

REWORK BY JASON FRIED | BOOK SUMMARY

Rework is a fantastic read for anyone interested in business, leadership and entrepreneurship. It's very quick and easy to read. Each section is very concise; there's no fluff – just quick tips and actionable ideas. This is one of the reasons I love the book so much!

One of the interesting things about the book is that it was written based on the experiences of growing 37 Signals; the company behind Basecamp and other productivity apps. The book is a byproduct of their business (which is one of the ideas they talk about in the book).

FIRST

The New Reality

There's a new reality. Today anyone can be in business. Tools that used to be out of reach are now easily accessible. Technology that cost thousands is now just a few bucks or even free. One person can do the job of two or three or, in some cases, an entire department. Stuff that was impossible just a few years ago is simple today.

TAKEDOWNS

Ignore the real world

"That would never work in the real world." You hear it all the time when you tell people about a fresh idea.

Scratch the surface and you'll find these "real world" inhabitants are filled with pessimism and despair. They expect fresh concepts to fail. They assume society isn't ready for or capable of change.

Don't believe them. That world may be real for them, but it doesn't mean you have to live in it.

Learning from mistakes is overrated

Failure is not a prerequisite for success. A Harvard Business School study found already-successful entrepreneurs are far more likely to succeed again (the success rate for their future companies is 34 percent). But entrepreneurs whose companies failed the first time had almost the same follow-on success rate as people starting a company for the first time: just 23 percent. People who failed before have the same amount of success as people who have never tried at all.* Success is the experience that actually counts.

Planning is guessing

Give up on the guesswork. Decide what you're going to do this week, not this year. Figure out the next most important thing and do that. Make decisions right before you do something, not far in advance.

Working without a plan may seem scary. But blindly following a plan that has no relationship with reality is even scarier.

Why grow?

Don't be insecure about aiming to be a small business. Anyone who runs a business that's sustainable and profitable, whether it's big or small, should be proud.

Workaholism

Workaholics don't actually accomplish more than nonworkaholics. They may claim to be perfectionists, but that just means they're wasting time fixating on inconsequential details instead of moving on to the next task.

Workaholics aren't heroes. They don't save the day, they just use it up. The real hero is already home because she figured out a faster way to get things done.

Enough with "entrepreneurs"

Let's replace this fancy-sounding word with something a bit more down-to-earth. Instead of entrepreneurs, let's just call them starters. Anyone who creates a new business is a starter. You don't need an MBA, a certificate, a fancy suit, a briefcase, or an above-average tolerance for risk. You just need an idea, a touch of confidence, and a push to get started.

GO

Make a dent in the universe

To do great work, you need to feel that you're making a difference. That you're putting a meaningful dent in the universe. That you're part of something important.

This doesn't mean you need to find the cure for cancer. It's just that your efforts need to feel valuable. You want your customers to say, "This makes my life better." You want to feel that if you stopped doing what you do, people would notice.

Scratch your own itch

The easiest, most straightforward way to create a great product or service is to make something you want to use. That lets you design what you know—and you'll figure out immediately whether or not what you're making is any good.

Start making something

Think your idea's that valuable? Then go try to sell it and see what you get for it. Not much is probably the answer. Until you actually start making something, your brilliant idea is just that, an idea. And everyone's got one of those.

Ideas are cheap and plentiful. The original pitch idea is such a small part of a business that it's almost negligible. The real question is how well you execute.

No time is no excuse

When you want something bad enough, you make the time—regardless of your other obligations. The truth is most people just don't want it bad enough. Then they protect their ego with the excuse of time. Don't let yourself off the hook with excuses. It's entirely your responsibility to make your dreams come true.

Besides, the perfect time never arrives. You're always too young or old or busy or broke or something else. If you constantly fret about timing things perfectly, they'll never happen.

Draw a line in the sand

As you get going, keep in mind why you're doing what you're doing. Great businesses have a point of view, not just a product or service. You have to believe in something. You need to have a backbone. You need to know what you're willing to fight for. And then you need to show the world.

