

**PHYSICAL THERAPY LEADERSHIP BOOK**

# **LEADERSHIP IN PRIVATE PRACTICE**

**WHAT IT TAKES TO BECOME A WORLD  
CLASS LEADER AND CEO OF A SUCCESSFUL  
PRIVATE PRACTICE**

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Paul Gough Publishing

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# **COULD EVERYTHING YOU'VE EVER BEEN TAUGHT ABOUT LEADERSHIP BE WRONG?**

The great irony of being a leader and CEO of a private practice is that many who make it to that level have no clue how they even got there. Having focused for so long on providing great medical care to patients, the happy by-product is an increased volume of patients – enough that they can't all be serviced by you alone, which leads to the inevitable forming of an organization known as a company.

This company is now responsible for complex legal and financial notes owed to the government, not to mention the welfare and well-being of a group of people called employees. These are people you agree to pay weeks in advance of the revenue they bring in – regardless of how well

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your company is doing. At least the government only wants to be paid if you've made some money first.

As well as new legal and personnel obligations, you've still got the ongoing responsibility of providing a high-quality service to your patients.

When it was just you, you could be sure the patient experience was magical. Now that ten other people are involved, all you can do is hope and pray they're all bringing their "A-game." If one doesn't, you'll soon know about it because it will be written up in a Google review for the rest of the world to see.

The very fact that you've had to bring in more employees means that your expenses have gone up. Inevitably, you'll need to raise the fees just to cover the additional costs. Selling "you" at a lower price was easy. Selling someone else at a higher price – that is a different story altogether. A new marketing and sales system are now required, but they don't come cheap and aren't easy to implement when you've got so many other things to consider.

Paying out for employees and spending on marketing requires you to pay close attention to your cash flow. Managing cash is often as difficult as managing people, yet it's nearly always an afterthought. It only becomes a priority when you've run out. Cash is like oxygen to a business. If you don't get enough of it coming in, you'll die very quickly.

As the saying goes, "You can exist for years without profit, but you can't exist a week without cash." Cash is king – and as the owner of a private practice, you have to know how to bring it in faster than it goes out.

If you ask any business owner if they'd ever considered any of these things *before* they'd formed the company, they'd *probably* tell you no. If you asked the same business owner if they'd ever considered how much

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hassle and heartache would come as a result of these things, they *definitely* tell you no.

The problem is this: when you reach the point of realizing how difficult it is to do all of this – lead people, manage cash flow, build a marketing system etc. – while simultaneously trying to keep your sanity and find time for your family, it’s often the case that you’re past the point of no return. Your proverbial ass is on the line for a costly office space, the line of credit needed to get to this point is secured against your family home, oh, and that’s on top of the business startup loan you took out to get your company off the ground in the first place.

Above all, your self-worth is attached to making this thing work by *any* means.

Even though everyone around you tells you not to pursue it, your pig-headedness has you believing that you *will* work it out and that you *will* prove them all wrong, in the end. Your future success will come at any cost, including your health, your sanity, and most definitely time away from your family.

What’s more, it is very likely that you’ll forgo a decent salary.

You’ll be “happy” to earn less than most of your employees, and you’ll do it in the hope that, one day, *someday*, this company will pay out and you’ll be able to tell everyone that the rewards justified the means. You quite literally mortgage your future on the hope that your company will one day pay dividends.

Welcome to Hell!

Welcome to the loneliest and oftentimes most frustrating and sometimes lowest-paid job on the planet. It’s madness, but everything I’ve just described is so often how it plays out for a small business owner. If you knew back then all of the things you’re now responsible for as the

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CEO of your own company, I wonder if you'd even apply for your own job. (I don't think many would – especially not at the pay that is being advertised.)

## **MY STORY: HOW I LEARNED THESE LESSONS**

How do I know this story so well? It's because I've lived it. I started my private practice after I quit my job as a physical therapist in professional soccer at the age of 26. I had absolutely no clue about how to run a real business. At first, I thought it was all about being a great practitioner. I thought that all I had to do was continue to improve my clinical skills and make sure that my patients got results.

And that worked for the first two years or so.

But the inevitable flatline happened and it one day became obvious that there was very little growth in my revenue, despite the time and effort I put into learning new clinical skills.

After being stuck at the same revenue level for a while, I realized that it was time to learn more about this thing called “marketing.” I was convinced at this point that my business success was going to be *all* down to how well I could market. So, I went off and learned how to create a marketing system. And it worked. I got inundated with lots more people interested in my services.

But then I realized that getting good at marketing just gave me a new problem –not knowing how to sell my cash-pay services.

My private practice is in the UK – where medicine is completely free to patients, paid for by the government as a form of socialized medicine. There's no co-pay or deductibles. It is just free. It meant I had all these people interested in my service which they assumed would be paid for by

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the government. As you can imagine, the objections to paying in cash, for what they believed they could get for free, came thick and fast. It exposed that I had no clue how to sell the value of what I do to them. So, I set about learning how to sell effectively at higher prices.

I got pretty good at it and things were okay for a while.

