

Sample eBook Writing

4 Cats, Ink

Kelly Jo Eldredge and Eric L. Mott

Chapter 2: It's All In Your Head

I didn't have a defined goal when I came to the United States. I was searching for something, but I wasn't exactly sure what that something would be. What I did do was to keep an open mind and look for opportunities. I studied English, I attended college, and then I went to work for a small CPA firm in California. I prepared myself for my future, and I kept my eyes and ears open.

That could have been the end of my story. I could have worked for that small CPA firm my entire life and fulfilled my family's idea of success by staying with the same employer from the beginning to the end of my career.

However, I had a different mindset. I continued to take IT courses in the evenings as I witnessed the dot-com era getting into full swing in the late 1990s. I had a real talent for computers, and soon I was doing occasional side jobs for clients. I began to cultivate a dream of owning my own IT services company.

And *this* is where I believe I stepped away from the pack. I made one critical choice:

I thought, “**why not?**”

I didn't dwell on the fact that I had very few contacts and no real idea how to run a business. I concentrated on what I did know. I looked at the opportunities right in front of me, and I went for it.

Now, you may be thinking, that makes a very nice story, but how exactly did I get from “why not” to millionaire? That certainly doesn't happen overnight. There must be a catch. What did I do to make things happen? How did I capture that level of success?

Creating the Perfect Mindset for Success

One of the major things that I did was to create the perfect mindset for success. It would be pretty difficult to find a successful entrepreneur who clawed their way to the top through pessimistic and negative thinking. That just doesn't happen. I had an overall positive attitude and a mindset that I would be successful— not that I *might* do pretty well—that I *would* be successful.

Success starts in the head. If you don't believe it, you won't do it. If you do believe, the sky is the limit. The first step in creating the perfect mindset for success is to open yourself up to possibilities. Take that "why not" attitude with you everywhere you go, and never shut off an opportunity.

Just as I didn't know what my future would hold when I arrived in the U.S., you have no idea how events in your future might unfold. Look around. Open yourself up to new thoughts and new ideas. Success may be lurking right around the next corner. Don't shut your eyes and miss the opportunity.

Keep it Simple

Little did I know at the time, but one of the brilliant things I did when starting my business was that I kept it simple. I didn't have a lot of contacts at first, but I had a very strong link to the Japanese community. So, I chose that segment of the population, and I targeted my business to them.

I didn't create a gigantic media campaign to get the word out to the entire market. There were a lot of dot-com companies at that time, and I would have had a ton of competition. Instead, I kept it simple. I stuck with what I knew.

I knew the Japanese community. I knew about the IT issues that people in that community were facing. So, I took a small section of the market and helped the people I really knew how to help first.

How can you keep it simple? What can you do to make your business manageable? The best way to keep it simple is to start with what you know. Think about your potential clients. Is there a group or sub-set with which you are very well connected? Do you feel like you really understand the needs of a particular segment of the population?

Go for the easy targets first. If you understand one group, and you know that your product or service will absolutely fill a need for that population, then target them and only them. It will be much easier to build your business on solid ground, even if it seems as though you are working with a very small customer base.

Remember what I did, and keep it simple. You don't need to run a national ad campaign to get a business started. Stick with what you know, help the people you are sure you can help, keep your eyes and ears open, and your business will have a solid foundation on which to grow.

Create Value

Another important mindset for achieving business success is to always find new ways to create value. The first step in creating value is to define a problem, and then define your solution. You create value for someone if you are able to solve their problems. Always make sure that you have a clear definition of both the problem and your solution.

Once you have a solid definition of the problem and the solution, you can define the value you are creating more specifically. Here are several areas where you can add value for your client:

- Quality
- Service
- Price
- Filling a Need
- Innovation
- Emotion

Let's take a look at each of these. **Quality** is a given. Your product or service must be of the highest quality, or it adds little value for your customer. Never skimp on quality to make a few extra dollars. You will end up losing much more money in the long-run, as your customers flock to the competition. If the quality of your products and services is consistently high, you will end up with loyal customers.

Answer the following questions, and you will begin to assess the quality of services you offer and point out areas in which you may want to improve:

- How do you differentiate your products and services?
- What do you have that your customers love and your competitors fear?
- Why do you think customers will stay with you?

Service is another area where you can set yourself apart from the competition and add value. Put yourself in the customers' shoes and treat them exactly as you would like to be treated. Always provide the product or service, plus a little bit more.