A strong stand is how you attract superfans. They point to you and defend you. And they spread the word further, wider, and more passionately than any advertising could.

Mission statement impossible

There's a world of difference between truly standing for something and having a mission statement that says you stand for something. You know, those "providing the best service" signs that are created just to be posted on a wall. The ones that sound phony and disconnected from reality.

Standing for something isn't just about writing it down. It's about believing it and living it.

Outside money is Plan Z

Raising money is just not worth it. We hear over and over from business owners who have gone down this road and regret it. They usually give a variation on the investment-hangover story: First, you get that quick investment buzz. But then you

start having meetings with your investors and/or board of directors, and you're like, "Oh man, what have I gotten myself into?" Now someone else is calling the shots.

Before you stick your head in that noose, look for another way.

You need less than you think

There's nothing wrong with being frugal. When we launched our first product, we did it on the cheap. We didn't get our own office; we shared space with another company. We didn't get a bank of servers; we had only one. We didn't advertise; we promoted by sharing our experiences online. We didn't hire someone to answer customer e-mails; the company founder answered them himself. And everything worked out just fine.

Great companies start in garages all the time. Yours can too.

Start a business, not a startup

Don't use the idea of a startup as a crutch. Instead, start an actual business. Actual businesses have to deal with actual things like bills and payroll. Actual businesses worry about profit from day one. Actual businesses don't mask deep problems by saying, "It's OK, we're a startup." Act like an actual business and you'll have a much better shot at succeeding.

Building to flip is building to flop

Another thing you hear a lot: "What's your exit strategy?" You hear it even when you're just beginning. What is it with people who can't even start building something without knowing how they're going to leave it? What's the hurry? Your priorities are out of whack if you're thinking about getting out before you even dive in.

Less mass

Embrace the idea of having less mass. Right now, you're the smallest, the leanest, and the fastest you'll ever be. From here on out, you'll start accumulating mass. And the more massive an object, the more energy required to change its direction. It's as true in the business world as it is in the physical world.

PROGRESS

Embrace constraints

"I don't have enough time/money/people/experience." Stop whining. Less is a good thing. Constraints are advantages in disguise. Limited resources force you to make do with what you've got. There's no room for waste. And that forces you to be creative.

Build half a product, not a half-assed product

You can turn a bunch of great ideas into a crappy product real fast by trying to do them all at once. You just can't do everything you want to do and do it well. You have limited time, resources, ability, and focus. It's hard enough to do one thing right. Trying to do ten things well at the same time? Forget about it.

Start at the epicenter

When you start anything new, there are forces pulling you in a variety of directions. There's the stuff you could do, the stuff you want to do, and the stuff you have to do. The stuff you have to do is where you should begin. Start at the epicenter.

For example, if you're opening a hot dog stand, you could worry about the condiments, the cart, the name, the decoration. But the first thing you should worry about is the hot dog. The hot dogs are the epicenter. Everything else is secondary.

Ignore the details early on

Architects don't worry about which tiles go in the shower or which brand of dishwasher to install in the kitchen until after the floor plan is finalized. They know it's better to decide these details later.

You need to approach your idea the same way. Details make the difference. But getting infatuated with details too early leads to disagreement, meetings, and delays. You get lost in things that don't really matter. You waste time on decisions that are going to change anyway. So ignore the details—for a while. Nail the basics first and worry about the specifics later.

Making the call is making progress

When you put off decisions, they pile up. And piles end up ignored, dealt with in haste, or thrown out. As a result, the individual problems in those piles stay unresolved.

Whenever you can, swap "Let's think about it" for "Let's decide on it." Commit to making decisions. Don't wait for the perfect solution. Decide and move forward.

Be a curator

You don't make a great museum by putting all the art in the world into a single room. That's a warehouse. What makes a museum great is the stuff that's not on the walls. Someone says no. A curator is involved, making conscious decisions

about what should stay and what should go. There's an editing process. There's a lot more stuff off the walls than on the walls. The best is a sub-sub-subset of all the possibilities.