Now at this point, I am a few years into starting my practice and I think I've cracked it. I'm now a great therapist, I'm a good marketer, and I know how to sell. I'm thinking "show me the money."

But all that did was put me in a position where I needed to hire other people to keep up with the demand that my marketing and sales skills created.

And this is where it started to go *really* wrong.

Although I was busier than ever, I was taking home less money than ever. I was doing more but making less. At one point I had more than twenty people on my payroll, all spread across four clinics that were miles apart from each other. I thought what I had was a private practice. What I really had was a hot mess that was a disaster waiting to happen.

The reality of my situation was this: I was a great clinician with skills in marketing and sales – and that just compounded the problem that I didn't really know how to run a real business.

## **HOW DID I BECOME A BETTER LEADER?**

Accepting this, I set off on a new journey to learn yet *another* new business skill. The one that I was looking to learn this time was leadership.

*How do I become a better leader?* That was the question I asked myself over and over. I assumed that once I found the answer, I could get back to growing and scaling a more profitable practice that I could enjoy

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owning; one that compensated me fairly for the blood, sweat and tears I was investing.

The problem was this: I fell into the trap that many business owners do when they consider the idea of leadership – thinking that all of my problems would disappear when I became a “better leader.” I thought that becoming a “better leader” was the missing piece in the jigsaw, and that once I finished the puzzle, I could sail off into the sunset, sit on the beach somewhere in Florida, and let my employees bring in the cash while I topped up my tan and they topped up my bank account.

If only.

Being a “better leader” is important, but it’s certainly not the final piece of the puzzle if you’re looking for long-lasting *business* success. Being a good leader only gets you so far before you realize there’s a difference between leadership skills and the specific responsibilities and tasks required of a CEO who can lead.

As I’ve since found out, it’s the latter that you need to focus on if you’re wanting to be successful in private practice for the long term. There is a huge difference between being a leader and a leader who runs a business. That difference is what we’re going to discuss within the pages of this book.

## **A BETTER LEADER, OR A BETTER CEO?**

If, having spent years being a great clinician, you now find yourself in the situation of needing to be a better leader for your business, you are not alone. It is the top job and yet many who occupy it do so by default – not because of merit.

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Accepting that you need to become a better leader is the first step toward building a practice that you can be proud to call your own. It is the first step toward owning and running a company that doesn't rely upon you being there every day. It is also the first step to understanding that in order to get a handle on the company you've created, and all of its moving parts, you must become world class at the other role you'll need to play – you, the CEO (Part 2 of this book).

“Leadership” and “business leadership” are two very different things and they come with completely different sets of skills and requirements to be great at either or both.

I believe the question you should ask is not, “How do I become a better leader?” It is, “How do I become a better leader *and* CEO of my clinic?” You should also ask, “What are the specific roles and responsibilities that are required of each?”

When you know the answers to those two questions, your chances of success in private practice are suddenly looking rosier. And that is why I am so glad you've picked up this book. We're going to be answering both of those questions, and a whole lot more.

Having worked closely with many, I've noticed that one of the biggest flaws of many private practice owners is that they never consider themselves to be the CEO of their own companies.

Sure, they think of themselves as business owners – but never as the CEO. That is because most do not know what the CEO's job description actually is, let alone how to be successful in the role.

I know I didn't.

Leadership is a very confusing topic, and any study of it can often leave you feeling like you have to become someone you're not or behave in a way that isn't true to who you are.

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Anyone who struggles with leadership privately thinks that it is because they are not born with the “natural” qualities they believe to be required of leaders. They think that because they are unable to inspire and motivate others, or because they can’t thump their chests or raise their voices and command people to do things for them, that they are not going to be great leaders. But honestly, none of that is needed. None of that is required for success as a leader in private practice.

Leadership is a construct. It is something that is open for interpretation depending upon the situation that you’re in (as a business owner, parent, teacher, etc.).

I believe you can be a great leader in any situation.

That could be as a parent, or a teacher, or just to a group of friends who are looking for someone to lean on or take the lead. Being a leader is a way of living. It is a cap you wear 24/7.

For example, I am a leader when I am at home and with my family. I can choose to live the role of a leader 24/7 and in almost any scenario that you can imagine. However, when I am on the couch with my kids watching Disney, my CEO cap is hanging up at work. *As a CEO, I am doing specific things. As a leader, I am living a certain way.*

If leadership is a construct open to each individual’s interpretation, then the role of a CEO is the complete opposite. It involves a specific set of non-negotiable tasks and responsibilities that must be carried out successfully or the company will fail.

These include things like creating a strategic growth plan, setting the annual budget, managing money, creating the marketing strategy, hiring A players, retaining A players, understanding key metrics, coaching people, and developing the company culture (all to be covered in the pages of this book).

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This explains why some people are great leaders, but cannot run great companies. I've even spoken to many employees who tell me that their boss is a "great leader" and "very inspiring," and yet their companies continue to fail. It is because the role of the CEO is not being performed correctly.

I think it is very possible to be a great leader – but not necessarily a great CEO. However, I do not believe that it is possible to be a great CEO if you're not a great leader.

