Small Island, Big Business

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Abstract

My project will explain the reasoning and results of applying a business knowledge and expertise to various aspects of the working experience. As I reminisce on past work experiences, I try to understand how the concepts taught in business courses resonate throughout my work. I want to display a new perception on the motivation within the workplace through the eyes of a business student. The implied author of my project is one who is trying to see the underlying motivations behind conducting their work and what sorts of conclusions they draw upon so as to justify their actions. Reflecting on how my previous knowledge shaped my decisions and reactions throughout multiple job experiences. The narration will remain mellow with the occasional rant and provide a sense of maturity as the paper progresses. I aim to include readers who view work as nothing more than a time waster, for it is their motivations to work which are in question. Lastly, I hope to reach other business majors and see if their experiences differ or coincide with my own. My audience will be learning as much from me, as I from them.
PROLOGUE

There really is a secret to success: You have to see it. Maybe your vision of success includes a yacht with a bowling alley on the inside, or maybe for another it is having a child with the one you love. Regardless, our hopes and dreams of success are shown to determine our actions in life and we begin to form habits to see our goals realized. Personally, I have been taught to believe that success comes from applying what you have learned to realize goals. Being a business major, I have seen a great deal of influence on how I view success and have concluded it is attributed to four qualities; you must master your craft, build connections, see the big picture, and be prepared to fail. I must remind myself of these traits to become the businessman I have always hoped to be.

“All we are is our ideas, or people. That's what keeps us going to work in the morning, to hang around these great bright people” – Steve Jobs. (Jobs & Beahm). Wise words from one of the biggest businessmen this century has seen so far. Steve Jobs was able to gain a cult-like following from his consumers and employees, while his business saw increasing profits from selling the widely popular Apple products. Steve Jobs met the criteria of a perfect businessman, in my eyes. His ability to take a simple idea and evolve it into an international business amazes me to this day. Jobs, like many successful businessmen, has inspired me to focus my academics in the Business school of my university. Since then I have dreamed of my future, and feared it as well.

I did not always want to go into business studies and only recently did I decide it was the right choice. Like many students in college I went through the motions, hoping my laziness was not too apparent and that I would eventually figure out a career path or
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at least select a major. As I took courses revolving around the economy and general business workings, I began to grow a fascination with how one person can create something that attracts so many people of various backgrounds. I learned that businesses are what run the world and they can better communities as well as the economy. I decided it was my calling to apply to the business school at my local university, but I had no idea where to start. I had to observe and envision what it took to be an ideal businessman.

So, what is a businessman, exactly? The answer to this question varies, but there are several overall qualities I believe each and every business minded individual possesses. We live by these standards as they influence our decisions, reactions, and opinions. For me I can easily spot a business person, not only by their attire, but by their attitude and the way they carry themselves. This holds true in the business school I attend, as the people I believe to be successful usually are. A business minded individual knows what they want, and how to get it. They start off like any other student, but immersing themselves in the world of business prepares them to achieve numerous successes in their lifetime.

I often wander around the Shidler College of Business at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and simply people watch. You see newly admitted students in their casual apparel, walking around with a sense of satisfaction as they get closer to their dreams. You can also see students nearing the end of their academic careers, dressed in fancy clothes and attending club meetings or business night interviews. You tend to see the veterans, if you will, around campus less often, as they begin to prepare for their careers. Regardless, I find myself at awe that our greatly distinct life-choices have
brought us to a common ground; a place where we hope to succeed in the business world, through hard work and cooperation, a place where dreams can be realized.

One aspect of business is that you must always have a goal, a dream. It is what inspires us to work hard. It is what gets us out of the bed every morning and also what gets us to strive to be better. To me that dream is to own a skateboarding company. I have been skating for over seven years now and have even suffered ligament tears in my knee around the two year mark. That did not stop me. They say if you love what you do for work, you’ll live a happy life. For me, skateboarding provided an outlet for creativity, and for others, it can be something even greater. I have seen skateboarding bring people together who may have nothing in common but the love of skating. I wanted to start a company that did just these things: Inspire and connect people within the community. I cannot do it yet, but as I acquire the qualities of a businessman, I shall succeed!

