

BUSINESS FAILURE GUARANTEED ⁽¹⁾

Our government has not yet seen fit to legislate eternal profits and continued prosperity for owner-managed businesses. That cherished right of owner-managers still exists: the right to fail.

Too often we observe businesses that continually operate on the brink of success, relying on luck alone to help them fail by snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. There do exist however, time tested fully guaranteed proven methods, which if mastered and practiced by the owner-manager, are certain to result in business failure. You no longer have to rely on luck alone; you can be personally responsible for your own business failure.

1. Keep busy with daily operating problems and fire fighting. Make sure that you “don’t have the time” to listen to your industry or plan your strategy within it.
2. Ignore cash flow. Keep your overhead costs and inventories high -- wait out any slowdown.
3. Work with frantic haste and tireless procrastination. What doesn’t get done today will keep until tomorrow. Hold a meeting.
4. Always look for the worst in people and in situations. Better to be a pessimist and be right all the time rather than an optimist and be wrong now and then.
5. Ignore change, or better, fight change. Emphasize past accomplishments as an excuse for current failures. Focus on what your business has been rather than what it might become.
6. Stop selling. Your products are so good they sell themselves. Spend disproportionate amounts of time on customers you are not a good fit for.
7. Don’t provide for management and ownership succession. Let your attorney and spouse decide the future of your business while riding in the car on the way back from your funeral.
8. Your business is unique. No one but you can understand it, so you don’t need any Advisory Board. You’re smart enough to pick up what you need as you go along. You alone have the divine inspiration and perfect information required.
9. You are always right, the customer never is, and make sure that the customer understands that by not returning their phone calls.
10. When the going gets tough-- give up. No sense in killing yourself.

(1) The original version of this “Bigelow Message” first appeared in the Fall of 1980. We were struck by how appropriate much of it seemed today. So it’s with a salute to our friends, mentors, and former partner Philip B. Ryan that we bring this updated version to you.