Throw less at the problem

Watch chef Gordon Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares and you'll see a pattern. The menus at failing restaurants offer too many dishes. The owners think making every dish under the sun will broaden the appeal of the restaurant. Instead it makes for crappy food (and creates inventory headaches).

That's why Ramsay's first step is nearly always to trim the menu, usually from thirty-plus dishes to around ten. Think about that. Improving the current menu doesn't come first. Trimming it down comes first. Then he polishes what's left.

Focus on what won't change

The core of your business should be built around things that won't change. Things that people are going to want today and ten years from now. Those are the things you should invest in.

Amazon.com focuses on fast (or free) shipping, great selection, friendly return policies, and affordable prices. These things will always be in high demand.

Tone is in your fingers

People use equipment as a crutch. They don't want to put in the hours on the driving range so they spend a ton in the pro shop. They're looking for a shortcut. But you just don't need the best gear in the world to be good. And you definitely don't need it to get started.

In business, too many people obsess over tools, software tricks, scaling issues, fancy office space, lavish furniture, and other frivolities instead of what really matters. And what really matters is how to actually get customers and make money.

Sell your by-products

When you make something, you always make something else. You can't make just one thing. Everything has a by-product. Observant and creative business minds spot these by-products and see opportunities.

Software companies don't usually think about writing books. Bands don't usually think about filming the recording process. Car manufacturers don't usually think about selling charcoal. There's probably something you haven't thought about that

you could sell too.

Launch now

When is your product or service finished? When should you put it out on the market? When is it safe to let people have it? Probably a lot sooner than you're comfortable with. Once your product does what it needs to do, get it out there.

Put off anything you don't need for launch. Build the necessities now, worry about the luxuries later. If you really think about it, there's a whole lot you don't need on day one.

PRODUCTIVITY

Illusions of agreement

The business world is littered with dead documents that do nothing but waste people's time. Reports no one reads, diagrams no one looks at, and specs that never resemble the finished product. These things take forever to make but only seconds to forget.

If you need to explain something, try getting real with it. Instead of describing what something looks like, draw it. Instead of explaining what something sounds like, hum it. Do everything you can to remove layers of abstraction.

Reasons to quit

It's easy to put your head down and just work on what you think needs to be done. It's a lot harder to pull your head up and ask why. Here are some important questions to ask yourself to ensure you're doing work that matters:

- Why are you doing this?
- What problem are you solving?
- Is this actually useful?
- Are you adding value?
- Will this change behaviour?
- Is there an easier way?
- What could you be doing instead?
- Is it really worth it?

Interruption is the enemy of productivity

If you're constantly staying late and working weekends, it's not because there's too much work to be done. It's because you're not getting enough done at work. And the reason is interruptions.

Instead, you should get in the alone zone. Long stretches of alone time are when you're most productive

Getting into that zone takes time and requires avoiding interruptions. It's like REM sleep: You don't just go directly into REM sleep. You go to sleep first and then make your way to REM. Any interruptions force you to start over. And just as REM is when the real sleep magic happens, the alone zone is where the real productivity magic happens.

Meetings are toxic

When you think about it, the true cost of meetings is staggering. Let's say you're going to schedule a meeting that lasts one hour, and you invite ten people to attend. That's actually a ten-hour meeting, not a one-hour meeting. You're trading ten hours of productivity for one hour of meeting time.

Is it ever OK to trade ten or fifteen hours of productivity for one hour of meeting?

If you decide you absolutely must get together, try to make your meeting a productive one by sticking to these simple rules:

- Set a timer. When it rings, meeting's over. Period.
- Invite as few people as possible.
- Always have a clear agenda.
- Begin with a specific problem.
- Meet at the site of the problem instead of a conference room. Point to real things and suggest real changes.
- End with a solution and make someone responsible for implementing it.

