

FAIL HARD, WIN BIG

30 VENTURES 20 FAILURES 10 WINS



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CHAPTER ONE

Find Your Fire – The “Why” That Keeps You Going

Money might light the spark—but purpose is what keeps the engine running. Entrepreneurs who chase profit alone almost always flame out. But those fueled by a deeper mission? They transform setbacks into fuel and keep pushing when everyone else quits. Your “Why” is your North Star—it guides your decisions, inspires your people, and turns hustle into legacy.



The Mirage of Money

Let's be honest: it's easy to get caught up in the numbers. The dopamine hit of closing big deals, the thrill of watching revenue climb, the moment you finally afford the car or the house or the vacation you dreamed about.

But here's the part no one tells you: *You can hit every financial milestone and still wake up feeling empty.*

Because when adversity hits—and it will—money isn't enough. It doesn't comfort you when the biggest client pulls out, when your top employee quits, or when your business launch flops. It doesn't get you out of bed when the fire's gone.

What does? Purpose. That's the difference between those who burn out and those who break through.

Why Purpose Is Non-Negotiable

Your “Why” isn't just a tagline or fluff for your website or pitch deck. It's the difference between surviving and thriving. It's the reason you'll work weekends, take the hard calls, and rebuild after failure. It's also what rallies people around you—because people don't follow spreadsheets; they follow passion. And passion is contagious.

Your “Why” makes you magnetic. It's what separates temporary hustlers from lifelong builders.

Real-World Proof: Starbucks

Howard Schultz, the force behind Starbucks, didn't just want to sell coffee. His vision was rooted in personal expe-

rience. Growing up in a working-class family, he saw how economic insecurity broke people’s spirits. When he took over Starbucks, his goal wasn’t just profit—it was to create a company that treated employees with dignity and offered healthcare, stock options, and a sense of belonging. That purpose became the “Why” behind Starbucks’ culture.

How to Find Your “Why”

If you’re not clear on your deeper motivation, don’t panic. Most entrepreneurs start with a vague sense of what they want—and sharpen it over time. Clarity comes through reflection and repetition. You’ve got to dig deep and be honest with yourself. And sometimes, you’ve got to ask the same question over and over before you get to the truth.

One of the best tools to uncover your purpose is the **“5 Whys” exercise**, borrowed from Toyota’s lean manufacturing playbook. It’s a simple but powerful tool originally developed by Toyota to diagnose root causes in manufacturing. Here’s how it works:

Start with a service-level goal like: “I want to start my own company.” Now ask yourself, “Why?” Do that five times. Like this:

1. Why do I want to start a company?

Because I want to make more money.

2. Why do I want more money?

Because I want financial freedom.

3. Why do I want financial freedom?

Because I don’t want to depend on anyone to take care of my family.

4. Why don't I want to depend on anyone?

Because I saw my parents struggle and I don't want to repeat that.

5. Why is that so important to me?

Because I want to break the cycle and build a new legacy.

Boom. You're not chasing dollars—you're building generational change. That's a real "Why." And it's powerful.

Do this exercise with brutal honesty. No filters. Just you, your ambition, and the truth beneath it. Once you find your "Why," put it everywhere—frame it and put it on your wall, in your pitch deck, everywhere. Let it anchor every decision. Because when you're clear on your Why," the "How" gets a whole lot easier.

When Business Is Fun, It Works Better

If your business isn't fun, you're doing it wrong. One of the biggest lessons I've learned is this: culture is your greatest competitive advantage. Happy employees drive innovation, customer loyalty, and sustainable growth, while miserable employees create headaches, high turnover, and stagnation.

I've seen too many companies treat culture as an afterthought, and every single time, it was a huge mistake. The companies that thrived were the ones that understood that their people were their most valuable asset. I made sure that when I built my businesses, we did things differently.

I made it a priority to build environments people wanted to show up to—where wins were celebrated, laughter was common, and the process was just as exciting as the result.

I’ll never forget when we landed a game-changing deal with a national mortgage company. Instead of sending a dry email, I threw an impromptu party—music, drinks, a ridiculous amount of food. Some might call it over-the-top. I call it unforgettable.

Because people don’t want to work for a paycheck. They want to work for purpose.

My Wake-Up Call – The Retirement That Wasn’t

I learned this lesson in an unexpected way. One week before my 30th birthday, I had a successful exit from one of my companies. It was a life-changing moment—I had worked tirelessly, scaled my business, and finally cashed out. So, I did what every entrepreneur dreams of: I took time off and decided to semi-retire.

My kids were young, not in school yet, and my wife and I had the freedom to travel. We packed our bags and set off on an 8-month vacation—no itinerary, no agenda, just endless destinations and relaxation.