Put another way: **the role of CEO comes with a highly specific job description that is easier to execute if you are a great leader.**

## **SO, WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?**

The answer is: it depends. It varies upon the context in which you're using the term. There's a *general* view of leadership that covers all situations you might find yourself in throughout life. Then there is the more specific role of a business leader.

It's very easy for people to think that leadership is a trait or a skill that you're either born with, or not. That you either have the right "personality" for it, or not. That you're ruled out of it if you're an introvert and "in" if you happen to have a powerful presence that is comparable to that of an inspiring politician or great football coach.

We've all seen this stereotype in the movies or on TV. But here's the thing: for every great politician, football coach, or business owner that you can think of who has a strong and charismatic personality, there are tens of thousands of great leaders who are not so charismatic. There are many leaders who are not so loud or vocal in their day-to-day practice, and yet they are at the helm of very successful companies or teams. You don't

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hear from them because they're introverted, or they just don't like being in the spotlight.

It doesn't mean they're not there – you just don't see them as they're busy running their companies.

Thus, we can conclude early that the secret to being a successful leader doesn't have as much to do with your personality or the tone of your voice as you might currently think. And that should be good news for you. It means there *are* things in your control that determine how good of a leader you will become of your private practice.

Most people think of leadership in the context of *who* you are, and the personality traits you're born with. But I have a much simpler version of what leadership is that has served me very well. Here are the two things that I believe summarize precisely what great leadership is about as it pertains to general situations in life.

- 1. Great leaders are able to raise the performance of their people beyond that which they are capable of on their own.**
- 2. Great leaders bring certainty to uncertain situations.**

Let's look at both of those points in more detail.

- 1. Great leaders are able to raise the performance of their people beyond that which they are capable of on their own.**

What does this mean? However you look at it, this is evident in every scenario in which a great leader exists. Take a football team, for example. For three seasons, the team has underperformed under one coach. The coach is sacked, and a different coach comes in to lead the same group of players. Somehow the new coach is able to lift the team from the bottom of the division to the top tier in a matter of months. It is because the coach – the leader – knows how to get the extra 20 percent in performance from his players. The previous coach hadn't figured that out.

I spent five seasons working in professional soccer and I witnessed this very thing happen twice. After one manager was fired because of a failing team, the new one came in and got more from the same team simply by changing the way he would speak to them. He worked out ways to get them to give him more.

Another scenario is at school. How do some teachers get more from kids when other teachers struggle to get anything? There's always that scenario where that one teacher somehow got more from you than you ever knew was possible. You excelled at English, yet you struggled with history. Two different teachers, two different results. That is leadership in play.

You'll see it at home, too.

On their own, kids can achieve a lot. But with a parent who has a strong leadership presence, kids will obviously go on to achieve so much more.

What about athletes? How do they achieve what they do? They don't do it on their own, that's for sure. No one ever achieves a gold medal without a coach. The coach is also a leader. They're helping those athletes get more from themselves than they ever could on their own. You could go all the way to kids' soccer or Little League. There's a leader there who

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is coaching the kids to get more from themselves than they could on their own.

Everywhere you look in life, anytime you see someone doing well or excelling, there's a strong leadership influence somewhere in the background, helping that person get more from themselves than they ever could on their own.

Here's another example. I've experienced many instances where other business owners have looked at my staff and wondered how they can land the type of people who work for me.

They look at my team and think that all of their problems would go away if only they could get one or two of my people on their team.

I know they think this way because they tell me to my face.

And when they do, I tell them that they're not thinking accurately. I remind them what they're thinking pre-supposes that my employees would perform the same way for them as they do for me. Because it is very unlikely they will.

How my employees perform for me is the *effect* – the cause is *how they are led*.

If I am great at leadership, it is because I have great people. And equally, if I have a great team, it is because of great leadership.

It is a mutually beneficial relationship that cannot be broken by either side. It means that you can poach my staff – but you are unlikely to get what my staff currently give me unless you are willing to do what I do.

## **2. Great leaders bring certainty to uncertain situations.**

As I wrote this book, the COVID-19 pandemic had just begun. It is inarguably the biggest medical and economic crisis to hit the planet in the

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last 100 years, and the reality is that no one knows for sure how to deal with the uncertainty that it is bringing.

It's a potent cocktail of a global health emergency and a financial catastrophe sprinkled with a lot of fake news and polarizing politicized opinions. It has created a level of uncertainty that was previously unseen or even dreamt of.

During this time, people are looking for leadership. They're desperate for it. Millions of people are tuning in to the daily updates from their president or prime minister, hoping to find some certainty to help them feel better about the situation. This is the job of leadership. To make people feel better about things they think are out of their control.

Being effective at leadership requires the management of one's own emotions when all the people around you are looking for help with their own.

The world might be falling down around you, but you can't let anyone see that you're affected by it. You might be having some trouble in your personal life, but you can't let it shake you. You might have had your clinic closed down by the government (enforced by a lockdown) and all of your revenue streams cut off, but you can't let that alter how you speak to and present yourself to your employees.