Good enough is fine

A lot of people get off on solving problems with complicated solutions. Flexing your intellectual muscles can be intoxicating. Then you start looking for another big challenge that gives you that same rush, regardless of whether it's a good idea or not.

A better idea: Find a judo solution, one that delivers maximum efficiency with minimum effort. Judo solutions are all about getting the most out of doing the least. Whenever you face an obstacle, look for a way to judo it.

Quick wins

Momentum fuels motivation. It keeps you going. It drives you. Without it, you can't go anywhere. If you aren't motivated by what you're working on, it won't be very good.

The way you build momentum is by getting something done and then moving on to the next thing. No one likes to be stuck on an endless project with no finish line in sight. Being in the trenches for nine months and not having anything to show for it is a real buzzkill. Eventually it just burns you out. To keep your momentum and motivation up, get in the habit of accomplishing small victories along the way. Even a tiny improvement can give you a good jolt of momentum.

Don't be a hero

Keep in mind that the obvious solution might very well be quitting. People automatically associate quitting with failure, but sometimes that's exactly what you should do. If you already spent too much time on something that wasn't worth it, walk away. You can't get that time back. The worst thing you can do now is waste even more time.

Go to sleep

Forgoing sleep is a bad idea. Sure, you get those extra hours right now, but you pay in spades later: You destroy your creativity, morale, and attitude.

Your estimates suck

We're all terrible estimators. We think we can guess how long something will take, when we really have no idea. We see everything going according to a best-case scenario, without the delays that inevitably pop up. Reality never sticks to best-case scenarios.

The solution: Break the big thing into smaller things. The smaller it is, the easier it is to estimate. You're probably still going to get it wrong, but you'll be a lot less wrong than if you estimated a big project. If something takes twice as long as you expected, better to have it be a small project that's a couple weeks over rather than a long one that's a couple months over.

Keep breaking your time frames down into smaller chunks. Instead of one twelve-week project, structure it as twelve one-week projects. Instead of guesstimating at tasks that take thirty hours or more, break them down into more realistic six-to-ten-hour chunks. Then go one step at a time.

Long lists don't get done

Start making smaller to-do lists too. Long lists collect dust. When's the last time you finished a long list of things? You might have knocked off the first few, but chances are you eventually abandoned it (or blindly checked off items that weren't really done properly).

There's a better way. Break that long list down into a bunch of smaller lists. For example, break a single list of a hundred items into ten lists of ten items. That means when you finish an item on a list, you've completed 10 percent of that list, instead of 1 percent.

Make tiny decisions

Big decisions are hard to make and hard to change. And once you make one, the tendency is to continue believing you made the right decision, even if you didn't. You stop being objective.

Instead, make choices that are small enough that they're effectively temporary. When you make tiny decisions, you can't make big mistakes. These small decisions mean you can afford to change. There's no big penalty if you mess up. You just fix it.

COMPETITORS

Don't copy

Copying is a formula for failure. The problem with copying is it skips understanding —and understanding is how you grow. You have to understand why something works or why something is the way it is. When you just copy and paste, you miss that. You just repurpose the last layer instead of understanding all the layers underneath.

Decommoditize your product

If you're successful, people will try to copy what you do. It's just a fact of life. But there's a great way to protect yourself from copycats: Make you part of your product or service. Inject what's unique about the way you think into what you sell. Decommoditize your product. Make it something no one else can offer.

Pick a fight

If you think a competitor sucks, say so. When you do that, you'll find that others who agree with you will rally to your side. Being the anti-_____ is a great way to differentiate yourself and attract followers.

Underdo your competition

Do less than your competitors to beat them. Solve the simple problems and leave the hairy, difficult, nasty problems to the competition. Instead of one-upping, try one-downing. Instead of outdoing, try underdoing.

The bicycle world provides a great example. For years, major bicycle brands focused on the latest in hightech equipment: mountain bikes with suspension and ultrastrong disc brakes, or lightweight titanium road bikes with carbon-fiber everything. And it was assumed that bikes should have multiple gears: three, ten, or twenty-one.

