



Revealing the inner beauty of the Torah in a way that touches and inspires the Jewish soul

APPLYING BUSINESS ACUMEN TO LIVING

B.S.D.

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Nobody can eat popcorn all day long without getting bored. But money? All around people are getting swallowed up by their career. "I've got a million dollars, but I want 10 million." Why? Because money is a symbol of pleasure. It has the allure of promising everything.

Way #16 is *bmi'ut s'chorah* - "minimize business." Of course you need to work to put food on the table. But too much business will wipe you out. Be aware of your yearning for money, and seek to control it. If you can leave the office one hour early to spend more time with your family, then you are making a conscious decision about priorities.

Would you rather be rich or wise? Wise, of course. So why do we pursue money with more zeal? Because money is more real to us. The key is to take that motivation for money, and apply it to the more meaningful aspects of life: relationships, spirituality.

If your business is worth it, then certainly "You, Inc." is worth it, too. Deal with yourself as if you're a big business. Examine how you strive to make a dollar, and seek wisdom in this same way. Apply business principles to living.

OPERATE EFFICIENTLY

To compete in the marketplace, a business has to function at maximum efficiency. Imagine a worker who takes 10 steps to turn a bolt when he could have done it in two. Multiplied by 1,000 workers at eight hours a day, and that's a huge loss.

Apply this idea to your life. When you wake up in the morning, where are your shoes? Wherever you put them! If you're not organized, you could waste five minutes each day. How much of your life will you spend being a shoe seeker?

The solution? If this were a business, you'd create a filing system and have a folder labeled: "Shoes." So do the same here - designate one place to put your shoes every day.

Apply this to all your activities. Do you have a doctor's appointment coming up? Plan ahead and take something productive to do in the waiting room. Otherwise you're throwing away an hour of your life.

When you're trying to close a deal, you'll stay at the office until midnight. And if you're doing business halfway around the world, you'll get up at the crack of dawn. Why? Because customers have to be able to rely on you. And every minute is precious when trying to match the competition.

Life is big business. Get organized. Get your time under control. You'll have less stress and achieve more.

COMMIT TO THE GOAL

Imagine someone comes to register as a university freshman, and asks:

"When am I getting paid?"

"What do you mean? You have to pay us!"



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"What are you talking about? I came here to become an engineer and make lots of money!"

They take this guy to the loony bin. Why? Because everyone understands if you want to be an engineer, you first have to learn the business.

In pursuit of wisdom, you may hear good information yet still be discouraged. "I attended a seminar on how to gain self-confidence, and it didn't work. By the end of the 90 minutes, I still didn't have self-confidence."

Do you think you're going to get paid on the spot?!

"Business" and "risk" go hand-in-hand. In order to succeed in business, you have to be willing to take risk.

How many times have I heard: "Huh? Take time to learn Torah? At this stage in my life?!"

We all need more joy in life. Realize there's a cost to getting it. Don't try the happiness game and say, "It didn't work." If it's important enough, you'll try it 3, 4, even 10 times. If you can be happy for the rest of your life, it's worth the investment.

We all know that to succeed in business, you have to keep on top of industry trends and innovations. In life, you have to keep up with the latest techniques in wisdom. Attend seminars. Read books. Take supplemental courses. All this will keep you growing - and will keep you far from ignorance and apathy.

Constantly pursue wisdom. Be a "wisdom-aholic." Just as a self-made millionaire is a magnet for attention and respect, find yourself a mentor for wisdom. Choose someone who is humble, wise, and willing to share his personal formula for success.

When your boss talks, you listen. Realize how much you endure in order to advance your career. It's a long haul to the top. If the boss assigns an unpleasant task, you'll do it, because your paycheck and promotion depends on it.

Similarly, when striving for higher levels of pleasure, don't be wooed by instant gratification. Be willing to invest training, dedication, and self-sacrifice. When you find a mentor, pay attention and follow directions.

Imagine you have an unpleasant customer. Do you throw him out of the store? No! If someone can help you profit, he doesn't have to be the most charming soul in the world. If the fee is right, you'll deal with just about anything.

Similarly, if a nudnick comes into your life, put aside personal animosity. Forget whether you like him or not. What's important is how you can forge a relationship to be able to share wisdom with each other. Overlook quirks in others. Learn to deal with all types of people. This will open you up to far-reaching opportunities.