The qualities that make a successful business person vary across job spectrums, so narrowing it down was not easy. I came to choosing these four because of my own experiences in school, work, and with my peers. Whether through interviews, novels, or websites, I have found these common traits amongst individuals involved in business firms, schools, and associations. Although broad, these qualities are powerful in shaping the minds of business-minded individuals and molding them into one’s ultimate version of success.

QUALITY #1: MASTERING YOUR STRENGTHS
The first quality a business person possesses is the desire to master their strengths and weaknesses. It is important we assess our own strengths and weaknesses constantly, working to become the best person we can be. We want to be able to solve any problem that arises. It is less about being better than others, and more about growing confidence. It reminds me of a quote by Thomas Edison: “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won't work” (“Thomas”). We focus our attention on what makes us unique and work on qualities that make us struggle in our quest for success. It is said it takes ten years to master a skill, and as a business person, every day we must strive to better ourselves, whether inside or outside of the workplace. We take it one day at a time, and before we know it we have mastered a new talent.

In school I am constantly reminded of what makes a strong business person, and even what makes a weak one. The Business curriculum forces students to master public speaking, one-on-one meetings, and ability to lead others, amongst a plethora of other skills. If you fail to meet one of these, you are not necessarily a bad businessman, but a weaker one than most. Being a competitive person, I tend to over-prepare myself for any situation, whether it is a presentation, project or simply a group meeting. To me and most business majors we do not enjoy being under-prepared as it can cause issues for one’s peers as well. The courses offered at Shidler College of Business prepare us to assess ourselves as well as the business world around us.

Upon acceptance to Shidler they require you take 5-6 core business classes. Most of them revolve around the basics of spreadsheets, global business, finance, marketing and the economy. I love that they require these courses because it allows students to form a basic understanding of the aspects of business and what skills are
necessary to succeed. I found that the marketing course was easier for me and that it was more enjoyable than the others. I also realized that finance courses were difficult and using excel spreadsheets became an issue in all my classes. Eventually I began teaching myself excel and furthering my knowledge of finance to prepare myself for the workplace. “I love Shidler. When I entered the college I had little skill with finance, management and accounting, but the challenge bettered me as a person, and as a student. I was able to seek and seize new opportunities that showcased my new talents” – Kelly Chin; International Business/Human Resource Student at Shidler (Chin)

The first instance when I began addressing my strengths and weaknesses outside of an academic setting was when I was washing dishes at my first job. I got the job my sophomore year of college. It was a takeout Mexican Restaurant and for the sake of privacy we’ll call it “Salsas.” At Salsas I assessed that I was a good worker that constantly asked questions (for fear of messing up). I learned I was good at remembering instructions and procedures. However, it also came to my attention that I lacked efficient communication skills. My boss would instruct me to ask how the customer’s meal was and if there were any other services I could provide for them. I began to over think things and feared I would fail miserably. I would avoid speaking with customers and co-workers, hoping to simply work and go home with no complications. It even came to a point where I was called out by my co-workers for not speaking enough, which hurt the efficiency of the restaurant. They wanted me to become more outgoing because they saw I worked hard and that my weakness was communication skills.

I began making a conscious effort to speak to my co-workers and customers more often. As I made strides in breaking my habit of “anti-socialness” I began seeing
positive changes, even outside of the workplace. My newfound ability to speak allowed me to make better connections and understand new perspectives. I began seeing the thought process of my peers and how complex problems usually have simple solutions if you talk it out. I was able to gain new insight on the lives of customers and workers, and what motivates them, frustrates them, and makes them unique. As humans, one of our greatest accomplishments is written and formal communication, a trait we all should learn to respect and master. Mastering the many forms of speaking and conveying ideas opens the door for new opportunities and relationships.

