

THE 7 KEYS

TO WINNING BIG
IN BUSINESS & LIFE



JEFF GUNTHER

“He likes to build little empires.” I wasn’t quite sure whether this was intended as a compliment or a criticism – but it was absolutely true!

In my early twenties, I’d achieved enviable success in the field of ski resort management. I knew how to form fiercely loyal staff. I knew how to control costs and increase revenues. I knew how to innovate and constantly create new profit centres. What I didn’t know was how to win BIG.

All of my achievements, no matter how impressive I made them out to be, were admittedly small. In my effort to make a name for myself, I had inadvertently limited my potential and risked relationships. And here’s the problem: the empire I was building was built around me.

As it turns out, I’m not the only one who suffers from this problem. As humans, our natural tendency is to

put ourselves first. We all want to be the centre of our own little universe. When we do this, pride crowds out humility and we end up exchanging our rightful place in eternity for something shorter, smaller and significantly less exciting. And as long as we do, we can never win BIG.

Deep inside, I longed for more than my little empire. I flirted with success and empty victories as I struggled to discover what seemed like an elusive secret. And like so many secrets, when I finally found it, it was surprisingly simple: Rather than struggling to build my little empire, I could join an infinite God in building his Kingdom!

Yes, simple – but not easy!

I immediately released control of my empire, and put my future in the hands of a trustworthy God. Then I set about the daunting work of discipleship—seeking to find practical truth in his Word. As I began putting principles into practice, I came to realize that freedom is the ultimate reward of discipline. By trading my little empire for his Kingdom, I was no longer limited by self-imposed boundaries.

We live, however, in an imperfect world. While I now consider the Holy Bible to be the single greatest success manual ever written, I confess that I am constantly challenged by what it seems to be saying.

Although I am no longer involved in the ski industry, I still love to spend a day on the slopes followed by an evening with friends around a fireplace. On one such ski trip several years ago, I was invited by a group of young adults to share something from Scripture. I opened my Bible, turned to the New Testament book of Acts, chapter 4, and simply read:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

I was older than the others and, at this point in life, enjoyed a level of success in both business and real estate investment that easily set me apart from them. I paused, and then said: "As much as anybody in this room, I truly want to be obedient to the Word of God... but I'm having great difficulty with this passage. Can anybody tell me why?"

Silence...

And then the response came – in a soft, but steadfast voice: "You don't trust us."

That's exactly what I was thinking! Give up my possessions? Share everything I have? Sell my land and houses? Give it to you? I don't think so! Where will you be when I need you?

And I think I'm right. But as long as we live in a culture that cannot trust, we will continually be pushed back into our own limited little empires.

Were you hoping that the secret to winning BIG would be easy or instant? I'm sorry to say that it's not, but neither is it out of reach. The moment we put our trust in an eternally-reigning King, and join him in building his Kingdom on earth, we've already won—but there will be work.

We can have faith in what we do not yet see, but faith without work is worthless. In life we all have setbacks, but that is never cause to give up. As cliché as it sounds, we learn far more from our mistakes than we ever do from our success. It is often in weakness that we discover strength.

For me, it was following a disappointing business failure that I found myself in the midst of an opportunity to win BIG by choosing the Kingdom over my faltering empire. Financially and emotionally exhausted, I was forced to take inventory of what I stood for, and what I had left to offer. I sought assistance from others in areas where I was lacking, allowed myself to be guided by gratitude rather than greed, and became accountable by placing the interests of others above my own.

For you, the secret to winning BIG will also be found in choosing the Kingdom over the empire. Here are Seven Keys to Kingdom Building that you can begin using right now:

KNOW YOUR VALUES



We all have a set of values that governs the way we live our lives. However, until we have stopped to identify with crystal clarity what they are, we can easily be distracted—to our own detriment—by the world around us. When I work with business owners I tell them that, while I'm interested in what they do and where they're going, I'm far more interested in how they will get there. How you choose to live your life – your values – has greater impact on your results in life than anything else you will ever do.

Take a moment right now to write down some of the values that define you. You can always come back and refine your values later, but you can't win if you don't start!

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KEY#2

BECOME AN EXPERT



We have all been given unique gifts and abilities that set us apart. However, until we identify them and determine to become an absolute expert in a specific area, we can never expect to win BIG because we simply don't have enough to offer.

What do you have to offer? Examine yourself right now. Write down two or three areas in which you have sufficient interest, experience, or passion to create tremendous value for others. Then narrow your list to one, and decide to become an expert in that area. Do it now!

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KEY#3

SEEK WISE COUNSEL



There is no such thing as a self-made success. Learn to leverage the knowledge and wisdom of others - especially as it pertains to your area of expertise. Every author in this book has the potential to help you win. You likely already know others in your field whom you hold in high regard. Reach out to the very best.

Take a moment right now and write down the names of at least three people you will seek out for wise counsel. Next, make a plan to contact them, and do it!

