

# FILL A NEED

13

CRITICAL TIPS FOR SUCCESS  
IN BUSINESS AND LIFE

RETIRED  
AT AGE  
38!

"ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR" FINALIST

**BRENT W. WARNOCK**

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# FOREWORD

**LIFE AND BUSINESS ARE** dangerous. There are rapids, boulders, sinkholes, and dangers on every side. Obstacles on the water, in the water, and on the shore must be avoided. But once you become aware of the dangers and understand the secrets of successful passage, ultimate joy, excitement, and exhilaration await you. This book provides you with words of experience from one adventurer who has journeyed the rapids of business life and who has tasted the fruits of success.

You will find this book inherently different than most. Life's greatest lessons are often learned from failures rather than successes. Stories of mistakes and failures, however, are consistently hidden, forgotten, or purposely omitted from books intent on detailing successes. When hearing stories of success, I find it worthwhile to always ask: what failures preceded success?

Literally, it has taken thirty-plus years and over \$1 million to produce this book. The stories that are shared herein are costly lessons learned. In a very real sense, this book could be considered a business survival guide. Survival guides, by nature, are lessons that can literally keep you alive by sharing the trials and errors experienced by those who have gone before. This is that kind of book. If you adhere to the survival tips discussed herein, you can save hundreds of thousands of dollars—and hours—in your future business adventures.

This book outlines what I believe are the 13 most critical lessons necessary for success in business and life. Each of these Success Tips is a lesson learned as a result of mistakes, errors in judgment, and costly failures. I share these stories openly in hopes that you will avoid the perils and leap more directly to success.

I salute you as one willing to learn from others. Experience is a great teacher—but wiser still are those who are humble enough to learn from the experiences of others.

# INTRODUCTION

## **Retire by Age Forty**

Since I was a child, I had a goal to retire by the time I was forty years old. I am not exactly sure where this insatiable desire originated, but possibly, it came from watching my father leave for work every morning, extremely frustrated. Perhaps my yearning also originated from watching him return home at night even more frustrated than when he left. Possibly it came from overhearing my parents, neighbors, and friends' parents discuss their own horrific experiences of working forty-plus hours a week.

I clearly remember overhearing many conversations of complaint, concern, frustration, and resignation, focused on the horrors of working for someone else. Yet I remember just as clearly how the atmosphere would immediately change when the conversations would shift from the horrors of work to the joys of eventual retirement. These dialogues always began with the same statement: "When I retire I will..."

Regardless of the specific dreams and wishes that finished that sentence, I felt the feelings and emotions surrounding the dialogue. A magical feeling entered into the room that even a child could detect. It was as if the adults involved in the conversation allowed themselves to breathe freely—for the first time in a long time. There was a relaxing tone. There was a calming demeanor. There was laughter. There was passion. There was positive energy. There was happiness. There was peace. There was joy.

In these conversations about future retirement, I would often hear the phrases "finally," "at last," and "imagine when I am able to do what I want to do." I suppose my insatiable desire to retire early was rooted in

childhood. If retirement was where happiness was to be found, I wanted to experience it early—and sooner rather than later.

In retrospect, I find it humorous that as a five-year-old I would think such thoughts. I was not in kindergarten yet and was busy planning an early retirement. Nevertheless, I had made up my mind. I was going to retire early. I was going to retire by the time I was forty—period! Moreover, I did!

## **The Promise—Thirty Years in the Making**

- Do you find yourself dreaming of the day when you can retire?
- Do you find yourself silently wishing for the day that financial concerns, economic worries, and difficult work relationships were gone, forever?
- Do you find yourself envious of those who seem to have the perfect life; a great career, fine cars, beautiful homes, vacation escapes, and an apparent lack of concern about money in general?

If so, this book is for you. Obviously, I cannot promise you that by simply reading a book all your dreams will come true. I cannot promise that all your financial, economic, and social worries will be magically resolved. Yet, I can make you this promise: I promise this book will bring you real hope. Further, I promise that this book will provide you with real, practical, proven, and doable strategies that will set you on the path toward the life that you have imagined.

You may be asking yourself, “How can he make such a promise?”

*Fill a Need* was written with the intent that it will provide you, the reader, with many Success Tips that, if adhered to, will lead to success in both business and life. Notice I did not say “may” or “can”—I said they *will* lead to success.

Over the course of thirty years, I have been involved in dozens of new business start-ups. Over this time, I have made some great business decisions. I have also made some very poor decisions. I have made many gains and suffered some significant losses. I have been run over by more than one bus (figuratively speaking) only to get up, brush myself off, and keep going. I have had many sleepless nights and stressful days. However, in the end, I have done what I loved, enjoyed most of it, and, for the most part, been successful.



