And when you're the one doing the communicating, be more economical in everything you write, publish, broadcast, or post online. You're supposed to be a decision maker, not an information expert.

“Once complexity is reduced, uncertainty is minimized, and decision makers can start to take charge of their jobs and their lives.” Dean Anderson, founder of COR Healthcare Resources.

Demand that any report that reaches you have a one-paragraph or one-page summary. If it doesn't, send it back.

Send brief responses.

When you're presenting information on a screen, keep it simple. Seven lines of text is the limit. One visual per slide is the ideal.

Professor Hugh Hecl of George Mason University observes: “In the long run, excesses of technology mean that the comparative advantage shifts from those with information glut to those with ordered knowledge, from those who can process vast amounts of throughput to those who can explain what is worth knowing, and why.”

A Simple Summation – If you unclutter your mind, you'll think more clearly.

Chapter 5 – Consultants

Jack Welch's management mantras are pretty simple. First, you tell your people that you believe in being number one or number two in a field. If not, they run the risk of being sold ... next it was the “boundaryless” sharing of ideas, a process that breaks down corporate hierarchies to make sure that information flows up and down ... As *Forbes* magazine wrote, “the secret of Jack Welch's success is not a series of brilliant insights or bold gambles but a fanatical attention to detail.”

Chapter 6 – Competitors

Business today is not about reengineering or continuous improvement. Business is about war.

The world's 100 largest economies, 51 are not countries but corporations. The 500 largest account for a stunning 70 percent of world trade.

In simplest terms, to be successful today a company must become competitor-oriented. It must look for weak points in the positions of its competitors and then launch marketing attacks against those weak points.

Four types of marketing warfare ...

1. Defensive Warfare Is What Market Leaders Wage. Leadership is reserved for those companies whose customers perceive them as the leader ... A rolling company gathers no competitors.
2. Offensive Warfare Is the Strategy for the Number Two or Three in a Category. Papa John's attacked Pizza Hut at its weak point, ingredients. John Schnatter, the founder, got his hands on the best tomato sauce in the country. It was a sauce that the other chains couldn't buy. This became the cornerstone of his concept, "Better Ingredients. Better Pizza."
3. Smaller or New Players That Are Trying to Get a Foothold in a Category by Avoiding the Main Battle Pursue Flanking Warfare.
4. Guerrilla Warfare Is Often the Land of the Smaller Companies.

If you're at war, it's important that you adopt the qualities of a good general.

- You must be flexible.
- You must have mental courage.
- You must be bold.
- You must know the facts.
- You need to be lucky.

Chapter 7 – Strategy.

In real estate it's location, location, location. In business it's differentiate, differentiate, differentiate. – Robert Goizueta, former Coca-Cola CEO.

In a world where everyone is after your business you must supply your customers with a reason to buy you instead of your competitor. If you don't offer that reason, then you had better offer a very good price ... That reason is then packaged into a simple word or set of words that is positioned in the ultimate battleground, the minds of your customers and prospects. We call that "positioning."

Unfortunately, what many companies end up with are not differentiating ideas, but meaningless slogans.

Differentiating yourself comes in three parts:

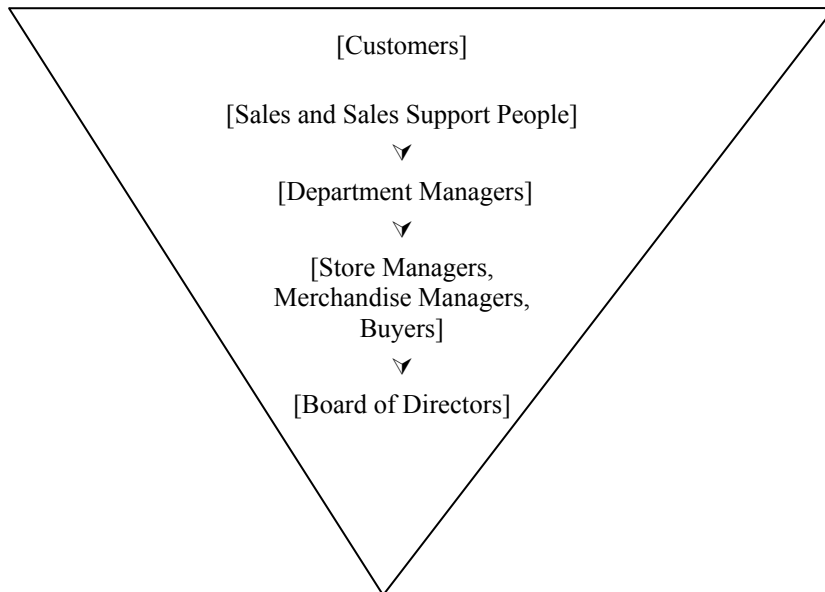
1. Having a simple idea that separates you from your competition.
2. Having the credentials or the product that makes this concept real and believable.
3. Building a program to make your customers and prospects aware of this difference.

