

5 WAYS TO SUCCESS.

During lunch with an old and wise friend of mine, I had a moment of self-reflection. He was out gathering insights for his new appointment as general secretary (love the title). The agenda of the day was to pump me of experiences condensed into a short scribble with the headline “your 5 best tips for success”.

An irresistible proposition, both broad and vague enough not to put unnecessary limits to the conversation, but targeted enough to produce something interesting.

My answers were very spontaneous, but sometimes what the spirit or soul or whathaveyou blurts out in an instant is just as wise as what takes the mind an eternity to express. Here they are, with somewhat more elaboration, hope you'll enjoy.

1) TO HURT

Possibly the very most important part. And in direct relation to what all “real” strategists know: Those who try to succeed with everything will likely not succeed with anything at all. Just as whoever tries to satisfy everyone ends up not satisfying anyone.

And then it's not just a matter of choosing what you want, but opting out of what you don't want.

Whenever I have these coaching-sessions with CEOs, marketing heads and different digital startups, the most common feedback I get is “it hurts”. And that's what it's supposed to do. It SHOULD hurt – anyone who's ever worked with strategy and not been in pain hasn't really worked with strategy at all.

So choose. And opt out. Sort things out. Pick a target. Pick an audience. You can only be the best in the world doing one thing, with one audience. At least, only one at a time.

2) DON'T HAVE A PLAN B

This might sound crazy, but how else should you know how badly it can go if you don't have a Plan B once Plan A fails? It's to do with flexibility and staying dynamic, something utterly decisive in this ever-changing world we live in.

I wrote the first research paper in Sweden on the capacity of change. And yes, the capacity of change is the most essential prerequisite for every organization in the world looking to move forward into the future. But now we're talking strategy. As long as you have an awesome strategy, that's sufficiently elastic, it's exactly the strategy you should stick to. Period.

A wise man said to me once “whoever makes a plan B will rarely ever achieve their plan A”. And that has been my maxim for the past 15 years since, and all my experience has shown that to be true. All this talk of “aim for the stars and you might at least reach the tree tops” is complete BS.

Instead, decide with 200% certainty to reach a certain target with a certain strategy (and forget about the tree tops!). Eat, sleep, live and breathe your strategy. Make sure it's elastic enough to give you some maneuverability, but always maintain the core of it as an absolute truth, grounded in the depths of your soul. It will make you strong enough to crush anything that stands in your way.

If you had a plan B in your back pocket, it would've burned a hole in it in desire to be executed as a payoff for your risk. And it would've made you just as weak as risking it all could've made you poor.

Because it would be about risk management and minimizing risk instead of maximizing opportunity. And anyone who minimizes risk has never broken a single record or achieved anything but middling results in anything (not to mention, such individuals are seldom happier because of it – but that's a discussion for another time).

3) HAVE EMPATHY

This should be obvious. Isn't it innate human nature to have it? Or at least a universal desire to have it and wish it upon all those around you?

It may be insane to have to mention this in the year 2018, but sadly, no. Almost 50 years ago my grandfather was known as a 13-time Swedish champion and world record holder, the “Zlatan of his field” or “Björn Borg”, but also the first real marketer of Sweden and head of one of Sweden's biggest banks. He had a

background as not only a celebrated athlete, but an entrepreneur and insurance director been hijacked to teach old bank directors on customer orientation.

He then stood tall at 6' 3" and declared boldly "you don't know a goddamn thing about marketing".

This was followed by a minute of silence before the honorable chairman of the entire bank and head of the most powerful family in Sweden stood up and gave him a round of applause. And everyone else on the board soon followed suit.

After that, he toured all of Sweden, working with something which all of Sweden still struggles with – getting a genuine customer orientation that runs through the entire organization, understanding the customer, the very people the organization is there for, MI in corporate speak, but in effect also develop a genuine sense of empathy for the people we're there to serve. To not just understand their needs but their emotions, their behavior, how they want to be met and what makes them happy.

That's everything, the Alpha and the Omega. And still, every week I meet with CEOs and marketing directors from global megacorporations and startups alike, who base all their thinking on an inside-out paradigm. This means that you who don't, you who build your foundation on an outside-in principle, who continuously put your ear against the rails with a good portion of empathy, listening to your social media, analyzing your digital data, constantly check in on your customer

service and with genuine, unwavering empathy isn't just there to represent but to actually engage and emote with your customers, still have a considerable awesome edge over your competitors.

4) TO DARE LIVE

What I'm talking about here is what others may call leadership. But for me, to dare lead is more a question of daring to live. In philosophy, this is called humanism. In leadership theory, this is sometimes called charismatic leadership, something which isn't always described as a positive trait for an organization. But as long as people have anything to do with anything in a modern organizational structure, I'd say it means the world, as it has to, in order to achieve a top-grade dynamic organization.

This has followed me around wherever I've been in life. As a researcher and student, I was secretary of the board and spearhead in starting the first cross-scientific center for e-Health in Sweden. In an extremely short span of time, a handful of people without any significant resources created wonders – to such a degree that we only a year later had started processes all across the country and crowned our achievement by arranging the world congress in e-Health, with a record number of participants and widespread acclaim.

All because a few of us dared to LIVE e-Health, and dared to LEAD the world.

And for something completely different, more of a physical than mental achievement, during this time I also became chairman in the local boxing club – a tiny local club with severe recruitment problems and a strained economy. Just a year or two later, we had multiplied the number of members, saved our finances and arranged junior championships, teen championships, ladies championships, beginners championships and again, record numbers of audiences for the senior Swedish boxing championships with widespread acclaim. And again, all because a few mad lads dared to LIVE boxing and dared to LEAD boxing in Sweden.