At first, it was amazing. I had all the time and money I wanted. But then, something unexpected happened.

After about six weeks, I found myself restless, unfulfilled, and, frankly, miserable. The resort pools and piña coladas weren’t doing it for me anymore. Something was missing.

One day, my wife turned to me and said, “Honey, I love you, but you need to be building companies and solving challenges. You’re not yourself.”

She was right.

That moment shattered my illusion of retirement. I wasn’t built to sit around—I was built to create, innovate, and build things that matter.

That was the day I realized: I can never retire. Work is what drives me.

From that moment on, I decided my ventures wouldn’t just generate cash—they’d create meaning. My companies became purpose-driven, focused on solving real problems, genuinely improving lives, and building businesses where people actually enjoyed showing up. Guess what happened? Profits didn’t just follow; they multiplied.

Purpose is your oxygen. When you remove the meaning from your work and it doesn’t matter how luxurious your surroundings are—you’ll suffocate. That realization rewired the way I thought about work. It wasn’t a means to an end anymore—it was the end. The work was the reward.

So I came back swinging—but with new rules. I stopped building just to exit. I started building for impact. Every new business had to check two boxes: Will it challenge me? And will it matter to someone else? If the answer wasn’t yes to both, I passed.

And here’s what surprised me most—when I aligned with purpose, the profits grew faster than ever before. Employees were more engaged. Customers were more loyal. Partner-

ships came easier. When you have a mission, the people around you feel it—and they want to be part of it.

That six-week crash course in early retirement taught me more than any MBA ever could. It taught me that freedom without meaning isn't freedom at all. It's boredom.

Culture Is the Business

Let me be crystal clear: Culture isn't snacks in the break-room or ping pong tables. Culture is how your company makes people feel—every day.

If your business isn't fun, you're doing it wrong. One of the biggest lessons I've learned is this: culture is your greatest competitive advantage. Happy employees drive innovation, customer loyalty, and sustainable growth, while miserable employees create headaches, high turnover, and stagnation.

It's in the way you celebrate wins. The way you run meetings. The way you handle mistakes. Culture is what people say about your business when you're not in the room.

I've seen too many companies treat culture as an afterthought, and every single time, it was a huge mistake. The companies that thrived were the ones that understood that their people were their most valuable asset. I made sure that when I built my businesses, we did things differently.

When I launched my companies, I made it a priority to create an environment that people actually loved coming to every day. We celebrated wins, we shared laughs, and we made sure that work wasn't just about hitting targets—it was

about enjoying the process. I remember one of our biggest company milestones when we landed a game-changing deal. Instead of just sending out an email congratulations, I surprised the team with an impromptu celebration in the office, complete with music, drinks, and a ridiculous amount of food. Some might call it unnecessary, but I saw firsthand how that single moment of celebration fueled our team's motivation.

That celebration wasn't about the food or the music—it was about the message. It told the team: "You matter. What we're doing here matters." People want to be part of something exciting, something bigger than themselves. When people feel valued, they don't just do their job—they go all in. They innovate. They hustle. They protect the culture because they feel like they own it.

Too many leaders think culture is a 'perk'—something you throw in after the business stuff is handled. That's backwards thinking. Culture *is* the business. You can have the best product in the world, but if your people hate showing up, you'll bleed talent, crush morale, and stall out. On the flip side, is a team that believes in the mission, supports each other, and has fun doing the work. That's the team that wins—over and over again.

But remember: it's not just about office parties and swag. It's about creating an environment where people feel safe to take risks, share ideas, and admit mistakes without fear of being shut down. Culture lives in the small moments: how you run meetings, how you give feedback, how you show up when times get hard.

Real-World Proof: Chick-fil-A

Chick-fil-A’s culture is a masterclass in values-based leadership and service-driven excellence. Rooted in the principles of founder Truett Cathy, the company prioritizes people over profits—both customers and employees. From day one, team members are immersed in a culture that emphasizes hospitality, gratitude, and servant leadership. Their signature phrase—“my pleasure”—isn’t just a line, it’s a mindset. Franchisees are selected based on character and cultural alignment, not just financial backing. Employees are empowered to deliver extraordinary service that feels personal and genuine. This deep cultural consistency fuels exceptional customer satisfaction, sky-high employee loyalty, and continued success.

Purpose Builds Resilience

Entrepreneurship will test you. You will hit breaking points. You will doubt yourself. But if your “Why” is strong enough, you’ll outlast everyone who’s only in it for the money.

Your purpose gives you staying power. It’s what transforms pain into grit, loss into clarity, and chaos into focus.