Put another way, if you can't manage your own emotions, you can't manage someone else's. It is that simple.

Good leaders are confident in themselves and they know that the best and only way to help the people around them is through certainty in their own actions and behaviors. Far from worrying over what others think about how or what they're doing, good leaders are certain that what they're doing (and how they're doing it) brings a much-needed level of calmness and direction to the situation.

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I've learned that the best leaders are not always right – they don't need to be. They just need to be certain in their own heads that they are. But if they find out later that they weren't, they're humble enough – and certain enough – to admit it.

Great leaders are certain even when they don't know all the answers. They won't hide from the fact that they don't know something or can't yet see a way through. But the way they admit to *not knowing* is the part that makes them great leaders. They're confident about the fact that they don't know. They're able to look people in the eye and stand tall as they announce they have “no clue” what the right answer is, but that they'll figure it out.

I think this is one of the best characteristics of a great leader. Leadership is not knowing everything, it is being comfortable with acknowledging that you don't know everything and committing to resolving the situation regardless.

Yet, that's the complete opposite direction that most people seem to be headed in today's society.

Too many people are trying to fake knowing everything out of fear that they'll be judged by others if they don't.

It's creating a society where people feel constantly inferior – yet project an outward view of looking superior. It creates mental and emotional turmoil for that person, not to mention pent up anger and resentment.

It's a recipe for disaster for anyone who is aiming to achieve anything of significance in their life – such as feeling in control of it.

I believe it's better to publicly admit you don't know something and privately commit to resolving it. After all, you're always rewarded in public for the work you do in private.

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You could very easily apply this idea to an interaction you have with a patient. If they ask you how long it will take to fix their hamstring injury and you stumble and stall over your answer, or you immediately break eye contact with them or change the tone of your voice (because you're not certain), you've just lost their trust.

You're still their physical therapist, but you're no longer a leader in their eyes.

What they need and want (just as much as your great clinical skills) is to be in the care of a great leader, someone who is certain in himself. After all, if you're not certain in yourself how can they be certain you can do what they need?

### **“I have absolutely no clue what is coming next”**

And it's the same with your staff – they need to know that you aren't faking it or pandering to their needs. I can vividly recall an interview that I did with the lady who heads the operations of my now-global media business. At the end of the interview, she asked me the standard question that goes something like, “What are the career progression opportunities for this role?”

After she asked me, I sat back in my chair and went silent for a few seconds while I looked out of the window. I came back with the following reply:

“You know, I have absolutely no clue what the opportunities will be. All I know is that this company is going as fast as a rocket ship en-route to the moon and more good things are happening than I ever thought possible. For me to sit here and tell you what might or might not happen – just to appease you, because that is what I am supposed to do right now –

would be me blowing smoke up your ass. The truth is I have absolutely no clue what will happen, but I know it is going to be fun getting to where we are going. If you want to jump on board, I'll make sure you know about opportunities as they open up.”

Cue the startled look on her face.

We got our relationship off to a great start because she immediately knew who she was working for – someone who is certain even when he doesn't know the answer; someone who wouldn't pander or lie about things. Even if I didn't know the answers to her future questions, she'd get the truth. Without attempting to blow smoke up my own ass, I believe that is a sign of great leadership.

Okay, so that's the end of the first chapter. What I want you to take from it is the idea that leadership in life and leadership in business are two very different things requiring very different skills and attributes. To be successful in private practice you're going to have to excel in both. As we move through the rest of this book together, my aim is to shed light on the difference and help you understand what is required of you, the leader and you, the CEO of a private practice. I'll explain the personal qualities that I believe great leaders have and we'll also pay a lot of attention to the important roles and tasks that should capture every CEO's focus.

In fact, we'll work through the actual job description of a CEO (you'll need to download your copy: [www.paulgough.com/leadership-resource](http://www.paulgough.com/leadership-resource)) so that you're crystal clear on what you should be doing and how to get better at your role.

It's going to be very enlightening for you.

Come with me to the next chapter. We'll start by clearing up the answer to that age-old question everyone in business has: “What is the difference between a manager and a leader?” Turn the page to find out

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# WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MANAGER AND LEADER?

If the difference between a leader and a CEO is misunderstood, then the difference between a manager and a leader is even more so. It is yet another thing in business ownership that is not clearly defined and, as such, it leaves people confused about what role to play and when.

Could it be possible that you play both roles as a private practice owner? I believe so. In fact, I believe that *leadership evolves as a result of management excellence*.

What is more, the two are interwoven.

In the beginning, as you start your company, you are the manager *and* leader – of yourself. Then, as you bring on your first employees, you begin to manage and lead other people. From there, your leadership role evolves. You're managing and leading simultaneously, but you just might not

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acknowledge or recognize it. You're telling people what to do to make sure the business is operationally efficient (manager) and, at the same time, you're getting the best out of them (leader). You're also bringing a sense of certainty to them when the business experiences early challenges or setbacks (leader).

Personally, I don't think it matters too much what you call yourself or how you self-identify. What matters most is your understanding of the fact that you do have to play both roles – and there's a clear difference in what is required of each role if you want to be successful.

