



Building Cash Cows™  
Improving Quality of Life™

## The Strategic Edge™

Insights for improving profits, cash-flow, and quality of life

Winter 2008

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### **The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round**

*Who's on the Bus, and Who's in Which Seats? Who Cares?*

Ever since Jim Collins chose the imagery of "the bus" in his now renowned book, "Good to Great," to help the rest of us who struggle in the trenches with the challenges of building a world class team in our businesses, I've heard nearly every possible analogy from it. The fact is that every entrepreneur in America understands, on some level, that the day of the Lone Ranger in business is long gone. Maria Von Neuman Wittman, the former chief economist of one of America's largest corporations and the highest ranking woman in business at the time, has stated that "all significant achievement in business and industry from this time forward will be as a result of collective effort." Was she saying that the day of spectacular individual performance in business is over? No, not at all. What she was saying is that much more can be accomplished through the efforts of a cohesive team working together than can ever be accomplished by an individual or a group of individuals, each "flying solo." And if ever there was a time that American enterprise needs outstanding achievement, it is now! It sounds so simple, this notion of getting only the right people on the "bus" (our business), and making sure they are in the "right seats" (each position at our company).

### **HELP! THIS GROWTH IS KILLING ME!**

In the course of helping business leaders and their teams turn their businesses into "Cash Cows," we at ABA encounter just about every flavor of frustration and struggle you can imagine in this area. Because different skill sets are necessary on the team in a company as it moves through its various stages of growth, often a business leader finds himself or herself with a bus full of folks, some of whom do not belong on it any longer. At the very least, many no longer occupy the right seats. Additionally, it seems apparent that they also may need one or more passengers who are not yet aboard.

It seems that all or nearly all of the businesses we have the privilege of working with either have a product with some form of uniqueness or they bring their product to the market with a totally unique twist. The irony is the more effective a business has been at meeting the needs of the market, the sooner they get into "bus trouble." Their success precipitates their problems. And before they know it, their greatest asset and often their most costly one—people—becomes their most immobilizing liability. What do we find as the major by-products? The list is far too long and painful to completely reiterate here. However, it always begins with confusion, puzzlement, insecurity, fear, radically lowered productivity, mistrust, and a major departure

from the main focus on the business' purpose. Enormous amounts of energy begin to be re-routed to the issue of personal survival. Whether a business leader realizes it or not, at the point when these things begin to happen with their team, they are at the most vulnerable place they have been since their business was a fledgling. Growth brings with it a definite non-returnability to the "good old days" when one person told everyone else what they were supposed to do and they all just did it. If we can't go back, and where we are is killing us, then what do we do?

## **MAKING THE RIGHT TURNS TO GET ONTO THE RIGHT COURSE**

In this area of getting our company "on course," we face a number of challenges. Some of the most important challenges are discussed below.

### The Quick Fix Really Isn't

The first challenge is the tendency for all business leaders to attempt a quick fix for team building and development challenges. The old adage, "never time to do it right, always time to do it again," is almost always **untrue** for companies finding themselves off course with their team. Some companies don't have enough "margin" to get a second chance at building the right team. It can be dangerous to try to "fix" everything all at once, rather, it is crucial to sort through all the components and prioritize efforts.

### What, Who, and Why?

Another critical challenge is related to obtaining the right people for your team. Although the market for employees could almost be described as flooded, it is still as hard or harder than ever to get the right people. This is not because they do not exist. It is because we often do not know exactly who we need. Part of this quandary is exacerbated by the fact that some of the good people we currently have on board appear to no longer be in the right "seats on the bus." The three questions below guide companies in determining how to get the right people in the right seats on the bus.

1. **What** does our team need to look like, as our company grows, if we are to hit or exceed our annual goals and as we build our team for the future? What kind of skill sets do we require in the people on our team if we are to accomplish everything the company has to do to get there? This question is one of **talent**. Once we have determined the answer to this question, we may move on to the next.
2. **Who** do we need on our team right now? Is this person the kind of person with whom we want to build our company? This question is one of **values**. In the most fundamental ways, do their values line up with the values of the company? It has been accurately said that all human behavior is motivated by something. What makes this person behave the way he or she does? I have a friend and former boss named Dr. Jay Kesler, who became the president of my university alma mater. He often referred to a concept he called "the fellowship of the lifeboat." He would ask us, is this person you are considering hiring, or even just having as a good friend, the kind of person you would want to have in a lifeboat with you as part of your "survival team"? In essence, a lifeboat is the most graphic place where an alignment of core values is most essential to everyone's survival and "success." If the person passes the lifeboat test, they possess the first credential to qualify them to be on your team.

3. **Why** does this person do what they do? This question is one of *passion*. It is very difficult for a person not to be very good at doing something they truly love to do. Find out as much as possible about what makes a person "tick." What things can they not "not do"? When they can be doing anything they want to be doing, what does that look like? Although I've never seen a job which is a continual party for the one doing it, the most important thing you can hear from someone on your team is, "I love my job and the people I work with."

You may be asking, what does all this have to do with the wheels on the bus going round and round? The answer is when the wheels on the bus go round and round, everyone on the bus, without exception, arrives where the bus is going. Remember that the thing which makes our free enterprise system work so well is that it is designed to identify and meet the wants and needs of people, which makes their lives better. This group is made up of not only consumers of our products or services; but also all those on our bus—our employees. We, as employers, have the high privilege of being a key part of enriching the lives of our team members and providing them the raw materials they need for their happiness and meaning in life. When our team consists of the right people on the bus, all sitting in the right seats, everyone can enjoy the ride.

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