But recently, fixed-gear bicycles have boomed in popularity, despite being as low-tech as you can get. These bikes have just one gear. Some models don't have brakes. The advantage: They're simpler, lighter, cheaper, and don't require as much maintenance.

Who cares what they're doing?

In the end, it's not worth paying much attention to the competition anyway. Why not? Because worrying about the competition quickly turns into an obsession. What are they doing right now? Where are they going next? How should we react?

Every little move becomes something to be analyzed. And that's a terrible mind-set. It leads to overwhelming stress and anxiety. That state of mind is bad soil for growing anything.

EVOLUTION

Say no by default

It's so easy to say yes. Yes to another feature, yes to an overly optimistic deadline, yes to a mediocre design. Soon, the stack of things you've said yes to grows so tall you can't even see the things you should really be doing.

Start getting into the habit of saying no—even to many of your best ideas. Use the power of no to get your priorities straight. You rarely regret saying no. But you often wind up regretting saying yes.

Let your customers outgrow you

When you stick with your current customers come hell or high water, you wind up cutting yourself off from new ones. Your product or service becomes so tailored to your current customers that it stops appealing to fresh blood. And that's how your company starts to die.

When you let customers outgrow you, you'll most likely wind up with a product that's basic—and that's fine. Small, simple, basic needs are constant. There's an endless supply of customers who need exactly that.

Don't confuse enthusiasm with priority

Coming up with a great idea gives you a rush. You start imagining the possibilities and the benefits. And of course, you want all that right away. So you drop everything else you're working on and begin pursuing your latest, greatest idea.

Bad move. The enthusiasm you have for a new idea is not an accurate indicator of its true worth. What seems like a sure-fire hit right now often gets downgraded to just a "nice to have" by morning. And "nice to have" isn't worth putting everything else on hold.

Be at-home good

You know what it feels like. You go to a store. You're comparing a few different products, and you're sold on the one that sounds like it's the best deal. It's got the most features. It looks the coolest. The packaging looks hot. There's sensational copy on the box. Everything seems great.

But then you get it home, and it doesn't deliver. It's not as easy to use as you thought it'd be. It has too many features you don't need. You end up feeling that you've been taken. You didn't really get what you needed and you realize you spent too much.

Smart companies make the opposite: something that's at-home good. When you get the product home, you're actually more impressed with it than you were at the store. You live with it and grow to like it more and more. And you tell your friends, too.

Don't write it down

How should you keep track of what customers want? Don't. Listen, but then forget what people said. Seriously.

There's no need for a spreadsheet, database, or filing system. The requests that really matter are the ones you'll hear over and over. After a while, you won't be able to forget them. Your customers will be your memory. They'll keep reminding you. They'll show you which things you truly need to worry about.

PROMOTION

Welcome obscurity

No one knows who you are right now. And that's just fine. Being obscure is a great position to be in. Be happy you're in the shadows.

Use this time to make mistakes without the whole world hearing about them. Keep tweaking. Work out the kinks. Test random ideas. Try new things. No one knows you, so it's no big deal if you mess up. Obscurity helps protect your ego and preserve your confidence.

Build an audience

Instead of going out to reach people, you want people to come to you. An audience returns often—on its own—to see what you have to say. This is the most receptive group of customers and potential customers you'll ever have.

When you build an audience, you don't have to buy people's attention—they give it to you. This is a huge advantage.

Out-teach your competition

Instead of trying to outspend, outsell, or outsponsor competitors, try to out-teach them. Teaching probably isn't something your competitors are even thinking about. Most businesses focus on selling or servicing, but teaching never even occurs to them.

Teach and you'll form a bond you just don't get from traditional marketing tactics. Buying people's attention with a magazine or online banner ad is one thing. Earning their loyalty by teaching them forms a whole different connection.

Emulate chefs

Emulate famous chefs. They cook, so they write cookbooks. What do you do? What are your "recipes"? What's your "cookbook"? What can you tell the world about how you operate that's informative, educational, and promotional? This book is our cookbook. What's yours?