Through many experiences, I have learned many invaluable lessons on what it takes to be successful in business and life. The 13 secrets I share in this book are a result of lessons learned. You could call them the “checklist for success.” Before engaging in any new business adventure, I personally ensure that I adhere to this checklist.

I share the checklist with you in hopes that you will avoid some of the pain—and experience more of the pleasure—that a successful business provides. You will find this book inherently different than many books touting successful and proven strategies for business. I believe that most of the greatest lessons learned are not a result of one's successes, but rather from one's failures. Hence, you will discover within these pages many honest stories of hard lessons learned while running the rapids of business life. It is not easy to openly share errors in judgment, mistakes made, and costly business failures, yet, in looking back over my thirty-plus years of business experiences, it is precisely the lessons I learned from failures that lead to eventual success.

You are most likely reading this because you also have an interest in business. Possibly, you are already knee-deep in your own business. Maybe you are pondering taking the plunge. Perhaps you are merely flirting with the idea of leaving the safety of employment shores to begin your own enterprise. Perhaps you have absolutely no intention of starting your own business but the title *Fill a Need: 13 Critical Tips for Success in Business and Life* caught your attention. Or perhaps you are a professional student, always learning, always seeking, and always reading but, for a multitude of reasons, you have never taken a plunge into entrepreneurial waters.

Regardless of your reason for reading this book, I salute you as one willing to learn from others. Had I had the foresight to pick up a book like this years ago, I would be much farther ahead than I am now. Experience is a great teacher—but wiser still are those who are humble enough to learn from the experience of others.

## **A River Runs Through It**

One of my favorite movies is Robert Redford's 1992 classic, *A River Runs Through It*. While attending graduate school at the University of Utah, my mentor, Dr. Rogers, showed this movie in class. We analyzed a host of

movies that semester, but *A River Runs Through It* caught my attention like no other.

Though I would enjoy providing an in-depth, detailed analysis of many parts of this film, it is most appropriate to mention only the final scene of the movie. *A River Runs Through It* is a movie about early life in rural Montana. Although the narrative is a fictional account of a boy named Norman, his brother Paul, and their life experiences growing up in Montana, it could be a movie of everyone's life choices. Consider the final words of the film as narrated by Robert Redford himself:

Eventually all things merge into one,  
and a river runs through it.

The river was cut by the world's great flood,  
and runs over rocks from the basement of time.

On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops.

Under the rocks are the words,  
and some of the words are theirs.

I am haunted by waters.

Redford's inspired words illustrate how each of our lives—like raindrops—merge, eventually becoming one great river. This great river flows where others have gone before. It is, after all, the words of others (parents, grandparents, neighbors, siblings, teachers, clergy, friends, and so on) that influence not only who we are today but also who we will be tomorrow.

*Fill a Need* is an attempt to provide you with some words from one who has gone before. Lessons learned through experience will help you traverse a little safer through the rapids and waterfalls of business and life. The world of business, as is life, is dangerous. There are rapids. There are rocks. There are waterfalls and sinkholes on every side. There are obstacles to avoid on the water, in the water, and beneath the water, as well as on the shore.

This book is not meant to be a complete and comprehensive guide for managing your business or your life. Rather, it is purposefully positioned in

a story-oriented format to assist those who follow in avoiding some of the hazards and obstacles that all entrepreneur travelers must eventually face. By applying these Success Tips, you will find yourself enjoying the many benefits of business ownership while simultaneously avoiding some of the more dangerous and costly pitfalls inherent in exciting entrepreneurial explorations.

## **American Idol**

I have been captivated with the television reality series *American Idol* since its inception. Possibly, you too have looked on with awe at the number and quality of singers emerging from this show year after year. Dozens of artists discovered on this show have gone on to produce tremendously successful hit songs and albums. A few have become some of the most successful artists in the music industry today.

What I find most intriguing is the realization of just how talented many unknown singers truly are. Before appearing on *American Idol*, every one of these singers was literally unknown. Like you and me, they were seemingly faceless individuals, living quietly in crowds, going to school, working jobs, and hoping for more. It amazes me how talented so-called common, normal, typical, and everyday individuals really are. Popular artists like David Archuleta, David Cook, Chris Daughtry, Carrie Underwood, Jordin Sparks, Adam Lambert, and Kelly Clarkson were yesterday's unknowns.

*American Idol* is a show that testifies how talented and powerful most of us really are.

So, what propelled these common, normal, typical, and everyday people to stardom? Is it simply a lucky break? Being in the right place at the right time? Having a special gift? Yes, undoubtedly, many variables align to form a path to success. There is, however, one essential element that every one of these successful *American Idol* finalists has in common. They tried out. They stepped up to the plate. They plunged into the waters.