Rosser Reeves wrote a landmark book called *Reality in Advertising*. In it he coined the term "unique selling proposition," or USP. This was something you looked for in your efforts to differentiate your product.

A Simple Summation – If you're not different, you'd better have a low price.

Chapter 8 – Customer orientation

Many marketing people live in a dream world. They believe in the fantasy of the virgin market ... There are times when customer orientation can make a difference ... when you make "service" your differentiating idea ... in many ways Nordstrom is a brilliant example of taking a simple differentiating idea – "Better customer service – and elevating it to a coherent marketing direction. Consider the "company structure," which is an upside down pyramid with you know whom on top:



We especially like the employee handbook, which consists of a single five-by-eight card that reads:

WELCOME TO NORSDTROM
We're glad to have you with our Company.
Our number one goal is to provide
outstanding customer service.
Set both your personal and professional goals high.
We have great confidence in your ability to achieve them.

Nordstrom Rules:
Rule #1: Use your good judgment in all situations.
There will be no additional rules.
Please feel free to ask your department manager,
store manager or division general manager
any questions at any time.

One aspect of a marketing program that is often overlooked is that of reinforcing the perceptions of your existing customers. Make them feel smart about being your customers.

Chapter 9 – Annual Budgets

... here's an untraditional approach that maximizes that annual pot of money – one that can get a certain number of jobs done properly.

Step 1. Prepare Marketing Plans.

Step 2. Rank Product Opportunities.

Step 3. Assign Advertising Tasks.

Step 4. Stop When You're Out of Money.

A Simple Summation – Put your money where your opportunities are, not where they were.

Chapter 10 – Prices

There are some practical pricing considerations that have been proven over and over in the marketplace.

You've Got to Stay in the Ballpark.

People Will Pay a Little More for Perceived Value.

High-Quality Products Should Be More Expensive.

High-Priced Products Should Offer Prestige.

Late Entrants Usually Enter on Price.

High Prices and High Profits Attract Competitors.

Don't Train Your Customers to Buy on Price.

The commandments of discounting:

Thou shalt not offer discounts because everyone else does.

Thou should be creative with your discounting.

Thou should use discounts to clear stocks or generate extra business.

Thou should put time limits on the deal.

Thou should make sure the ultimate customer gets the deal.

Thou should discount only to survive in a mature market.

Thou should stop discounting as soon as you can.

It's Hard to Win with a Low Price.

Low prices only work where you have a structured, low-cost advantage over your competition. Southwest Airlines has cost advantages over the major airlines (no unions, one kind of airplane, no reservation system, etc.)

Make Sure You Build Some Promotional Dollars into Your Price.

Leadership Issues

Chapter 11 – Mission Statements

It's current thinking that a mission statement helps define what a company wants to be when it grows up.

After all, if a CEO needs a committee to figure out what the basic business is about, then that company needs a new CEO, not a mission statement.

A Simple Summation – A mushy mission statement is an indication that a company doesn't know where it's going.

Chapter 12 – Leadership

... how to be an effective leader isn't worth a whole book. Drucker gets it into a few sentences. "The foundation of effective leadership is thinking through the organization's mission, defining it and establishing it, clearly and visibly. The leader sets the goals, sets the priorities, and sets and maintains the standards."

It's no secret that most of the world's greatest military strategists started at the bottom.

Karl von Clausewitz learned his military strategy the best way and the hardest way – by serving in the front line at some of the bloodiest and most famous battles of military history.