I think much of the confusion that surrounds the difference between manager and leader comes from our own egos. It is much more exciting to say that you're a leader as opposed to a manager.

As proof, look at the number of books written and sold on the topic of leadership versus those written about management. What is more, leaders are often glamorized as strong, passionate, and charismatic types who make big things happen and everyone feel great. At least, that is what the Hollywood movies want you to believe. This means every business owner wants to think of herself as the leader – but in comparison, very few people want to think of themselves as a manager.

And let's be honest, manager even *sounds* like harder work, doesn't it?

If you're confused, just think about it like this:

*"We are all managers who need to know how to lead."*

Another way to think of it is this:

*"Your title is 'manager' – but your people make you a leader."*

No matter how big your company gets, you're always going to have to play both roles. Even if you employ 400 people, you're not exempt from managing. Because of the way the company organizational chart works,

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you still have dozens of people reporting directly to you. You will always be both managing and leading.

If leading is about setting the vision, then being a manager is about ensuring that the necessary standards are met to achieve that vision. Standards usually disappear when the leader is thinking about growth. It's why it's so important that both roles are evident in your practice.

The owner of a practice can do both of these things. The operational or general manager of the practice can do both as well – it is just more common that the owner is the one responsible for coming up with the vision or the specific outcomes for the practice.

I think it is vital that you – the private practice owner – are happy to do both of these things, particularly in the early or rapid-growth years (the first five years or so).

And at the same time, do not get too hung up on the fact that the people around you are not the leader that you are. You don't need them to be. You just need them to lead at a level above the people they are directly responsible for managing on the company org chart (I've included a copy of an example org. chart in the toolkit that accompanies this book: [www.paulgough.com/leadership-resource](http://www.paulgough.com/leadership-resource)).

And that, in essence, is how a company leadership team is developed.

When you have a head of marketing, a head of sales, a head of operations, and a head of finance, you have what is commonly called a *leadership team*.

They may not be *the* leaders of the company, but they are able to act and think like leaders at a level above anyone else in the company. In that way, they are leading. But they also still need to be managed – and led – by you.

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## Traffic police vs. coach

Here's an easy way to think about the differences between each role. Managers act a lot like traffic police, and leaders act like football coaches. Figuratively speaking, managers are responsible for making sure that the traffic is flowing in the right direction and at the right speed – and that no one is crashing into each other.

In this way, the manager ensures things keep running smoothly. Essentially, they're making sure the growth plan that the business owner created is being executed correctly (more on that later). They're ensuring that people are doing their jobs and processes are being followed. They're telling people when to slow down and when to go faster, depending upon the results being generated.

That doesn't mean that the owner of the business can't and shouldn't get involved this type of work. When needed, you should. But you shouldn't be spending *all* of your time in what I call the “nitty gritty” or the “tactical stuff” that is often the job of the people farther down the org chart.

You have to develop the skill to know when you need to float between the two types of work, as and when your business needs.

And that need is constantly changing.

For example, in the beginning, when you started your clinic, it was likely that you had lots of grand visions for the future of the company. One minute you're thinking about how many clinics you would like to own and what it would be like to one day sell your chain of 25 clinics for \$20 million. Then, just a few seconds later, you're back into the day-to-day of the practice, having to update the process for billing an insurance company or dealing with a patient on the phone who wants to cancel their appointment.

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The latter are examples of the nitty gritty, tactical things – the weeds – that are very important for a business to manage correctly if it is to run smoothly.

However, the business owner that spends all of his time doing these things soon finds himself stuck. Crises require tactics. Sustained success requires strategy. If you're always in a crisis, is it because you're always working tactically?

If you're spending all of your time on the tactical things that are often below your pay grade, you'll find you're always paid at a grade less than you hoped.

Whether you like your business or not, it does not discriminate against you. Your business always pays out at the level at which you work. If you do \$15 per hour work, that is what you get paid. If you do \$500 per hour work, in the end, that is what you get paid. In the long run, it is fair. It doesn't always seem that way to business owners, but that is mostly because of how they choose to spend the most valuable asset available to a business owner – time.

Here's something very important for you to grasp: your business can only ever grow when you're thinking strategically and considering what it needs to be able to grow, not just operate.

There's a big difference between doing work that merely delivers on promises already made – and that which drives the company forward. The work you need to do to grow hasn't happened yet. It's in the future – it's waiting to be created. Its value has yet to be realized and it doesn't happen when you're thinking tactically about things like social media, another new website, or what questions to ask to stop a patient from objecting to your prices.

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Business growth work requires you to be thinking about your company structure, developing your people, getting a better return on your marketing investment, or improving the sales process so that you can scale.

Business growth is a direct result of the type of work that the owner chooses to do. If it is all tactical – nitty gritty – then the business will stay at its current level. It’s why the leader must think strategically as much as possible. It’s why your day and your week must be optimized in the best way possible to allow you to do more of this strategic thinking.

And sure, there *could* be more growth if you work harder on the tactics. But it usually comes at a price – that being your health or not seeing your kids.