Literally, each of these contestants had to walk to the audition. Do not overestimate the simplicity of this. This was no easy task. Ask anyone who has auditioned for the show. Nearly every location that stages an *American Idol* tryout has in excess of 10,000 contestants. Imagine showing up for an audition to learn that you are number 8,588. The wait seems endless. It is

hot. It is humid. If you look at it logically—honestly—what is the chance that you will be one of the finalists?

Typically, at each tryout location, only about 20 of the 10,000-plus contestants receives a “golden ticket.” On the show, a golden ticket means that you are invited to go to Hollywood week. Hollywood week is an additional, week-long, intense tryout event. The odds of an invitation to Hollywood week are less than two-tenths of 1 percent (2 in every 1,000 contestants). It makes you wonder how many attended the audition, recognized the odds, thought about the futility of the attempt, and returned home or back to work. Those who did not stay will never know. Sure, the odds were against them. They are against all of us. The odds were stacked against me when I set off to retire by the time I was forty. Nevertheless, each successful contestant took the first step. They showed up.

Action is based on belief. To show up and try requires that you believe that you can be successful. With no belief, there is no action. Maybe this is why the *American Idol* judges almost invariably ask each contestant the same question:

“Why are you here today?”

Why do you suppose that this is the first question they usually ask every contestant? If you have watched the show faithfully, you also are familiar with the typical answer: “I am here to be the next American Idol.” So why do the judges ask the question if they already know the answer? The answer to this is likely found in the next question the judges typically pose:

“Do you think that you can be the next American Idol?”

American Idol viewers realize that the show is not only about finding the greatest voices. No doubt, possessing a vocal instrument and being able to sing is a necessity, but the judges are looking for much more. True artists have strong characteristics: a quality of essence and a charming charisma that goes beyond a great voice.

The judges look for more than vocal talents; they look for character talents as well. They search for those who can sing and those who believe in themselves and their talent. True artists carry themselves with confidence, with skill, but most importantly—with passion. In other words, the judges search for those who have passion. Passion is discussed in detail in this book as one of the secrets of future success, but it suffices to say here that passion is just as critical in business and life as it is for contestants on *American Idol*.

As previously mentioned, the odds of success on *American Idol* are somewhat slim. However, as an entrepreneur, your odds of success are much better. The Small Business Administration recently revealed that two-thirds of new small businesses survive at least two years, and 44 percent survive at least four years. Approximately six hundred thousand new businesses begin each year. Do you have the desire, the belief, the confidence, and most importantly, the passion that you can be one of those six hundred thousand to start a new business this year? Better yet, ask yourself the same question the judges would ask:

“Do you think you can be a successful entrepreneur?”

Listen to your answer carefully—it may have more to do with your future than you think.

Consider one of my favorite thoughts, by anthropologist Clifford Geertz:

“We all begin with the [opportunity] to live a thousand kinds of life but end in the end having lived only one.”<sup>1</sup>

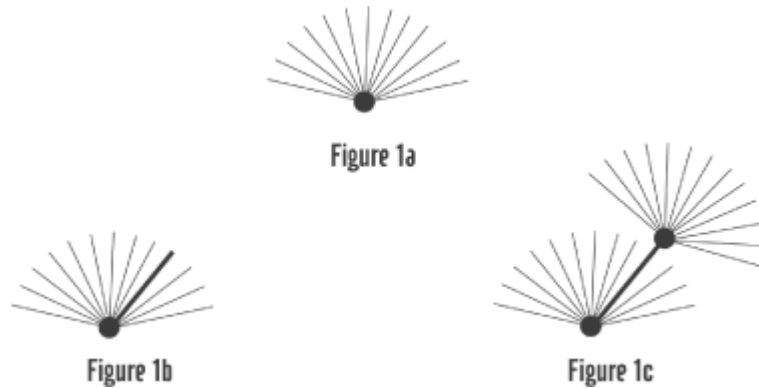
Originally, I was introduced to this thought during my graduate studies in communication at the University of Utah. In the original quote, Geertz used the term “natural equipment” rather than “opportunity” because he was speaking of genetic selection. However, I believe the thought is more powerful when we speak of human choices and opportunity. I have taught a variety of communication courses at several nearby universities and colleges over the past fifteen years. Invariably, I introduce this thought to the students by posing the question:

“What could you have done today besides coming to class?”

The answers begin.

- I could have stayed in bed.
- I could have stayed at work.
- I could have studied for the exam I have in my next class.
- I could have stayed home and watched TV.
- I could have gone to the game, gone out to eat, gone to a movie, and so on.

While the students respond, I draw a myriad of short lines originating from a single point, visually indicating the innumerable possibilities of choosing different actions (see [figure 1a](#)).



Then I continue. “But each of you in this room *did* choose to come to class. That was a conscious choice among many competing alternatives.”