And the same thing has happened for every company I've been involved with. A number of the digital pioneer companies in video advertising succeeded without experience, training or financing to become the leading companies in the field because some of those involved decided "impossible is not a fact, it's an opinion". And then we went out and did the impossible and reached 5-10 times the effect of anyone else in Scandinavia and got 150 clients in four countries. Another company broke every record by going from 20 000 visitors to 200 000 in one year (eventually reaching 1 million) with chump change and a good portion of crazy bullheadedness, burning passion and a go-getter attitude. Another company I was involved with reached the national top position in their field and among the best in the world in digital strategy, all out of sheer thirst for knowledge and a nothing's impossible-attitude, and will win the gazelle this year. The company I'm with right

now has in a few months since our launch become the second biggest app in its category, and will before Q3 this year [slug it out for the global top position](#) as the “Spotify of Learning”. In just barely a year's time.

And to return to something completely different than the commercial corporate world, I want to also note the volunteer organization I started just over a year ago has since then, without any financing to speak of, performed 17 refugee actions in 10 countries, from Slovenia and Croatia to Bosnia, Greece, Iraq and Syria. We helped deliver over 50 metric tons of supplies to 70 000 refugees, we installed toilets, donated sowing machines and provided food. All so that we can now, in our long-desired ISIS-free state be able to focus more on self-help, setting up sowing shops, greenhouses and mobile education in the most afflicted refugee area in the world outside of Mosul. All without paying a single individual for their service, nor any administration costs and overhead, all with the help of none but an amazing group of heroes with amazing heart who dared to LIVE for the refugee cause and dared to LEAD some of the most admirable efforts I've ever heard of. Whether we're talking about research, sports, non-profit or super commercial digital ventures, it's all been a question of daring to LIVE it and daring to LEAD the way, believing in yourself, directing all your [focus outward](#), taking a genuinely impassioned [total responsibility for it](#), closing your ears to all the nay-sayers and obliterating all that stood in the way with utmost confidence and a burning passion

for action and results. And with maybe, maybe something others may call charisma. Whenever I HAVEN'T done this, when I haven't lived or lead in the most serious way I'm capable to, whenever I delegated leadership to some assistant CEO or production manager tasked with “handling managerial duties”, we never reached the speeds we'd see otherwise. And whenever I DID do it, lived the company and hovered over the shoulders of all these amazing people with an insane intensity, from morning until night, it hasn't been success without a price. People have overperformed, worked late, not been able to let go of their job after punching out at night. Some even broke because of it.

But those who didn't just survive, but lived the company with me, they haven't done anything but grow. Grow into 100 foot giants that outperformed themselves and thereby outperformed the world entire.

Some have out of exhaustion declared to themselves “never again”, but what they learned on the road has in turn made them grow so much that in their continued careers and opportunities, they've been compensated greatly with gigantic salary packages and top-level positions in companies where they've become big fish in small ponds.

So no matter if you're thinking about the best for the company and the organization, or your own goals or if you just want to let people grow and realize their fullest potential, make sure you dare LIVE and dare LEAD. Have the courage

to believe in things no one else believes in, but that you know will work. And dare to ensure that everyone else in your organizations share your beliefs and ensure that you LIVE it. Experience points only to one thing – that is the only way to LEAD the way to a truly and genuinely disruptive success.

5) DARE LIVE DIGITALLY

Finally, and this can't be avoided, to live and lead in all its glory, I wouldn't be who I am today if I didn't emphasize that if you don't think digitally, develop digitally, live digitally and involve a whole digital dimension in all that you do, you'll have nothing to show for yourself, either in 2018 or any time in the future.

It has now come to a point where I'd say if you're not ready for it, close up shop right now. Squeeze out every penny you can from the cash cows and gigs you have, but don't believe for a second that you stand any chance of getting anywhere compared to everyone else around you. I'm not just talking about your old competitors that have gone digital but every other digital upstart you won't see coming.

It may not sound very wholesome or uplifting, but it's time to learn this the hard way and get it once and for all. Tough love. The new organizations that are on the way won't need to make any kind of “digital transformation” of their operations. They won't have to add a “filter” of digital technology to find some kind of compromise for “integrated marketcommunication”. They won't need to hire

expensive digital consultants to add to “digital value” to their business. They're all born digital, they have digital processes as their core, they have an omni-channel strategy where digital constitutes everything they're about, their whole identity, and their entire business is born out of a digital opportunity.

Do you think you stand any kind of chance against these guys if you're not ready to learn and live digitally? And these new, born digital competitors are only the beginning. Because for now, they're at least started and run by entrepreneurs. But when these madmen – who already know R, Python and Big Data just as well as you used to know your dusty old 4P and porter-diamond – with their digitally native programming skills replace both their colleagues and themselves with hyperintelligent automation and AI, they won't just be replacing themselves. They'll be replacing YOU, and your whole outfit. And you don't stand a chance to do anything about it.

It is, as they say, only a matter of time.

So LIVE digitally. Nothing else has higher long-term priority on your agenda. And by “long-term” I don't mean years. I mean months, maybe weeks or even just days.

Don't get moving today, get moving yesterday.

AND THEN...

...it doesn't hurt if you're also incredibly positive, or absolutely amazing at turning problems into opportunities, a fast learner but forward-thinking, don't dwell and live a healthy life with an intensity that means you don't have to sleep, that you get that knowledge is power, that you have the best accountant and lawyer you can find, hire people who are considerably smarter than yourself, that you're curious of everything and everyone, that you have a burning passion for your field...

And so on and so forth. But if I have to choose (as above “those who try to succeed with everything will likely not succeed with anything at all”), then I'd say out of all of my experience with dozens of companies and businesses all around the world, both coming from my successes as well as my failures and those of others around me, these are the five main points for success.

...for whatever it's worth!!! But now onto the next adventure!