Go behind the scenes

Give people a backstage pass and show them how your business works. Imagine that someone wanted to make a reality show about your business. What would they share? Now stop waiting for someone else and do it yourself.

Think no one will care? Think again. Even seemingly boring jobs can be fascinating when presented right. What could be more boring than commercial fishing and trucking? Yet the Discovery Channel and History Channel have turned these professions into highly rated shows: Deadliest Catch and Ice Road Truckers.

Nobody likes plastic flowers

Don't be afraid to show your flaws. Imperfections are real and people respond to real. It's why we like real flowers that wilt, not perfect plastic ones that never change. Don't worry about how you're supposed to sound and how you're supposed to act. Show the world what you're really like, warts and all.

Press releases are spam

If you want to get someone's attention, it's silly to do exactly the same thing as everyone else. You need to stand out. So why issue press releases like everyone else does? Why spam journalists when their inbox is already filled with other people's spam?

Instead, call someone. Write a personal note. If you read a story about a similar company or product, contact the journalist who wrote it. Pitch her with some passion, some interest, some life. Do something meaningful. Be remarkable. Stand out. Be unforgettable. That's how you'll get the best coverage.

Forget about the Wall Street Journal

Forget about Time, Forbes, Newsweek, Business Week, the New York Times, and the Wall Street Journal. Pitching a reporter at one of these places is practically impossible. Good luck even getting ahold of that guy. And even if you do, he probably won't care anyway. You're not big enough to matter.

You're better off focusing on getting your story into a trade publication or picked up by a niche blogger. With these outlets, the barrier is much lower. You can send an e-mail and get a response (and maybe even a post) the same day. There's no editorial board or PR person involved. There's no pipeline your message has to go through.

Drug dealers get it right

Drug dealers are astute businesspeople. They know their product is so good they're willing to give a little away for free upfront. They know you'll be back for more—with money.

Emulate drug dealers. Make your product so good, so addictive, so "can't miss" that giving customers a small, free taste makes them come back with cash in hand.

Marketing is not a department

Just as you cannot not communicate, you cannot not market:

- Every time you answer the phone, it's marketing.

- Every time you send an e-mail, it's marketing.
- Every time someone uses your product, it's marketing.
- Every word you write on your Web site is marketing.
- If you build software, every error message is marketing.

Recognize that all of these little things are more important than choosing which piece of swag to throw into a conference goodie bag.

The myth of the overnight sensation

You know those overnight-success stories you've heard about? It's not the whole story. Dig deeper and you'll usually find people who have busted their asses for years to get into a position where things could take off. And on the rare occasion that instant success does come along, it usually doesn't last—there's no foundation there to support it.

Trade the dream of overnight success for slow, measured growth. It's hard, but you have to be patient. You have to grind it out. You have to do it for a long time before the right people notice.

HIRING

Do it yourself first

Never hire anyone to do a job until you've tried to do it yourself first. That way, you'll understand the nature of the work. You'll know what a job well done looks like. You'll know how to write a realistic job description and which questions to ask in an interview. You'll know whether to hire someone full-time or part-time, outsource it, or keep doing it yourself (the last is preferable, if possible).

Hire when it hurts

Don't hire for pleasure; hire to kill pain. Always ask yourself: What if we don't hire anyone? Is that extra work that's burdening us really necessary? Can we solve the problem with a slice of software or a change of practice instead? What if we just don't do it?

Pass on great people

Pass on hiring people you don't need, even if you think that person's a great catch. You'll be doing your company more harm than good if you bring in talented people who have nothing important to do.

Problems start when you have more people than you need. You start inventing work to keep everyone busy. Artificial work leads to artificial projects. And those artificial projects lead to real costs and complexity.

Strangers at a cocktail party

Hire a ton of people rapidly and a “strangers at a cocktail party” problem is exactly what you end up with. There are always new faces around, so everyone is unfailingly polite. Everyone tries to avoid any conflict or drama. No one says, “This idea sucks.” People appease instead of challenge.

