



'Building a successful business is similar to making a strong piece of plywood.'

From Plywood

To the Boardroom

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My first desk was made of the material most people associate with sub-flooring and roofing. I reasoned that if homes are supported with it, how could I go wrong building my business on it? Plywood seemed a natural choice for a great beginning.

The journey from my plywood desk to an \$11 million company is one I could never have planned or even imagined.

With patience being one of my lesser virtues, I learned many lessons the hard way. The bad choices, difficult decisions and challenging moments were opportunities for me to learn. I filed each one in a mental folder marked "experiences." From these, I formed my personal sense of business and style of relationship management.

Today, my old desk is mounted on the wall of my home office, reminding me of the early days when one phone line serviced my fax machine, computer connection and customer calls. I learned a very important first lesson from this piece of pressed wood: Do it right the first time.

Originally, the desk was free of stain and varnish. I wanted my office up and running. I was excited, so why take time to put a finish on it? I realized within a day or so why taking a couple extra minutes would have been a better decision.. Without a top coat, my "new" desk was quite capable of slipping splinters into the palm of a passing hand at any given time.

After a week of Band-Aids and ointment, I cleared my desk of phone, Rolodex, pencil holder, file trays and stray paper clips. With sandpaper and sealer, I spent the better part of a day doing what I should have done to start with. A bad decision recognized and rectified is better than a bad decision gone wild. OSHA would have given a nod of approval to the final product.

Most entrepreneurs don't furnish their offices and then decide to go into business. They decide to go into business, and then begin piecing together an office. That's the beauty of working from home. With just a couple of dollars, some technology and

planning, companies are born. The most important element is planning. Everything you have tomorrow will be built on what you do today.

My first plywood lesson learned was: choices made because they deliver an end result quickly, are not necessarily the right choices. Building a successful business is similar to making a strong piece of plywood. Use good material. Be good material.

I learned my second plywood lesson in the middle of the winter rush. Faxing my specials out to clients back in the mid-90's was my main form of advertising. \$99 air to Vegas along with a hotel was a great package. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, I faxed my clients specials of the day. One Tuesday, I didn't fax, because I was kind of tired and didn't want to take the time to do the research and set up the fax. I got three calls that day from the "Tuesday" fax list asking, "Where is our fax?"

The second plywood lesson was consistency. Whatever it is you said you were going to do, do it! And do it well.

A client called me from the airport on New Year's Eve morning. He missed his flight to Ft. Myers. The flight left early. He didn't call to confirm his flight at the number listed on the invoice I sent.

When I checked his reservation, there had been a flight time change, but even worse, I found out I had never put payment on his booking. The plane was not full, so rightfully had he called to verify the flight time, he and his family would have been on their way to Ft. Myers. I booked him the last three seats on a flight that evening. The cost? \$3,000. I made up the difference.

The third plywood lesson: honesty. This guy's problem was my fault. If I had guaranteed the reservation, I would have been notified of the schedule change, and I would have notified my client. Honesty always; no excuses. To this day the guy knows nothing of what happened, except Bonnie got him on a flight, no extra charge even though he screwed up. He is a wonderful client of mine.

My business isn't just a business, it's me. What your company stands for should fly proudly above your business like signal flags on a ship: integrity, honesty, consistency, professionalism.

So, how did I get to the boardroom? With my plywood lessons lining the way, I simply walked through the door.