

Alex Vorobieff

Transform Your Company

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The Circle of Frustration

“Why is it so difficult?”

After years of listening to frustrated business owners lament the difficulties of running a business, I noticed something: they were sitting on a country music gold mine.

Only instead of singing about lost love, broken pickup trucks, and warm beer, the frustrated business owner sings about horrible meetings, email hell, and fighting fires all day, every day.

Sound familiar?

You hear about how running a business is supposed to feel. It’s supposed to be engaging. You’re supposed to see growth every year. The business is supposed to give you the freedom to live life on your terms.

But your reality is different.

You feel like you are stuck and going around in circles.

You go through repeated cycles. In each cycle, your frustration level spikes as you wrestle with the same problems. And those problems only seem to be getting worse over time.

You’ve tried to fix them. Maybe you’ve hired people with “big company” experience. Maybe you’ve implemented some business ideas from the popular books you’ve read. Or you’ve tried new software systems and consultants who promised to fix everything, hoping to get control of the chaos, but none of them worked. Heck, some of them even threw gas on the fire.

On paper, all these ideas should help. But when you apply them, they fail—and you don't know why.

Is your business different? Are you just beyond help? You want to stop fighting fires and prevent them from ever starting in the first place, but you don't know where to start.

So you go back to doing what you've been doing: the same thing, over and over—and it doesn't get better or easier. If anything, you feel like you need to work harder to keep your head above water. You sense you are just paddling in a circle of frustration.

And all this negativity isn't quarantined to your business.

It spills over into the rest of your life. It hijacks your mind and appears in not-so-subtle nightmares. Your friends and family keep asking what is wrong or, worse, have stopped asking. You yourself might be flirting with emotional bankruptcy. You're searching for a way out—anything that will improve this situation. But you don't have the strength for another false start.

You want to transform the business and make it what you've always envisioned. But to do that, you need a path that will get rid of this frustration once and for all. You need a logical way to move forward.

You need a place to start.

Start at the (Real) Beginning

Transforming your business begins with finding the unique starting lines for you and your organization.

In today's business lexicon, we put a lot of focus on the finish line. Most business concepts are designed and marketed as express lanes to the end goal. However, they make one critical error.

They assume that where you start is not relevant.

When you know your personal starting line, you can finally reach the finish line: a business where everyone is on the same page, asking great questions, confronting reality, and making the best timely decisions to gain an advantage over the competition.

When that happens, the question "Why is it so difficult?" stops playing in your head every day.

The frustration disappears, and a feeling of satisfaction replaces it. Your business transforms from an energy drainer to an energizer. You begin to strive forward instead of in circles. Constant

worry stops gnawing at you. Instead of dreading the daily grind, you go into the office every day looking forward to making your business even better.

The rest of your life improves, too. You can take a vacation with your family and actually enjoy yourself while you're away. Better yet, when you return, you can open your email without that familiar feeling of dread, bracing yourself to deal with the fires that have raged in your absence.

When people are on the same page, the fires stop, and the perpetual state of crisis in your organization vanishes. In their place, you have important answers and clear lines that align decisions and action. Your team knows how to use the right questions and answers to diagnose problems, address them, and keep moving forward.

You finally have a business that works for you. And the confidence to grow it.

Unclogging the Sewer

How do I know all this?

Well, the short answer is, I bring clarity to chaos.

I started my career working as an accountant and consultant for Kenneth Leventhal & Co. when it was acquired by Ernst & Young. We worked on cleaning up financial messes. After I earned my CPA and left Ernst & Young, I moved on to dealing with the financial and information chaos of many dysfunctional companies, which I also cleaned up.

I referred to what I cleaned up as the “accounting sewer,” because every decision a company makes inevitably flows into the numbers. To me, cleaning up the accounting sewer was a fun, rational puzzle—a way to bring order to chaos.

But I soon found that cleaning up the numbers was the easy part.

It wasn't long before exasperated business owners started asking me, “Hey, you cleaned up the numbers . . . do you think you could help me take my company to the next level?” And that was when the trouble started. Once I crossed over the numbers line, I got sucked into the emotional frustrations of the businesses—the symptoms of horrible meetings, email battles, and the never-ending fires.

I knew that the accounting sewer was a symptom of dysfunctional companies. But what was the root cause?

I became determined to figure this out. Slowly, I started to notice patterns among the dysfunctional companies that were frustrating for people to work in or with. Nobody was on the

same page. It was never clear who was responsible for what, what the company was trying to accomplish, or what was essential for the company to be successful. There were also a lot of unanswered questions, which manifested as conflict in meetings and emails or resignation that nothing would ever change.

Meanwhile, when I worked with companies where people *were* on the same page, those organizations were more than just surviving. They were aligned and thriving.

This insight excited me. *Can you align a company?* I wondered. *Would that remove the cause of the dysfunction?*

I spent years figuring out what it meant to truly “align” a business. But when I finally got it, the results spoke for themselves. Dysfunction lifted. Companies that used to be stuck started to strive.

Alignment changed everything.

It can change your business—and your life—too.

Bringing Clarity to Chaos

As I said, for more than two decades, I’ve worked to bring clarity to chaos for pretty much any type of business you can imagine, from buttoned-down aerospace manufacturers to hip retailers “dropping” the latest Kanye West shoe: public companies and private companies, big organizations and small ones, real estate developers, food product innovators, service providers, builders, retailers, and manufacturers.

I don’t specialize in an industry, but in a state of mind—namely, the mind of frustrated business owners and leaders, helping them to get people on the same page so that it is easier to confront reality and make the best possible decisions.

When it comes to gaining alignment, finding the right place to start for your situation is as important as the destination. And I intend to help you do exactly that.

The Process

This book is designed to be your planning guide for a mountain-climbing journey—one that leads out of a valley to the summit of a healthy, thriving business.

You’ve got to plan and prepare for the trip before you leave. Then you’ve got to get your team ready. Before you start the climb, you will need to find your starting lines and make some key

decisions. Then, after you start climbing, you will be better prepared for the uncomfortable things that may occur.

This book can be the guide you need to make this journey. It shares what is likely to go wrong when you start to make changes, and how to keep those issues from stopping your ascent. It can help you avoid problems before you leave base camp, while you're going up, and even after you've reached the summit—where you will be exposed to different winds that want to push you back down the mountain.

Read these chapters from start to finish first. See if you recognize the critical issues that are keeping you stuck. Then keep the book in your backpack as you begin the climb so that you can refer to it when you need it.

Keep in mind that, like climbing a mountain, aligning your business is a process. This is not a book you can read today, get excited about, and then go and completely implement in the next team meeting. You can't skip steps. It takes time to reflect, ask the right questions, and address the critical issues before you'll be ready to share it with other people.

What you can do is begin the alignment process in your own mind, right now.

Plot Your Course

Tom Petty wrote the great lyric “I’m taking control of my life now. Right now.”

So many frustrated business owners and leaders feel like they lack control of their businesses. When you understand business alignment, you no longer have to be one of them.

You can do this. It's not going to be easy or a straight line. But if you take the principles of business alignment and apply them, you can move toward your ultimate goal with as few detours as possible. When the obstacles inevitably appear, you'll have the tools you need to confront reality and make course corrections. And in the end, you'll reach your destination by the most direct possible route.

You can take control of your business and your life. You can transform your company.

It all begins with finding the first starting line.

Let's go.