No matter what anyone else tells you, you cannot work ten times harder and expect to make ten times more money. Society has you believing that “working harder” is the secret to making money. But I assure you, it is not true. It really isn’t about how hard you work. It’s about the type of work you choose to do and how much of it you do.

The ability to allocate time and the prioritization of the activities you choose to work on are the ultimate skills required of a CEO. It is what defines how successful you are in life and in business. We all have the same time available to us – what we choose to do with it determines the success we get.

Of course, it also means there’s another side to this equation.

If you’re guilty of doing too much tactical work and getting stuck there, you can also be guilty of doing too much of the “visionary” stuff, too.

Any business owner who is spending all day dreaming of how the business will *one day* look – but is not willing to be on the ground floor to do the things needed bring the vision to life – inevitably finds that the

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vision becomes a nightmare he can't escape. The key is to be able to be great at both – just learn when and for how long you need to do either.

## **Behind every great leader is a “doer”**

If business leaders need to be more strategic in their thinking, then managers need to be great “doers.” A “doer” ensures the business owner's big vision comes to life. If the leader is spending 80 percent of her time thinking strategically about the growth plan, the manager is spending 80 percent of his time making sure milestones are being hit to ensure growth occurs.

Basically, “doers” are vital to the success of your company and you must have one around you.

What you often find, though, is the founder of the company wears the name badge of leader – but gets stuck at the level of perpetually “doing.” A business that has been stuck at the same level for some time is a classic symptom of a leader who is guilty of *too much doing* and not enough strategic thinking.

(Can you relate?)

Worse, they can often find that they've actually hired someone to “do stuff” – but are still doing it themselves. This business owner is definitely overworked and getting very little in the way of rewards for it. They are the leader in name, but not in how they think or act.

Another classic symptom of a business owner who is stuck at the level of constantly “doing” is that they operate and make decisions from a place of pent-up emotion. They are constantly “shooting from the hip” or “flying off the handle” when faced with even the smallest of setbacks.

If there's a screwup at the front desk causing a billing issue, or yet another mix up with a patient scheduling at the wrong time, it's easy to keep venting at the people involved, yelling at them to follow the process you created.

You can keep shouting and keep yelling. But what if the person you're shouting at simply isn't capable of following the process? What good is yelling or, for that matter, even fixing the process?

The solution to the pain point is only found when you find the real problem causing it. In this case, it is likely the recruitment, onboarding, and training process in the company that needs fixing. There is a *design* change in the business operating system that needs to be made to fix the issue at the source. However, if you're stuck working tactically, you can't see this and so you keep firing from the hip and keep flying off the handle every time something happens. At some point, you have to realize that a different approach is needed – one that is strategic.

## **HOW YOU RUN YOUR LIFE IS HOW YOU RUN YOUR BUSINESS**

If any of that sounds familiar, and you find yourself constantly fighting fires or always feeling like you're "spinning your wheels," always fixing the same problems over and over again, then it's possible you need to spend more time thinking about the structure and design of your business than working in it.

After all, structure brings freedom.

Function follows form.

And, by the way, it is the same in life!

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If you want a terrific life, you've got to design it before you live it. You've got to think about the conditions, standards, and values of your life as much as the rewards you want from it.

Designing your life and living it really are two very different things. And personally, I think this is where so many people go wrong in pursuit of happiness or fulfillment.

There's no shortage of people who want to "live their best life," but there is a huge shortage of people who are prepared to design it first in order to make living it a reality. I don't see many T-shirts with the slogan "Design Your Life First" on the front. But I do see T-shirts with something like the words "One Life, Live It," insinuating that all you have to do is show up every day and play.

Sadly, that isn't how it works in life or in business.

If you look at most people, they really *do* want to live a great life – there's no shortage of desire. But sadly, they're not doing that (at least not at the level they want).

And it's the same with business owners.

They really do want a great business. No one starts a business and wants it to be crappy. But years later, and despite a lot of effort and sacrifice, they still don't have a successful one. There's no shortage of determination or hard work. The will is there, but they are lacking the direction. And it nearly always happens because they lack the strategic oversight to achieve it. That is a business skill that can be learned.

Over the years, I've discovered that there's not that much difference between business success and life success. That is because both have one thing in common: the person living it or owning it.

One of my favorite sayings is "How you run your life is how you run your business." It basically means the same behaviors and level of thinking

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show up at home or in the office. The equivalent good and bad habits appear in both areas.

Said differently, there's no running to a phone booth to become Superman just before your business opens its doors. You are Clark Kent at home *and* in the practice.

I believe the primary reason that people don't have the life they want is because they spend too much time thinking about the things and stuff they think they *need* in their life for it to be great.

Instead of thinking about *how* to actually achieve them, thoughts are consumed by ownership of things like cars, TVs, glamorous vacations, or big houses.

It's the same for business owners – they obsess over wanting more patients and more money rather than what is required to do so: the how, the strategy.

And, what is more, because their thoughts are relentlessly fixed on “getting more” (both money and patients), there are very few, if any, thoughts about if either will actually make you happy. Many presuppose they automatically will.