Be determined, and keep your eye on the ball. Your emotional and spiritual well-being deserves it.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

A successful business develops short- and long-term plans. They don't say, "Hey, let's open a factory in China. Someone go there and buy a building." No. First they spend six months researching. Where are the raw materials coming from. What is the labor market? What are the taxes and export costs?

Good living demands good planning. Because if you don't know your destination, you'll never get there.

In the short term, you need to know how you're going to spend tomorrow. What time will you wake up? How will you re-energize your body with lunch? How will you nourish your spiritual soul as well?



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In the long term, successful people have 1-year and 5-year plans. What will you need to achieve so when you look back after five years you'll feel it was a success? These plans are crucial for getting focused. And they should be constantly reviewed, updated and modified.

Always keep your eye on the bigger issues. Ask yourself: "When all is said and done, what do I really want? What is the ultimate? The million-dollar stock portfolio, or a deep relationship with my family and with God?"

Know how to prioritize your pleasures. Nobody is going to trade in the pleasure of success for Chinese food. Give each pleasure a value. Will you stay a bachelor all your life? Compare that to the pleasure of having a family. How much is it worth? That's the intelligent way to make decisions.

Don't fool yourself into thinking: "I'll get to my family as soon as I've made my million." If you don't start today, it may be too late. Too many people reach age 65 and say, "I missed so many great opportunities. I could have really done something significant, but I postponed it."

When a CEO is signing a contract, he calls in the high-powered lawyers to pour over the fine print. "How are you defining this point? How will this affect the bottom line?"

Life is too short to be heading in one direction, only to find out later that you're getting something entirely different. Read the fine print, and define your terms: What is happiness? What is pleasure? This is the only way to make sure you don't later become liable for breach of contract - with yourself.

KEEP AN ACCOUNTING

Businesses can rise and fall in the accounting department. To make a profit, the balance sheets must be in good order, and reflect daily profit and loss. This is the yardstick which determines in which direction the business will sail.

We all need to take an accounting. What did I accomplish today? What did I lose?

Every night before going to bed, look back at the day's events, and evaluate where you profited or lost. Moving up the ladder? No, I had better straighten this place out! The next day, check again. Eventually you will become a great human being.

It's also crucial to make a plan for the next day. How are you going to get up in the morning? Are you going to look for your shoes? So write it down: 10 minutes of shoe-seeking. Then are you going to grunt as you stagger to the shower? Okay, budget for that, too. What a day!

Better yet, be determined to get a good start. Jump out of bed, and in two minutes you're all dressed and ready to go. It's great to be alive!

That's what you would like to do. Now write it down and make a plan. You will put your shoes in the right place.

To get the wheels churning, here are a few questions to ask yourself:



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Certain business acumen is particularly relevant to big business. For example:

MAINTAIN QUALITY CONTROL

Big business relies on quality control. Imagine one car zooming off the assembly line, and another going chug, chug, chug. The customer doesn't care who was working the assembly line that day. If there's a lemon in the bunch, the business will lose market share.

How does that translate to you? In life, we encounter challenges, hassles and anxieties. People who go through constant mood swings - up one day, down the next - find it harder to achieve goals and sustain relationships. The key is to remain on an even keel. Don't allow your performance level to shift every time you run into a problem.

What time do you get up in the morning? Sometimes 7 o'clock, sometimes 8, sometimes 9? Set yourself a fixed schedule, so you don't find yourself raring to go one day, and sleeping late the next.

Business people succeed by pushing past the small obstacles. If a CEO has a headache or cold, does he stay in bed, or go to the board meeting anyway?

Likewise in life, every moment is a chance to grow, to reap opportunity, to enhance the quality of your life. You don't feel like it this morning? Push yourself over the hurdle. Exert quality control over your life. Ensure that whatever you do never falls below the standard of your abilities and goals.

Here's a short list of traits needed for success: Assertive, Consistent, Determined, Efficient, Goal-oriented, Honest, Loyal, Open to criticism, Optimistic, Organized, Patient, Reliable, Self-esteemed

INVEST LONG-TERM

A business cannot rest on its laurels. Eventually a competitor will come along with a better and cheaper product. That's why a successful business will invest in research and development to stay on the cutting edge.

You, too, should spend time "researching and developing" better techniques for living.

You want more pleasure? "No thanks, I'm happy enough." That doesn't fly. Imagine an investor coming to General Motors:

"I have a great deal to make \$200 million this year."