The unpretentious Sam Walton traveled to the front lines of every one of his Wal-Mart stores throughout his life. He even spent time in the middle of the night on the loading docks, talking with the crews.

How do you get the bad news as well as the good?

Once the word gets around that a CEO prizes honesty and reality, a lot of good information will be forthcoming.

The best leaders share their wisdom with the next generation. Noel Tichy, professor at the U of Michigan Business School, says, "Great leaders have to be great teachers." He estimates that Jack Welch, GE's revered chairman and CEO, devotes 30 percent of his time to leadership development. (Welch even teaches once a week at GE's executive training institute.) "That's where he gets his leverage," claims Professor Tichy.

The best leaders know that direction alone is no longer enough. The best leaders are storytellers, cheerleaders, and facilitators. They reinforce their sense of direction or vision with words and action.

A visible leader is a very powerful weapon with customers and prospects. This kind of leader offers unique credentials for a company.

A Simple Summation – Good leaders know where they are going.

Chapter 13 – Long-term Planning

In the early 1960s ... General Electric emerged as the pioneer in strategic planning. GE created a large, centralized staff of planners to ponder the future. Consultant McKinsey & Co. helped GE view its products in terms of strategic business units, identify competitors for each, and evaluate its position against them.

History is filled with bold forecasts that didn't pan out. Here's a sampling of predictions that flopped:

- "Airplanes are interesting but of no military value." Marshal Ferdinand Foch, French military strategist, 1911.
- "The horse is here to stay, but the automobile is only a novelty, a fad." President of Michigan Savings Bank, 1903, advising Henry Ford's lawyer not to invest in the Ford Motor Co.
- "What use could this company make of an electrical toy?" Western Union president William Orton, rejecting Alexander Graham Bell's offer to sell his struggling telephone company to Western Union for \$100,000.
- "Who the hell wants to hear actors talk?" Harry Warner, Warner Brothers, 1927.

- “We don’t like their sound. Groups of guitars are on the way out.” Decca Records’ statement on rejecting the Beatles, 1962.
- “There’s no reason for any individual to have a computer in their home.” Kenneth Olsen, founder and president of Digital Equipment Corp., 1977.

It might shock you to know that GE is out of long-term planning. Jack Welch nuked GE’s central planning department and pushed the responsibility for strategy down to the 12 operating units. They meet with top management over a four-day period. The focus is on strategy both near term and a four-year look into the future.

Chapter 14 – Organization

... some words about decentralization. Continuing the orchestra analogy, this is where a company gives control of different parts of the orchestra to different conductors.

Conventional wisdom says that decentralization is good. It gets you closer to the market. Our view is that decentralization is bad. It dissipates your forces, adds to complication, and makes it difficult to keep things focused.

Al Ries ... in his book *Focus*, puts decentralization in a clear focus.

“If nothing ever changed, a decentralized company would be more efficient and effective than a centralized company. There’s no question that decentralization contributes to a sense of responsibility on the part of both the operating unit’s management and employees. But how does a decentralized company develop a focus? It doesn’t. Decentralization removes top management’s ability to point the company in one specific direction. And then to change that direction when conditions in the marketplace change. Decentralization is efficient, but inflexible.”

Almost by definition, a decentralized company cannot have a focus on a correct strategic behaviour or strategy. It can only serve as a center for accumulating financial results ...

There’s no music, just sounds (i.e. in a too complicated company).

A Simple Summation – The future belongs to a well-organized and well-focused company.

Chapter 15 – Marketing

Marketing, in the fullest sense, is the name of the game. So it better be handled by the boss and his line. Not staff hecklers. – Robert Townsend *Up the Organization*

A differentiating idea is a *competitive mental angle*.

The idea must be competitive in the total marketing arena, not just competitive in relation to one or two other products or services.

Second, a differentiating idea must have a competitive *mental angle*. In other words, the battle takes place in the mind of the prospect.

In our definition, a strategy is not a goal. It’s a *coherent marketing direction*. A strategy is *coherent* in the sense that it is focused on the idea that has been selected.