But I am not sure that they always do.

Getting patients and making money is one thing – but if you're not careful, it can come at the expense of finding happiness and fulfillment in your life. And surely that is what you want from your business? I believe a business is simply a vehicle for a terrific life and I build my life around my business to suit.

My Uncle Liam always used to say to me, “Paul, making money is easy – it is the other stuff in life that is difficult.” Back then I never believed him. I looked at a lot of people around me who didn't have money and assumed it must be difficult to make a lot of it. But if the truth be told,

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I really didn't know what he meant by "the other stuff." Now I get it. He was talking about living and getting the best from your life every day.

After all, you can sit in an Uber for twenty hours per day, 365 days per year, and you'll make a decent sum of money. Certainly enough to get by. But is it going to give you the fulfillment and contentment you want in life?

Maybe. But probably not.

Therefore, it surely has to be about *how* you make your money – not just how much you make. That is why the strategy, or the design aspect of your business (and life), is so important.

What is the point in having made a load of money if you've never seen your son play baseball or you've never been able to pick him up from school because you were always looking for more patients and more money? It is the strategy that dictates how the money is made and ultimately if the juice is worth the squeeze.

Bottom line, the right strategies for your life and business are vital. These strategies require time to be invested, not to mention skills honed, if you're going to become world class.

## **Choice dictates quality of life**

I believe that what we're all after as business owners is the freedom of choice. Not freedom, but the freedom to choose. There's a difference. If you're lucky enough to live in the western world, you're already free. But you might not feel it. And that's because there's a lack of freedom of choice.

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People tell me they want to be free from their practice – but I think what they’re *really* saying is they want to be free to choose when they can be at or away from it. They don’t want to feel like they’re shackled to it 365 days per year. They want the choice to come and go when it suits them, go on vacation when they want, and be home for dinner or soccer any night they wish.

Remember this: *the people with the best lives have the best choices*. You don’t want more options – it’s more important to have choices. Everyone has options. Options are all around us – but not everyone has choices.

Choices are things you can actually execute on. Options are things that are available to everyone and in the western world there’s no shortage of options for things you could do or get. But for most people, there is a serious lack of actual choice that can become a reality.

For example, everyone has the *option* to book a first-class seat on an airline – but not everyone has the means to actually *choose* to book one. And everyone has the *option* to live in a big house with a swimming pool out back – but not everyone can actually *choose* to do so as they don’t have the means.

Every day I wake up, I do so with the intention of expanding the number of choices available to me. Remember this: the quality of your life is directly proportional to the number of choices available in your life. Increasing life choices is the number one objective for me and why I am in business in the first place.

If you focus on more money, you might just find that you get it, but you’ve now got more restrictions and liabilities therefore you can’t do anything with it. So, what was the point?

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If you focus on choice, you can still achieve the money but the decisions you make along the way come with careful consideration of how or if what you're about to do is going to expand your life choices – or limit them.

Focusing on more money is great. But be careful what you wish for. You might just get all the money you want but find that you're more restricted than ever and no happier for having it.

Try it for yourself. Switch your focus to being about expanding the number of life choices available to you and your family. I promise you, the quality of your life and the fulfillment you get will increase exponentially. What is more, you'll likely find your desire to buy things or get stuff that you once thought you needed to be happy decreases.

I've learned that when you have the choice, you realize that is all you ever wanted in the first place. Actually, getting the thing you thought you wanted or needed rarely makes you happy in the long term. Focusing on expanding your choices brings a new level of quality to your life that means you're not working on *getting* more things. Rather, you're focused on *achieving* more things.

It's hard to explain, but it's a wonderful place to get to in life.

Give it a try and come and join me.

## **Make your life about accomplishment – not activity**

I would encourage anyone who is serious about getting more from their life to think about the design aspect of life – the structure. It includes how your day will look, what time you want available for yourself, who you want to work with, what standards you'll accept from others around you,

what level of discipline you need, and the areas in which you need it. Doing this will take you well above the need for more things and stuff.

At this level, you're no longer focused on just making it through the day or hustling for more dollars. No, you're focused on the longer term and higher outcome of your life. You're at a much higher level in your life.

Getting to a higher level in your thinking elevates you above the noise that is likely to be consuming your day. Getting above the noise allows you to see who is doing all of the shouting in the first place. And that's a vital thing for a business owner to be able to do. If you can't see the forest for the trees, you don't know what is waiting in there for you.

As a business owner, you have to be able to see past the trees so that you can see what is coming down the line in terms of problems and opportunities. If you're constantly engulfed in the same problems – in life or business – and there's very little if any progress, it's likely because you're living and thinking day to day.

Get your head up high. Instead of a relentless “doer,” become an observer of the things happening around you. Do not constantly react to each one.

One of the best things I learned through the early phases of the coronavirus pandemic was to become an observer of the things that were happening to me.

I resisted the temptation to have strong opinions or form judgements about things that people were doing or saying around me. I began to realize that when I step back from constantly being engulfed in the situation – having thoughts about it or wanting to express my opinion on it – I was becoming less affected by the events that were literally bringing the world

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to its knees. I began to apply that same methodology to running my business and it's helped tremendously.