I then proceed to darken one of the lines on the diagram to highlight a path chosen (see [figure 1b](#)). I go on to pose another question:

“What could you choose to do this very moment?”

Some class member inevitably responds, “I could stand up and leave.”

“You are absolutely right.”

I draw one line originating at the dot, representing the present moment (see [figure 1c](#)). With the understanding that indeed each one of them is completely free to leave the class, the answers now come in droves. With each answer, I detect a slight hint of excitement as they seriously consider their alternatives.

- I could leave and go watch TV.
- I could drive to Vegas.
- I could go snowboarding.
- I could go do lunch with my girlfriend.

Again, I visually represent all the potential paths of action (see [figure 1d](#)).

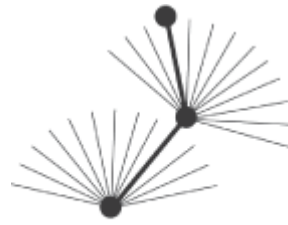


Figure 1d

I then ask one final question:

“What are you going to do after class?”

Again, a variation of similar answers are provided, and I illustrate each with a line.

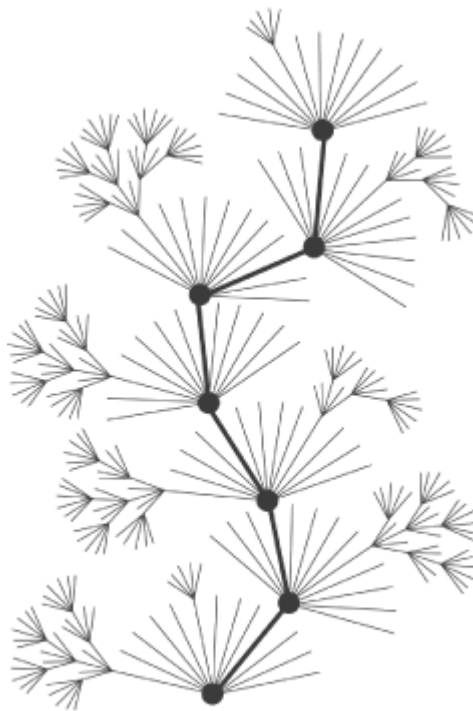


Figure 1e

“You see, each one of us has the opportunity to live literally a thousand kinds of life, but, in the end, you can only live one in each moment. In addition, snaking through the thousands of possible paths—looking like the

branches of a tree—is one highlighted path indicating what you choose to do out of all the possibilities that lie before you. Literally, *you* choose the path of *your* life.” (See [figure 1e](#).)

As you look over these visuals, it is important to note that once you make a choice and start down a particular path, you cannot turn back. The alternatives that existed at that previous moment are gone. Some options are gone forever. Actions are irreversible. You cannot undo an action. Behavior has no opposite. Sure, you can choose differently in the “now”—but you cannot change your choice in the past. Hence, decisions in the moment are incredibly powerful.

Therefore, it may be valuable to ask one final time:

“Do you think you can be a successful entrepreneur?”

For this to be a reality, you must first believe it. It must first be a choice. Then you put your belief into action. Action stems from thoughts. My only intent in this first section is to open up your mind to the possibilities. If you believe, all things can be yours.

I not only believed it was possible to retire by the time I was forty, but I also knew it would happen. I did not know the specifics, nor did I have an exact plan. I had no specific direction. I did not know the details; I just knew retiring before I was forty years old was my destiny.

## **If I Can Do it—You Can Do It**

At this point, you may be saying “Great,” “Wonderful,” “Good on you,” and I wouldn't be surprised if your tone of voice included a bit of sarcasm. I understand that you are not reading this book to learn about my successes. You are interested in creating your own.

Here's the point. I am not wise beyond my years. I am not more intelligent. I am not luckier. I am not from a wealthy background. In reality, being successful in business is not about me at all. Nor is it about you. Starting a successful business is about one simple action. And this simple action—if you take it to heart, if you believe it, if you dedicate your life to it—will not only ensure your success, it will also make your goal achievable, your life livable. Yes—it will make your dreams come true.

This “it” is something you can begin doing today.

- You can do “it” wherever you are.
- You can do “it” regardless of whatever else you may be doing.



- You can do “it” at home.
- You can do “it” at work.
- You can do “it” at play.
- You can do “it” at church.
- You can do “it” at a mall.
- You can do “it” at a restaurant.
- You can do “it” at a beach.
- You can do “it” on the court.
- You can do “it” at the gym.

To excel, you need to do “it” in all these places.

- “It” does not take money.
- “It” does not take intelligence.
- “It” does not take luck.
- “It” does not take education.
- “It” does not take wealth.

What is the secret?

What is the action?

What is “it”?

## **Note**

1. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 45.

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