

THE COMMONSENSE

M B A

The Seven Practices
of *ENDURING*
BUSINESSES for
the Entrepreneur

RICHARD M. ASTLE

Foreword by **STEPHEN R. COVEY**

The Commonsense MBA

The Seven Practices of Enduring Businesses for the Entrepreneur

by Richard M. Astle



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To Teri, my wife

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**The Seven Practices of Enduring Businesses
for the Entrepreneur**

It don't make no difference what you do as long as you're
the boss.

Mike Smith

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Foreword

by Stephen R. Covey

Richard Astle and I share a deep belief in the inherent capacity of people to be self-aware, creative, resourceful, and proactive. Richard writes about “Seven Practices of Enduring Businesses,” and I write about “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.” And while we both believe in the tremendous value of education, we also recognize that much of our real learning comes after our formal education. As Mark Twain said, you should “never let schooling interfere with your education.” Renewing our intellectual capital is a never-ending, life-long process.

Richard, too, sees the importance of building trust on the basis of trustworthy character. However, he puts greater emphasis on the “common sense” and obvious factors that significantly improve an entrepreneur’s chances for success. These factors include a ceaseless dedication to dependability, punctuality, fidelity to one’s word, prudence, and financial restraint.

We both speak of a curious phenomenon—people climbing the ladder of success only to discover that it’s leaning against the wrong wall.

Indeed, many people these days are climbing faster and better, and they are getting nowhere more efficiently. Still others live with the illusion that what they want is what they need, and that achieving what they want will lead to happiness and fulfillment. And it often isn’t until they reach the top rung that they finally face the reality behind their illusions and see that there’s something beyond their misplaced values that impacts their quality of life. Only then do they wake up to discover their shattered relationships or long-lost moments of rich living in the wake of their once intense efforts aimed at bringing recognition or financial reward.

Many of these people have deep desires to increase personal and professional effectiveness. They begin to sense that there are better ways to do things—and maybe better things to do—to bring about quality results. But one thing is for sure: if we keep doing what we’re doing, we’ll keep getting what we’ve always gotten. One definition of insanity is “to keep doing the same things and expect different results.”

Encouragement and Wisdom

In this book, Richard Astle offers encouragement to entrepreneurs who often live in perpetual crisis as they respond to midnight wake-up calls and midday client and employee “fire alarms.” He also offers wisdom—an invitation to listen to that inner sense that is not so common in the day-to-day practice of business.

Richard notes that certain things *are* fundamental to business success, just as certain things are basic to human fulfillment and quality of life. If these “first things” are not put first, we can expect to feel empty, incomplete, and unfulfilled. Strength in our capacity to live, to love, to learn, and to leave a legacy cannot be faked. It must be nurtured over time by our actions and decisions. By consistently putting the first things first, we become more empowered to lead our lives, not just manage our time.

Just as real as “true north” is in the physical world, so the timeless laws of cause and effect operate in the world of personal effectiveness and human interaction. The collective wisdom of the ages reveals these “true north” principles as recurring themes, foundational to every great person or society. Creating and sustaining quality of life is a function of aligning our beliefs and behaviors with these “true north” principles.

If our current “direction of travel” is not in alignment with these principles, then it will take real humility and self-awareness to subordinate our value-based maps to a principle-centered compass. Even then, Richard would say, only constant vigilance will keep us on the right path. Those who fail to regularly check their position with these compasses will soon see their clients, together with their profits, head south for a very long winter. When we recognize that external verities and realities ultimately govern, we ought to willingly align with them all our roles and goals, plans and activities.

No More Crisis Management

Reading Richard’s book gives us a sure way out of crisis management. His “seven practices” are based on what I call the timeless “agricultural principles.”

In agriculture, we can easily see that natural laws and principles govern the work and determine the harvest. But in social and corporate cul-

tures, we somehow think we can dismiss natural processes, cheat the system, and still win the day. Indeed, there is much evidence to support our belief.

For example, did you ever “cram” in school—goof off during the semester—and then spend all night before the big test trying to cram a semester’s worth of learning into your head?

I’m ashamed to admit it, but I crammed my way through undergraduate school, thinking I was really clever because I could psych out the system by learning what the teacher wanted. “How does she grade? If she grades mostly on lectures, then I don’t have to worry about reading the text. What about this other class? We have to read the book? Okay, where are the Cliff Notes so I can get a quick summary instead?” I wanted the grade, but I didn’t want it to crimp my lifestyle.

Then I got into the MBA program at Harvard Business School—a different league altogether. I spent my first three months cramming to make up for four years of academic negligence, and I wound up in the hospital with ulcerated colitis. I was trying to short-cut natural processes, and I found out that it doesn’t work.

Richard’s book is a swift kick out of the comfort zone for those who live by cramming and the “quick fix.” He writes about the natural process of personal success. He teaches us that even though in the short term cramming and quick fixes appear to work in school or business, these won’t work well in any system for the long term. If the laws of a country, city, family, or company are not in sync with natural laws and timeless principles, we can expect that people will resort to doing their own thing.

If we cram in school, we may get grades and degrees—even MBAs—but we won’t get a quality education. We eventually discover a difference between economic or political success in a social system and true success in life. The latter requires what Richard calls the “MBA” of common sense—the ability to think analytically and creatively, to communicate verbally and in writing, to cross borders and solve problems. These are skills that every entrepreneur needs, in spades.

Center of Correct Principles and Practices

Richard Astle keeps us focused on the differences between wants and needs, faith and fear, positive and negative, humility and pride. Humility,

in my experience, comes from knowing that principles ultimately govern—and that we're only effective to the degree we discover and live in harmony with them. With humility, we can cultivate the attitudes and habits of continual learning. We become involved in an ongoing quest to understand and live in harmony with the Laws of Life. We don't get caught up in the arrogance of values, which blinds us to self-awareness and makes us insensitive to conscience.

Our security is not based on our possessions, positions, and credentials, or on comparisons with others; instead, our security comes from our own integrity to "true north" principles.

Whenever we fail or make a mistake or hit a principle head-on, we say, "What can I learn from this experience?" As we learn where we went wrong, we can turn weaknesses into strengths.

"What I like about experience," wrote C. S. Lewis, "is that it is such an honest thing. You may have deceived yourself, but experience is not trying to deceive you. The universe rings true wherever you fairly test it."

With the humility that comes from being principle-centered, we can better learn from the past, have hope for the future, and act with confidence, not arrogance, in the present. Arrogance is lack of self-awareness, blindness, an illusion, a false form of self-confidence, and a false sense that we're somehow above the Laws of Life. Real confidence is anchored in the quiet assurance that if we act based on true principles, we will produce quality-of-life results. It's confidence born of character and competence.

Ultimately, it is not the MBA or any other degree declared by simple diploma that will determine your success. It is the Commonsense MBA—a degree that builds upon formal education through real world experience and the patient adherence to timeless principles, and then demonstrated by trust and integrity. This leads not only to entrepreneurial success and achievement, but to true life enrichment and personal happiness.

Studying this material will reconvince you that what is common sense is not always common practice.

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