ENGAGE OTHERS



It's not enough to become an expert. We all have gaps in our ability or resources. If we want to win, we need to actively engage the assistance of others. Think of yourself as part of a body. We need the other parts of the body in order to survive and thrive. What are you missing? Chances are great that the person with that is missing you. Find a partner, partners, or suppliers with values highly-aligned to yours. It's okay to have some overlap in contribution, but it's pointless to partner with someone exactly like you. It is not a sign of weakness to need others; needing others is absolutely essential to winning BIG.

What do you need and who has that? Begin engaging others to join you in building the Kingdom.

BE GENEROUS



The Dead Sea is dead, not because there's nothing flowing into it, but because there's nothing flowing out of it. Don't be like the Dead Sea; learn to hold your treasures lightly. We must be good stewards of our talents, but we must also remember that their highest and best use is in building the Kingdom. People known to be genuinely generous with time, treasure, and talent more easily attract others to engage with them in winning BIG.

Many people mistakenly believe that they are more important if they are a big part of something small, than if they are a small part of something big. Read the illustration at the end of this chapter and invest a few moments in considering how much more you might have to give when you choose the Kingdom.

BE ACCOUNTABLE



We are all susceptible to temptation. Kingdom builders learn to count on others and be held accountable by others. Part of the secret to winning BIG is the ability to stay the course and finish well. This includes both what we do, and what we don't do.

What systems can you put in place to ensure that you always do what you say you will do? Find a person, or small group of people, with whom you can be completely transparent, and insist that they hold you accountable.

PUT RELATIONSHIPS FIRST



It may seem somewhat odd that our last Key to Kingdom Building is about putting something first, but I saved this for last because it's probably the most important. I won't argue with you if you tell me that religion tends to complicate things. I will, however, point out that Jesus makes them remarkably clear. Once, when asked which of all the commandments is most important, he simply responded: Love God and love your neighbour. The story of the Kingdom is all about reconnecting people to God, and people to people. The secret to winning BIG is found in being connected to the Kingdom.

Never allow 'winning' to stand in the way of relationships. Resolve now to be quick to forgive, and to seek forgiveness. Partner with people whose interests you willingly place above your own.

I recall a breakfast meeting some time ago with a man I highly respect. He honoured me throughout our conversation and, as our time was coming to a close, looked me straight in the eye and asked: “How can I serve you?” I was caught by surprise, but only because his behaviour so closely resembled that of the believers described in that challenging passage of Acts, chapter 4—challenging me to choose the Kingdom.

I love to lead live workshops. When I do, I frequently invite people to physically participate in the presentation by joining me onstage.

First, I invite one person to stand in front of the audience and make a circle by holding their arms in front of them. Then I’ll invite a few others up to do the same. For fun, I’ll sometimes challenge one of them to make their circle a little bigger by somehow stretching their arms or releasing the clasp of the fingers just a little bit. Of course, it’s very hard to make the circle any bigger. This, I suppose, is the secret to winning small. And this is what most of us do most of the time. We go through life building our little empires. If we’re feeling generous, we’ll occasionally give out of our little empire, and then we must work hard to replace what we’ve lost.

Next I ask my volunteers to hold hands and form one big circle. Then I ask the audience: Which is bigger—one small circle; the sum of the small circles; or the product of the big circle? The answer is obvious. (The geometry is only slightly more difficult.)

When we recognize that we are small and God is big, we begin to get a glimpse of what it means to win BIG. Rather than struggling to build our own little empires, we can choose instead to build his Kingdom.

And that, my friends, is the secret to winning BIG!



ABOUT JEFF

Jeff Gunther is a gifted entrepreneurial leader and strategist. He has demonstrated proven results through bottom line accountability in restaurants, hotels, ski areas, investment real estate, sales and management training, dental centre development, professional practice management, financial services, franchising, international development, and business advisory services.

Jeff co-founded Associated Dental Care – a system of large customer-oriented, multi-disciplinary group dental centres in Ottawa – where he served as Managing Director from 1991 to 2002. This was one of Canada's largest and most successful dental enterprises.

As a practical philanthropist, Jeff serves boards of non-profit organizations, counsels young people in the integration of faith and work, and seeks out virtuous business opportunities. Jeff believes that freedom is the reward of discipline and that simple questions often lead to profound answers. He finds great joy in the privilege of walking with others as they discover their own true value.

Jeff earned an MBA at the University of Ottawa and an MCS at Regent College. Both academic degrees have revealed that he still has much to learn, and have helped him appreciate and model the genius in clear explanations of complicated concepts.

As an inspirational speaker, Jeff delights in disrupting the status-quo. As a business advisor, he adds value by collaborating on the creation and implementation of great ideas. Jeff also welcomes inquiries from financial partners interested in the acquisition and amplification of solution-oriented real estate projects.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JEFF GUNTHER...

www.jeffgunther.ca | www.secrethomes.ca | jeff@jeffgunther.ca