Second, a strategy encompasses coherent *marketing* activities. Product, pricing distribution, advertising – all the activities that make up the marketing mix must be coherently focused on the idea.

“Great ideas,” said Albert Camus, “come into the world as gently as doves. Perhaps then, if we listen attentively, we shall hear amid the uproar of empires and nations a faint flutter of wings, the gentle stirring of life and hope.”

Opportunities are hard to spot because they don’t look like opportunities.

A Simple Summation – Show me the idea.

Chapter 16 – New Ideas

Your idea needs to be original only in its adaptation to the problem you are currently working on.
– Thomas Edison

Innovation has very little to do with genius. It has very little to do with inspiration.

Let’s take an honest look at how the mind gets a new idea. It happens in three steps.

1. **Preparation.** You immerse yourself in the problem. You collect information, data, and opinions. You tell your brain to get to work.
2. **Incubation.** While you are busy doing other things, a part of your unconscious mind is swirling. Your brain juxtaposes ideas, blends characteristics, funnels ideas together.
3. **Illumination.** A new and reasonably complete idea surfaces (seemingly out of nowhere). Voila! You’ve done it.

The simplest way to solve a problem is to borrow an existing idea. Military designers borrowed from Picasso’s art to create better camouflage patterns for tanks.

The simplest way to invent a new product is to adapt an existing idea. The pop singer and composer Paul Simon was asked where he got the inspiration for “Bridge over Troubled Waters.” He was brutally honest. He said he was carrying around two melodies in his head – a Bach chorale and a gospel tune from the Swan Silvertones – “and I just pieced them together.”

Some smart folks in Florida capitalized on the fact that some people really didn’t want the bother of attending a big charity dinner, and would rather stay at home, so they invented the “non-invitation” invitation ...

The annual Goodwill Industries dinner
Will not be held this year at the Americana Hotel.
No cocktails will be served at 7 p.m.
No dinner will be served at 8 p.m.
The master of ceremonies will not be Art Linkletter.
The Rev. Norman Vincent Peale will not read the invocation.
The guest speaker will not be Dear Abby.
Stay home and have a restful evening.
But please send \$50 per person or \$100 per couple.

Did this scheme work? Like gangbusters.

In the years since, it has been adopted by other Goodwill chapters and by hospital charities.
(Would it work for your favorite foundation? Go ahead. Borrow it.)

Use the following blueprint to make the most of an existing idea. (The blueprint itself is adapted from a checklist by Alex Osborn, author of *Applied Imagination*.)

1. **Substitute.**
2. **Combine.** What could you blend with an existing idea? What ingredients, appeals, colors, flavors? Lipton combined fruits and flavors with its tea to develop new iced teas.
3. **Adapt.**
4. **Magnify or Minimize.**
5. **Put it to other uses.**
6. **Eliminate.**
7. **Reverse or rearrange.**

Dale Carnegie, of *Win Friends and Influence People* fame, was a famous borrower. He once wrote: “The ideas I stand for are not mine. I borrowed them from Socrates. I swiped them from Chesterfield. I stole them from Jesus. And I put them in a book. If you don’t like their rules, whose would you use?”

A Simple Summation – Show me someone else’s idea.

Chapter 17 – Goals

Built to Last, James Collins and Jerry Porras talk glowingly about “Big Hairy Audacious Goals.” But if you look closely at their thesis, “goals” are mixed up with “bold moves.”

Chapter 18 – Growth

To us a simpler and more powerful objective is to shoot for share, not profits. As a market emerges, your number one objective should be to establish a dominant market share. Too many companies want to take profits before they have consolidated their position.

A survey of 25 leading brands from the year 1923 proves this point. Today, 20 of those brands are still in first place. Four are in second place, and one is in fifth place.

When you do get on top, make sure the marketplace knows it. Too many companies take their leadership for granted and never exploit it.

Never finance the company’s losers with the earnings from the company’s winners, which is a typical accounting trick in a multi-product company. This dampens your ability to pour on the resources to your winners.

In the effort to pursue “endless growth” Nike has fallen into what we call the line-extension trap.

... in business it’s differentiate, differentiate, differentiate. The more things you try to become and the more you lose focus, the more difficult it is to differentiate your product ... the sooner that Nike realizes that it’s not about logos but about differentiated products, the sooner its game will improve.