My Evolving “Why”

At first, my “Why” was about freedom. But over time, it shifted. I realized what fueled me wasn’t just building wealth—it was empowering others. Helping people succeed. Creating businesses where employees and customers felt truly seen.

That's when everything changed.

The Wake-Up Call That Changed Our Company

One of my companies was killing it on paper—great revenue, solid growth—but internally? Morale was tanking. People were burnt out. We had lost our spark.

So we paused. We realigned with our purpose. We started sharing the real stories—how we were changing lives, creating opportunities, solving real problems.

The energy snapped back. The culture reignited. And our growth? It accelerated.

That wasn't luck. That was purpose. And it's repeatable.

Key Takeaways for Entrepreneurs

1. Find Your Personal Purpose

Reflect deeply on what drives you beyond money. Write down what motivates you, inspires you, and brings you joy. Think back to the moments in your life when you felt the most fulfilled—what were you doing? Who were you helping? What made it meaningful?

2. Articulate Your Company Mission Clearly

Condense your mission into a single, compelling sentence. Post it prominently in your office. Make it part of your company culture so that every employee knows it by heart. If you walked into my office today and asked

any of my employees what our mission was, they could tell you in a heartbeat.

3. Communicate Your Mission Consistently

Regularly share your “why” with your team, customers, and partners. Let them believe in your deeper mission. People don’t just buy what you do, they buy why you do it.

4. Lead by Example (Not by Intimidation)

Embody your mission in your daily actions. Teams follow passionate leaders who genuinely walk their talk. If you want your company to have purpose, you have to live and breathe it.

5. Revisit and Realign Often

Your entrepreneurial journey needs to be about more than just money. Purpose is what makes you resilient, innovative, and truly successful. Find your why, let it guide every decision, and watch as your business—and your life—transforms dramatically for the better.

Purpose is Your Oxygen.

Without it, the grind suffocates you. With it, you become unstoppable. Build for meaning. Hire for values. Lead with fire. Because when you find your “Why,” everything else falls into place.

CASE STUDY

How Spanx Redefined an Industry With One Bold “Why”

In the late '90s, Sara Blakely was selling fax machines door to door. Not exactly a launching pad for a billion-dollar fashion empire. But one day, frustrated with the lack of comfortable undergarments for women, she cut the feet off her control-top pantyhose and wore them under white pants.

That DIY moment lit the fire. She didn't just want better shapewear—she wanted women to feel more confident, comfortable, and in control of their own image. That became her “Why”: To help women feel great in their clothes and in their skin.

Built from Purpose, Not Privilege

Sara had no fashion background, no industry connections, and just \$5,000 in savings. She faced rejection after rejection, but she kept going—not because of the money (there wasn't any yet), but because she believed in her mission.

She finally found a hosiery mill willing to take a chance on her, created a prototype, and hustled to get Spanx into department stores. Her big break came when Oprah named

Spanx one of her “Favorite Things” in 2000. The orders exploded—but the mission never changed.

Culture That Mirrors the Mission

Blakely’s “Why” didn’t stop at the product. It bled into the company’s culture.

From day one, Spanx operated on positivity, humor, and heart. Sara built a workplace where women’s voices were valued, where risk-taking was encouraged, and where laughter wasn’t just tolerated—it was part of the job description.

When Spanx hit major milestones, she didn’t hand out plaques—she handed out surprise bonuses, vacations, and even cars. That’s not just generosity—it’s cultural alignment. It tells your people: “You matter.”

Spanx thrived not just because the product worked, but because the purpose behind it connected. It stood for something bigger: female empowerment, self-confidence, and the courage to innovate.

Full-Circle Moment

In 2021, Sara sold a majority stake in Spanx to Blackstone—valuing the company at \$1.2 billion. And how did she celebrate?

She gave every employee \$10,000 and two first-class plane tickets anywhere in the world. No strings. No PR stunt. Just gratitude. Just purpose.

Key Takeaways from Spanx

- 1. Solve a real problem you care deeply about.** Sara didn't build Spanx for attention. She built it to fix something that bothered her—and millions of others.
- 2. Let your mission shape your culture.** A “Why” isn't just external. It should show up in how you treat your team, make decisions, and celebrate wins.
- 3. Lead with bold belief.** She didn't have a traditional background, a co-founder, or outside capital. What she had was vision—and it was enough.
- 4. Celebrate people, not just profits.** When your “Why” includes your team, they'll run through walls for you.

Spanx isn't just a brand—it's a testament to what happens when you lead with fire.

Sara Blakely didn't just sell shapewear. She sold confidence, courage, and the audacity to build something better. And that's what purpose looks like in action.