And that appeasement is what gets companies into trouble. You need to be able to tell people when they’re full of crap. If that doesn’t happen, you start churning out something that doesn’t offend anyone but also doesn’t make anyone fall in love.

Resumés are ridiculous

If someone sends out a resumé to three hundred companies, that’s a huge red flag right there. There’s no way that applicant has researched you. There’s no way he knows what’s different about your company.

You want a specific candidate who cares specifically about your company, your products, your customers, and your job.

In a cover letter, you get actual communication instead of a list of skills, verbs, and years of irrelevance. There’s no way an applicant can churn out hundreds of personalized letters. That’s why the cover letter is a much better test than a resumé. You hear someone’s actual voice and are able recognize if it’s in tune with you and your company.

Years of irrelevance

We’ve all seen job ads that say, “Five years of experience required.” That may give you a number, but it tells you nothing.

Of course, requiring some baseline level of experience can be a good idea when hiring. It makes sense to go after candidates with six months to a year of experience.

But after that, the curve flattens out. There’s surprisingly little difference between a candidate with six months of experience and one with six years. The real difference comes from the individual’s dedication, personality, and intelligence.

Forget about formal education

Don’t excel in the classroom. Don’t fall into the trap of thinking you need someone from one of the “best” schools in order to get results. Ninety percent of CEOs currently heading the top five hundred American companies did not receive undergraduate degrees from Ivy League colleges.

Consider dropouts, people who had low GPAs, community-college students, and even those who just went to high school.

Everybody works

With a small team, you need people who are going to do work, not delegate work. Everyone's got to be producing. No one can be above the work.

Hire managers of one

Managers of one are people who come up with their own goals and execute them. They don't need heavy direction. They don't need daily check-ins. They do what a manager would do—set the tone, assign items, determine what needs to get done, etc.—but they do it by themselves and for themselves.

Hire great writers

If you are trying to decide among a few people to fill a position, hire the best writer. It doesn't matter if that person is a marketer, salesperson, designer, programmer, or whatever; their writing skills will pay off.

That's because being a good writer is about more than writing. Clear writing is a sign of clear thinking. Great writers know how to communicate. They make things easy to understand. They can put themselves in someone else's shoes. They know what to omit. And those are qualities you want in any candidate.

The best are everywhere

It's crazy not to hire the best people just because they live far away. Especially now that there's so much technology out there making it easier to bring everyone together online.

Geography just doesn't matter anymore. Hire the best talent, regardless of where it is.

Test-drive employees

Interviews are only worth so much. You need to evaluate the work they can do now, not the work they say they did in the past.

The best way to do that is to actually see them work. Hire them for a miniproject, even if it's for just twenty or forty hours. You'll get to judge them by their actions instead of just their words.

DAMAGE CONTROL

Own your bad news

When something goes wrong, someone is going to tell the story. You'll be better off if it's you. Otherwise, you create an opportunity for rumors, hearsay, and false information to spread.

Speed changes everything

Getting back to people quickly is probably the most important thing you can do when it comes to customer service. It's amazing how much that can defuse a bad situation and turn it into a good one.

How to say you're sorry

A good apology accepts responsibility. It has no conditional if phrase attached. It shows people that the buck stops with you. And then it provides real details about what happened and what you're doing to prevent it from happening again. And it seeks a way to make things right.

Put everyone on the front lines

Everyone on your team should be connected to your customers—maybe not every day, but at least a few times throughout the year. That's the only way your team is going to feel the hurt your customers are experiencing. It's feeling the hurt that really motivates people to fix the problem. And the flip side is true too: The joy of happy customers or ones who have had a problem solved can also be wildly motivating.

Take a deep breath

When people complain, let things simmer for a while. Let them know you're listening. Show them you're aware of what they're saying. Let them know you understand their discontent. But explain that you're going to let it go for a while and see what happens. You'll probably find that people will adjust eventually. They may even wind up liking the change more than the old way, once they get used to it.