As we all know, good things come to an end; or rather all things do. Leaving Salsas was bittersweet and I was anxious to be job hunting again. After applying to a few jobs through Craigslist and my student employment website, I was contacted with a job offer on my college campus. In February of 2014 I began my new job at the William S. Richardson School of Law Library. Like most jobs, the library brings its fair share of problems as well. In many ways I am the face of the library; by that I mean I am the first person a patron sees upon entering the building. I already feared the questions they would ask me that I would be unable to answer, the new problems I would have to face. I was falling back into old habits of mediocre communication skills and I never addressed this problem again until my supervisor brought it to my attention. She claimed I had to prepare myself and not be scared to work alone. I felt ashamed that as a business student I was purposely ignoring my weakness and only then did I accept and work towards fixing my fault. Anyone can say they have a weakness, but it is the ones who act to develop their weakness to become strength that become successful. I had to start doing things and letting my actions speak for themselves. I may not have
addressed this issue again but having a supervisor who cares and wants me to improve sparked my motivation to change. Her name is Lynette and she is one of the best supervisors I have had, and her ability to work well with others to give positive feedback allows for a cohesive workforce. “Most workers, students and people lack compassion. I try to lead by example and show that kindness is a dying quality more people should display” – Lynette Rodolfo, Law Library Public Services Manager (Rodolfo)

One aspect of my job is being evaluated in a performance appraisal where my supervisor will sit me down and explain what I can do better and what I need to work on. In my work life writing course we studied this evaluation and it got generally negative reviews. However, I believe they are beneficial in that most people do not address their own problems, or if they are aware, just need someone to tell them in order to change. I tend to utilize the layout of an appraisal when giving constructive criticism to a friend, family member or co-worker. For instance, a current co-worker would refuse to speak to me when I had questions about what happened during the previous shift. She would then speak to me briefly to the point where I was getting frustrated. I decided to speak to her about the problem as I saw no harm in informing her that her actions were not only inappropriate to me but hurt the library’s ability to function smoothly.

Communication is a key component in running a business, a quality I expect from myself and others. To be a better businessperson we must master our craft, our strengths, our weaknesses, and continue to do so even after we reach success.

QUALITY #2: BUILDING CONNECTIONS
The second quality businesspeople seek is the ability to build connections. By this, I mean create relationships that are mutually beneficial, a form of synergy if you will. It is our desire to be appreciated and that sense of satisfaction is what keeps business processes flowing. A true connection brings about mutual respect and an appreciation for the unique qualities that different people have to offer. We build bonds that encourage both parties to grow and succeed through cooperation. Although not all relationships are beneficial, they are all a learning experience. In my International Business course we had to form groups and do research on a certain company to present it to the class. With group members not showing up and deadlines not being met, it was a struggle for me to form any type of relationship with them. I persisted, and in the end we began to understand one another and what it meant to each of us to put in our fair share. Understanding people is the first step in building a meaningful connection.

At Salsas I thought of myself as the smartest person on the whole staff, and that's not saying much. If a second year college student is worried about his 30+ year old co-worker not doing his job, there are bound to be problems. However, I relished the responsibility, as it prepared me to handle all the bad co-workers I was bound to encounter. So I digress in saying we seek strictly beneficial relationships, because there are always bound to be bad ones that teach us new things. I was assuming I held greater knowledge than my grossly incompetent co-workers, in all aspects of life. This limited my ability to form a proper relationship with them. Once I realized that everyone in the world knows something you do not I was able to open up to them and vise versa. We began appreciating one another for the unique abilities we each brought to Salsas.
On the notion of appreciation, it is the main reason I left Salsas. After working hard to receive a raise, I was told that I was not doing well enough and did not deserve it. I would travel across the island to work and was never late. I would deliver supplies to both locations using the company van. I worked on their social media outlets for free and I even took the role of the black sheep by informing my bosses of any issues that arose in the workplace. Then, to my surprise, numerous co-workers of mine received raises. Mind you, near the end of my Salsas employment the bosses introduced an ex-convict working program that would save them money. Even my co-workers that drank on the job, complained, and half-assed everything got raises. Lastly, before these issues, I was threatened to be fired because I could not come into work after severely spraining my ankle. What hurt was that not only was my work going unappreciated, but myself as a person was too. The connections I thought were real were simply moments of exploitation and I was left feeling bittersweet and disappointed. I made it my goal that next time around I would make meaningful connections and be sure that we understood each other.