"No thanks, we're making enough money already."

When investing, a wise business person focuses more on long-term profits than on short. Sometimes, the startup costs are high, and for a few years the business will run in the red. But if it's a good investment, you can look forward to large profits down the road.

When you make an investment, always take into account the lifetime return. The deeper the goals you pursue, the more long-lasting the joy. For example, if you spend 10 hours learning how to be happy, you will be a better friend, a better parent, a better spouse, a better employee. Appreciate what that's worth in totality.



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It may seem that you "have it all" - a strong marriage, wonderful children, a thriving business. But don't stop at that. Make those pleasures deeper and broader. Are there ways to help your community? Could you improve your child's education?

The law of physics states: If it's not growing, it's deteriorating. So don't be "satisfied" with your current level. Always look for new ways to grow.

TEST MARKET

Before a company introduces a new product, they engage in months of research to determine overall costs, marketability, and profit potential.

Before making any major life decision - moving to a new city, getting married, or choosing a career - be sure to do a thorough analysis of the long-term feasibility.

Test market your ideas. Don't assume your viewpoint is correct. Share your plan with others. Get together a "focus group," a small cross-section of people who will respond honestly and openly. Bounce your ideas off them. Get somebody to shoot it down. The feedback will let you know if you're on the right track. (For more on this topic, see 48 Ways #11 - "Work it Through With Friends.")

The CEO of a large company will gladly take advice from a janitor if it can help make the business more profitable. Yet the same CEO may rebuff advice from his own wife!

In the business world, you lose if you don't accept constructive criticism. The same is true of life. Be open to suggestions. "Hang a suggestion box." At the very least, you can always choose to ignore it.

Certain business acumen is particularly relevant to small business. For example:

INVENTORY CONTROL

Did you ever go into a hardware and ask, "Do you have any number 9 nails?" Does the owner say, "Wait, let me look it up in my list"? No way! A small business owner has an uncanny knack for knowing his inventory. If there are 5,000 items in the store, he knows the exact location and price of each item.

You have the potential to become wise. Do you know the 48 Ways by heart? No. Why not - too many items? If you value it, you will memorize the list and carry it with you always.

Keep tabs on all your resources. Know your strengths, weaknesses, talents and skills. Make a list and write them down.

This is essential for making wise decisions about career and relationships. You don't want to be 20 years down the road and discover that you've denied an essential part of who you are. That's setting yourself up for a mid-life crisis.

If you're not sure, find out. Ask a trusted friend, or speak to a career counselor. Then, when opportunity knocks, you'll be ready to answer.

ELIJAH AND THE FISHERMAN

A person's motivation in business is a great indicator of how he can achieve in his personal life. Doesn't it make sense that the same God who gave you the means to be savvy in business, also gave you the means to become a great human being?

The Midrash (Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu) tells the story of Elijah the Prophet meeting up with a fisherman. "Do you study



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Torah?" Elijah asked.

"No," replied the fisherman, "I'm just a simple man. I am not endowed with any measure of talent or intelligence. I can't understand Torah. It's the Almighty's fault!"

"Tell me," said Elijah, "how do you prepare your fishing net?"

"Well," said the man, "It's actually quite complicated. First I have to select the proper gauge rope, and then I weave the net in a particular pattern to ensure that it has the proper balance of strength and flexibility. It's a whole science."

"How do you go about actually catching the fish?" inquired Elijah.

"Oh, that's also very complex. There are many factors involved - the season of the year, time of day, type of fish and location. I also account for water depth, temperature, and speed of the current. I've spent years mastering these techniques, and I'm able to earn a good living from my fishing."

"When you get to heaven," said Elijah, "you plan to claim that you didn't study Torah study because you're just a simple person, not endowed with any talent or intelligence. Everyone tries this defense. But you're a successful fisherman! Your actions disprove your claim. You have what it takes to be great."

Sometimes we all fall into a mode of self-pity. "If only I understood how, I would have accomplished more. I would have been a better parent, and a more caring and loving spouse. But Almighty, You didn't give me the right tools!"

We all have the right tools. And deep down we know that wisdom is more important than money.

The real question is once you acquire all these tokens, how should you spend them? You can't buy love. You can't buy happiness. The money has to be transferred into something meaningful. Make the commitment. When you minimize business and maximize growth, you're making a statement about what really counts.