CULTURE

You don't create a culture

You don't create a culture. It happens. This is why new companies don't have a culture. Culture is the byproduct of consistent behavior. If you encourage people to share, then sharing will be built into your culture. If you reward trust, then trust will be built in. If you treat customers right, then treating customers right becomes your culture.

Decisions are temporary

But what if ...? "What happens when ...?" "Don't we need to plan for ...?"

Don't make up problems you don't have yet. It's not a problem until it's a real problem. Most of the things you worry about never happen anyway.

Besides, the decisions you make today don't need to last forever. It's easy to shoot down good ideas, interesting policies, or worthwhile experiments by assuming that whatever you decide now needs to work for years on end.

Skip the rock stars

A lot of companies post help-wanted ads seeking "rock stars" or "ninjas." *Lame.*

Instead of thinking about how you can land a roomful of rock stars, think about the room instead. We're all capable of bad, average, and great work. The environment has a lot more to do with great work than most people realize.

Rockstar environments develop out of trust, autonomy, and responsibility. They're a result of giving people the privacy, workspace, and tools they deserve.

They're not thirteen

When you treat people like children, you get children's work. Yet that's exactly how a lot of companies and managers treat their employees. Employees need to ask permission before they can do anything. They need to get approval for every tiny expenditure. It's surprising they don't have to get a hall pass to go take a shit.

When everything constantly needs approval, you create a culture of nonthinkers. You create a boss-versus-worker relationship that screams, "I don't trust you."

Send people home at 5

When people have something to do at home, they get down to business. They get their work done at the office because they have somewhere else to be. They find ways to be more efficient because they have to. They need to pick up the kids or get to choir practice. So they use their time wisely.

As the saying goes, "If you want something done, ask the busiest person you know." You want busy people. People who have a life outside of work. People who care about more than one thing. You shouldn't expect the job to be someone's entire life—at least not if you want to keep them around for a long time.

Don't scar on the first cut

Policies are organizational scar tissue. They are codified overreactions to situations that are unlikely to happen again. They are collective punishment for the misdeeds of an individual.

This is how bureaucracies are born. No one sets out to create a bureaucracy. They sneak up on companies slowly. They are created one policy—one scar—at a time.

Sound like you

What is it with businesspeople trying to sound big? The stiff language, the formal announcements, the artificial friendliness, the legalese, etc. You read this stuff and it sounds like a robot wrote it. These companies talk at you, not to you.

There's nothing wrong with sounding your own size. Being honest about who you are is smart business, too. Language is often your first impression—why start it off with a lie? Don't be afraid to be you.

Four-letter words

There are four-letter words you should never use in business. They're not fuck or shit. They're need, must, can't, easy, just, only, and fast. These words get in the way of healthy communication. They are red flags that introduce animosity, torpedo good discussions, and cause projects to be late.

When you use these four-letter words, you create a black-and-white situation. But the truth is rarely black and white. So people get upset and problems ensue. Tension and conflict are injected unnecessarily.

And these words are especially dangerous when you string them together: "We need to add this feature now. We can't launch without this feature. Everyone wants it. It's only one little thing so it will be easy. You should be able to get it in there fast!" Only thirty-six words, but a hundred assumptions. That's a recipe for disaster.

ASAP is poison

Stop saying ASAP. We get it. It's implied. Everyone wants things done as soon as they can be done.

When you turn into one of these people who adds ASAP to the end of every request, you're saying everything is high priority. And when everything is high priority, nothing is. (Funny how everything is a top priority until you actually have to prioritize things.)

CONCLUSION

Inspiration is perishable

If you want to do something, you've got to do it now. You can't put it on a shelf and wait two months to get around to it. You can't just say you'll do it later. Later, you won't be pumped up about it anymore.

Inspiration is a magical thing, a productivity multiplier, a motivator. But it won't wait for you. Inspiration is a now thing. If it grabs you, grab it right back and put it to work.