At my current job at the law library I began to build connections immediately. My first task was memorizing names and being sure to ask for help as much as I can. I even furthered this by reaching for formal relationships with my patrons, as they are just as important to the library as the staff. My marketing professor always states that if you know the right people and have a drive for success, you will be sure to achieve anything. My goal at my new job was to become more than just another worker, to instead become a worker who was respected by his peers, someone who would contribute to others’ and the library’s successes. “You know it isn’t about being the bad
guy, telling people what to do. It’s being the person people want to be around, the
person who they look for when they need help or an example” – Kelsey Domingo; Law
Library Public Services Manager. (Domingo) It is often asked, “What connections are
good to have?” I will start by saying a professional relationship is necessary when it
comes to an employee-boss dynamic. My old bosses at Salsas were from Vegas and
Mexico and had worked their whole lives in restaurants. They felt their skills were strong
enough to begin their own business endeavor in Hawaii and established Salsas a few
years ago. They were a married couple that had lovable personalities and a charm to
match. Unfortunately, it leads to conflicting emotions when it came to maintaining
friendship over business. I was saddened that our relationship turned sour but knew it
was better for the both of us that we seek new connections and opportunities.

A key relationship every person must seek is a mentor-student relationship. I
remember reading something along the lines of, “If you are the smartest person in the
room, you are in the wrong room,” and that quotes sticks with me. It is imperative we
seek mentors who will groom us into competent adults, something I was and still am
lacking. We cannot do it on our own and finding someone to guide us is essential to our
professional growth. I did not have one at Salsas, nor do I really have one currently. Not
only do mentors guide us but they challenge us to think critically and act in new ways
contrary to our own. They were like us once, and have gained the knowledge and
experience to prepare the next generation for the things we will face. As most of the
professors hold an MBA, they all explain the importance of mentors. “Surround yourself
with people on the same mission as you. It is imperative as students you seek people
outside of your peer-group. Everybody knows something you don’t.” – Kelsey Domingo; Law Library Public Services Manager (Domingo)

I often ponder who I look up to, and what they do that inspires me. I cannot narrow it down to one person, but a collection of individuals, some of whom are political leaders in countries such as Brazil, which has seen substantial economic growth from pleasing the people. Others include teachers in the business school, for they show passion about their subjects and are willing to teach their subjects to aspiring students like myself. Lastly I look up to a handful of students on campus. Working at the law school I see the same faces, day in and day out, studying cases or writing memos. These people know what they want in life and work hard to do it. They are the type of people you want around you, helping you succeed.

QUALITY #3: SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

The third quality business minded individuals possess is that we see the big picture. Basically, we make decisions based off possible repercussions and look for those which are the most beneficial. We see short and long term opportunities. We make a plan for success. For instance, most businesses use Henry Foyal’s Five Functions of Managers to structure productivity. They Plan, Organize, Command/Lead, Coordinate and Control (Mindtool). Although usage of this technique varies, the results are similar in that managers are able to find and execute solutions effectively. For example, my job at the library conducts work orders that are issued frequently and I am often asked to assign people to a given task. I have to plan what is the most effective way to complete this, organize the materials and procedures to use, command and lead
my peers to success, and control by making sure they did their work in a timely and efficient manner.

Another concept in business is a SWOT analysis, a method used to identify a company’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Using this effectively will allow a business to make better decisions to their benefit. I decided to apply this method to my job experiences and my self. My strengths were the ability to work and learn quickly, along with deploying personable skills. My weaknesses included trying to communicate the same message to my peers with different personalities. My opportunities were to train my weaknesses and strengthen my strengths, as well as access to academic resources. My threats were my weaknesses as they held me back. I also saw some of my peers as weaknesses, as they bring out traits in me that can hold me back, such as conversing when I should be working. After applying the SWOT analysis to myself I decided to do it for my past job as Salsas.

Salsas was a popular restaurant, and like most food service industries, it had its ups and downs. I realized the strengths were the food and location. The food was delicious and would attract regulars and tourists from across the island. Having the location a few miles from the university campus allowed them to reach a booming college market. The fact that they have a “bring your own alcohol” policy is also a huge attraction. The strengths of Salsas were apparent but in order to thrive as a successful business, it is the weaknesses that you must constantly address.

Salsas had numerous weaknesses that slowed down the business processes. The first weakness was its fixed menu. My bosses would refuse certain items even though 90% of the customers demanded it. Not only was the menu fixed, but the
procedures were as well. They did not want to change, expand or even take risks, which in the end left them with unstable employees and a fluctuating fan base. The ability to change and adapt is what makes a person, brand, or company successful. “You have to be creative as well as innovative. People will always be scared to try new things, but you have to risk it for the biscuit. Change is a part of life, and those to who change are destined to perish or repeat their failures” – Kelly Chin: Shidler IB Student (Chin)

Salsas had many opportunities. I saw these opportunities the moment I assessed their weaknesses. They could have expanded into numerous popular locations but chose the wrong ones. They could have taken advantage of social media platforms to promote their business and products. Even expanding their menu or store hours would have increased popularity. There are also many events such as Eat the Streets, Oktoberfest and concerts they could have attended. I saw giving back to the community and those less fortunate as opportunities to help others and as another way to build a reputable business.