In our experience, less is more.

People Issues

Chapter 19 – Motivation

The fragile bond between organization and employee has snapped. The attitude of many workers is, “We’re all essentially temps.”

As Will Rogers once said in his understated way: “Even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.”

We were once in the audience when the CEO of a \$100 billion global bank took the stage. Hundreds of crisply pressed suits leaned forward, awaiting *the word*. The CEO cleared his throat and said: “Our overriding objective is to provide quality products to quality clients in quality markets around the world.”

Is there a competitive idea there? Is there a mental angle there? Platitudes do not a difference make. In fact, they do damage to today’s skeptical and suspicious workers by raising false expectations.

What that CEO should be delivering is a platform of ideas on “how we’re going to kick butt,” followed by “here are the tools to do it with.”

Chapter 20 – Self-improvement

Here is some simple advice to deal with self-improvement issues.

1. **Understand what’s going on here.** In their book *We’ve Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World’s Getting Worse*, James Hillman and Michael Ventura explain the feebleness of new age enlightenment. “It’s the cultivation of the inner landscape at the expense of the outer world,” they say. “What you learn is mainly feeling skills. But you don’t find out anything about the way the world works.”
2. **Leave personal growth to the person.**
3. **Start by improving the basics.** Take an honest look at your workforce. Chances are, you’ve got people who don’t read well, don’t speak well, can’t compose a coherent memo, can’t read a balance sheet, can’t turn on a computer. That’s where to start the training.

“People have to be trained for exactly what they really do.” FedEx workforce focuses on the single, primary vision that created the company in the first place: overnight delivery. FedEx has trained its workers to ship and track packages so efficiently that the U.S. Army, in designing the supply system for the Gulf War, copied the training techniques of FedEx.
4. **After the basics, work on skill building.** “You never send a changed person back to an unchanged environment,” says the director of GE’s training programs. “That’s Organizational Development 101.”
5. **Remember, it’s called training, not recreation.**

Chapter 21 – Success

To be successful today, there is only one simple approach: View yourself as a product rather than as an employee.

In other words, success is finding a horse to ride. And you only find that horse when you shrug off your preoccupation with your inner self – when you open your mind to the outside world, when you search for success outside of yourself.

Chapter 22 – The Critics

... humans admire complexity even though they don't understand it ... your critics' comments will come in a number of different forms, so you should stand ready to defend yourself. Here are their favorite critiques:

1. **You will be called “simplistic.”** How could something that simple work? Here you look them in the eye and quote Thomas Hazlitt, the British essayist: “Simplicity of character is the natural result of profound thought.”
2. **You will be accused of “not understanding.”** You just don't understand all the nuances. Here you quote Winston Churchill: “Out of intense complexities, intense simplicities emerge.”
3. **You will be told “we know all that.”** Henri Deterding, director general of Royal Dutch Oil: “Whenever I have met a business proposition which, after taking thought, I could not reduce to simplicity, I have left it alone.”
4. **You will be charged with being “lazy.”** Tell your critics what Edward Teller, the famous physicist, advised: “To pursue simplicity in life, in the world, in the future, is a most valuable enterprise.”

In Conclusion

Chapter 23 – Simplicity

Papa John's Pizza ... founder, John Schnatter ... It's all about better ingredients and quality and good old-fashioned hard work ... thirteen years ago we simply decided to make a better traditional pizza. We now make that product better than anybody does in the world.

Chick-fil-A ... “We didn't invent the chicken,” the ads say, “Just the chicken sandwich.”

Southwest Airlines. Herb Kelleher has built what has turned out to be one of America's most profitable and successful airlines. The airline was founded on the premise of keeping things simple. First there was only one kind of airplane, the Boeing 737. That made things simpler for the pilots and the maintenance people. Then there were no assigned seats ... no food at all ... no hubs ... easy on, easy off is the airline's philosophy.

The Palm Pilot Organizer. The Palm's formula for success? It was designed for just a few functions so that it's a companion to PCs – not a replacement.

The Kohl's Department Stores. “We do 20 simple things that have impact taken together,” says CEO John Herma. “The key is the consistency of the execution.”