If you can learn to see beyond the end of the day or past the current drama and think well beyond next week or even next month, you can picture your end goal. You can start to see the top of the mountain that you're climbing as you build your business. This allows you to start thinking about how you want your life and business to look in the next three to five years from now – and when you see it, work backward.

I always say that if I can see it – or I can see someone else doing it – then I can make it happen. I just need to be able to see it. And once you can see what you really want, you can start to build a roadmap that shows you how to achieve it. This allows you to think about all of the things you will need to do, as well as the likely challenges that will hit you along the way to getting wherever it is you want to go.

The best thing about living this way – in both life and business – is that when the inevitable challenges come along, they don't affect you nearly as much as others who are experiencing the same setback.

Why?

Simply because you were expecting them. And because you were, you dealt with them better than the next person.

I always say, “The problem is never the problem.” The only *real* problem in life is that we weren't expecting a problem. And because we weren't expecting it, what follows from this is often a poor response to the unexpected problem. And that nearly always creates an even worse situation. *That's* what hurts you – how badly you responded, or the bad decision you made to fix it. But it's rarely, if ever, the issue itself.

If I get hit and I was expecting it, I likely have a plan to get back up faster than the person who didn't expect it. It's that simple. If you can see

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things coming, you get to dodge the bullets, or they start skimming off you. Doing just this – in both business and life – immediately puts you ahead of most people.

The key, though, and where it all starts, is getting yourself out of the day-to-day grind, putting your workaholic ego aside and spending more time *thinking* about what you really want and *how* you're going to get it.

Then, of course, executing on it. Get busy hustling only once you've got your roadmap. But don't hustle for hustling's sake. That's dumb. And the only thing you're going to get is tired.

Thinking – *real thinking*, where you are actually considering ideas and concepts that are not immediately obvious to you – is a grossly underestimated sport. Yet, for those who play it regularly, the prize is huge. It leads to less frustration, less hassle, less stress – and, dare I say it, even less work (the “doing work,” that is).

Make your life about accomplishment – not activity. You can't take activity to the bank and cash it. Don't let your life become about moving in favor of momentum. There is a huge difference between the two.

Don't focus on the instant gratification that comes with getting stuff done, either. Instead, become more strategic and critical in your thinking – and start asking yourself if what you got done today was “growth work” or “grunt work.” When you think critically, you can see eleven other solutions to the problems that no one else can.

Stop telling your staff to do the same thing every time they ask you the same question. Instead, spend time on designing a more effective training manual that they can reference whenever needed so they don't have to ask you ever again.

Stop constantly blaming and changing marketing when you have poor leads. Instead, focus on recruitment and training the people who answer your phone so they are able to turn “okay” leads into high-paying patients.

Don’t focus on getting a long-overdue bill from an insurance company finally paid and being happy that you did. Instead, focus on finding out why the delay keeps happening in the first place and what part of the company needs to be redesigned to ensure it never happens again.

Don’t keep wasting time on hiring and firing dummies, constantly blaming the job market in your area. Instead, design a better recruitment process that finds and picks out A players (more on that in a later chapter).

These are all examples of where you, as a private practice owner, could change the level of your thinking and as a result change your outcome.

Remember this: you can’t solve a problem with the level of thinking that got you into it. *Tactical thinking* creates constant problems requiring a lot of effort with very little forward momentum. *Strategic thinking* creates breakthroughs and solutions that take you to a level of living that you currently can’t begin to imagine.

Strategic thinking is the only way to achieve long-lasting success in business. And to get breakthroughs in your thinking, to get the strategic idea, you need to allocate a significant amount of time to it. The quality of your thinking is directly proportional to the amount of time you allocate to it.

Put another way, you need to spend more than the customary five minutes doing it. Everything that you think about in the first five to ten minutes of your thinking session is something you already knew. It was likely what you had already considered to solve your problem. The breakthroughs – the solutions – are usually found twenty, thirty, forty

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minutes or longer into your session. The question is, will you as the leader of your company afford yourself the time to do it?

As this chapter comes to an end, I want you to take away these two points:

1. There's a difference between being a manager and a leader, but you'll always need to do both as the owner of a business. The most important thing is to recognize how much time you're spending on both. The beginning and early years of your business are a constant wrestling match played out between leading and managing. As you get more staff and a leadership team around you, it's about spending 80 percent of your time on the strategic thinking that allows your company to find new paths to grow. If you're not great at doing stuff, it's vital you employ someone who is so that you can focus on the bigger-picture stuff.
2. You are only as good as your level of thinking and the time you allocate to it. If you want a better business – and a better life – then spend more time thinking about the design and structure of your life and *how* you will get it (not just getting it). Time is your greatest asset. How you invest it – or spend it – is up to you.

I've touched on the idea of people a few times in this chapter, and how they can assist your or hold you back in pursuit of your business goals. Come with me to the next chapter and we'll talk more about how to get the best from your people.

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