Finally, Salsas had many threats. Their biggest one was Yelp. Although not a restaurant, the mobile and online application provides a service that can make or break a food chain’s reputation. In this case it hurt Salsas, as the constant change of employees altered the quality and consistency of their food, and the customers knew that. They would leave negative food reviews and I have since seen their ratings fluctuate from the usual positive comments. I could not help but relate this to how consistency is preached in every one of my business courses. Being consistent allows you to be reliable, and people will trust you. Like most businesses that fail, they did not see the big picture.
QUALITY #4: WE FAIL

Lastly, in business, we fail more than we succeed. We are not afraid of taking risks. I am not telling everyone to make sure you fail, but to expect it. It made me realize that learning from our mistakes is imperative. We will not know what is good until we know what is bad. We love the challenge of failing and cannot wait to fix our mistakes and better ourselves professionally. I personally thank skateboarding for this. I started when I was 15 and still skate till this day. I cannot count the number of times I fell but decided to get back up. As I progressed, I soon became a teacher and gave advice to the less experienced skaters. Applying this to my work and school life has taught me that no matter how many times you fall, you have to get up, and when you can’t, your friends will be there to help you. There will always be opportunities to learn from your mistakes and try new things. In this regard we gain new skills, relationships, and even more opportunities to succeed.

After washing dishes for a few months at Salsas I decided to try my hand as a cashier. I wanted to do this but feared I would fail. However, I took the risk and the reward was worth it. I began to excel at speaking with customers and even made friends with a few. It is expected that when you try new things you are bound to fail at some point. A quote from a cartoon show always resonates with me when I try new things: “Sucking at something is the first step to being sorta good at something” – Jake the Dog; Adventure Time Cartoon (“Sucking”).

The willingness to fail is the quality I struggle with the most. Even in my current workplace I will continue to flock to situations that showcase my strengths and avoid
those that display my weaknesses. Failing is not a good feeling, but failing on a task where you are relied upon by others is an even worse feeling. In business you must realize that failure is a part of the process, and everyone in the world has experienced it in one way or another.

One instance where my failure almost ruined me and risked my employment was during a shift at Salsas in Waimanalo. The phone rang and upon answering it I was told this person wanted to speak to my cook. It sounded urgent but I remember my bosses telling me that the land line was not for personal calls and if someone asks for them I should not give them the phone. I did not listen and it turns out the cook’s Mom went into the hospital and he freaked out. He up and left the restaurant with no other cooks and orders to fill. My human side was apathetic as I probably would have done the same thing; however, I had to think on my feet, and luckily got ahold of another cook near the restaurant. All the while my bosses were off island, making matters worse. I failed to follow procedure and in the end forced myself to follow the rules and really think my decisions through and what repercussions they might bring.

Everyone knows by now that failure is a key ingredient in success, no matter the educational background. Business people see their failures affecting the organization or group as a whole. When I fail, my co-workers suffer, and when I learn from my mistake, they benefit. It is this process that allows “proper cohesiveness” and reliability in the workplace.

EPILOGUE
Overall these are a few qualities I believe every businessman or woman should possess. It is these traits that breed success in our field and allows for individuals to succeed at their own personal endeavors as well. In life we all must learn to know our strengths and weaknesses, build connections, plan for success, and prepare for failure. Regardless of your preferred field of study, not only do these situations produce competent and unique people, but workers as well. As I sit here typing this paper I often drift off with thoughts of the future. How will my career go? Will I continue to exemplify these traits? Has my paper changed the way people view work? I cannot help but only envision success. I tend to be optimistic about the future and hope that I continue to work towards being successful. Regardless of what happens, my knowledge of business has prepared me to conquer almost any given situation and I will continue to do my best to reach my goals and accomplish my dream of being a part of the big world of businessmen on this small island.

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