Here is a great example:

Mandy started a pet sitting service. She had a good customer base through referrals from a local veterinarian, but she wanted to add value in some way to retain customer loyalty and maybe generate some word of mouth referrals from satisfied clients.

When a new client called, Mandy was very businesslike. She made sure to get the names of each pet, specifics about their care, emergency numbers, and security details for the home. The pet owners left for their trip feeling confident that Mandy had all the required information to adequately care for their animals.

When they returned, however, they got a little more than they bargained for. Happy and content pets greeted them, and they found a copy of Mandy's business card and the invoice for her services tacked to the refrigerator. They also received an additional document.

Mandy provided a daily diary of her pet visits. In the diary, she gave a rundown of when she fed and walked the pets, and she also added a little personal note about something she may have enjoyed about Fluffy's cuddly personality or Fifi's friendly bark when she met her at the door. Maybe she would include a sentence or two on how she noticed that Fido certainly did enjoy his chew toy when she was playing with him in the yard.

Most pet owners consider their animals to be members of the family, and leaving them behind can sometimes be a bit traumatic. Mandy knew this, and she created value by letting her customers know that she gave their pets extra love and attention when they were gone. She took her service just one small step further, and the result was extreme customer loyalty and a boom in business.

Creating added value is a small step that yields big results. Constantly brainstorm ways in which you can add just a tiny bit more to your products or services. What little perk would you enjoy if you were the client?

Price is extremely important. If the price isn't right, you can forget about the customers. You are already aware that your product or service must create value for the customer, but finding out just how much value can be a tricky process.

On one hand, if you overprice your product, your customers will write you off and never give you a second look. On the other hand, if you provide extremely high quality services, you can afford to charge a little bit more, because loyal customers will be willing to pay for excellent service.

Do not go arbitrarily into decisions about your pricing structure. Do your homework. Find out what the competition is charging for similar services, and then sit down and do an honest, side-by-side comparison of the services that you offer.

- Are you providing more or less than the competition?
- How are your services or products different?
- Are your customers exactly the same, or do they differ slightly?
- Is your location better or worse?
- Have you been around longer than the competition, or have they been established in this market for a longer period of time?

Go through this exercise with a number of competing companies.

After you have collected a healthy amount of information on your competition, you are armed to develop your own pricing strategy. Do you want to undersell the competition just a little to provide a better price value? Or, do you want to position yourself as a higher end product that is worth just a bit more?

The choice of setting a price is yours. You're the boss. That's the beauty of owning your own business. But don't make your decisions on pricing lightly. They can make or break your business.

One more thing to remember about pricing: make sure that you are putting forth the best product you are capable of providing, no matter what price you charge.

Henry Ford said, "The man who will use his skill and constructive imagination to see how much he can give for a dollar, instead of how little he can give for a dollar, is bound to succeed."

You know you have a winner of a business when you can clearly see that you are **filling a need**. Hopefully, the reason you created your business in the first place was to do exactly that, and not just to get away from an annoying boss or create your own work schedule. If your business isn't extraneous, if it isn't fluff, and if it actually does fill a specific need, you have added value for your customers.

Innovation is where you really set yourself apart from the pack—and this one isn't easy. How do you come up with innovative ideas that will add value for your customers? What if you're just not that creative?

The definition of innovation is to find a new way of doing things, to create something or change something in a way that no one has before.

Talk about pressure! Hasn't everything already been done before? Some people believe that there is no such thing as a unique idea. Are you one of those people? Maybe all you wanted to do when you started your own business was to avoid answering to a boss. And now you are expected to be some sort of inventor?

Just for the record, millions of people come up with unique ideas every day. Also, you can't skip innovation if you want to have a successful business.

Never fear! Innovation is not an unachievable task. It's actually a license to scrap the rules. It's permission to get silly! Truly innovative ideas come up only when you are able to drop all of your boundaries and let the ideas flow. So, get out a pad of paper or start a new Word document, put on some inspirational music, order a pizza and write down everything that comes to mind.

This is not a joke. Pick a subject. Maybe you need a new tag line to describe your business. Maybe you want to develop a new product, and you just aren't coming up with anything original. Write down all ideas, no matter how stupid they seem. It'll give you a good laugh, and it will also get those creative juices flowing so the truly innovative ideas have a chance to rise to the top.

Do not censor yourself. You don't have to turn this list in to a teacher at the end of the day. You will not be graded. In fact, feel free to burn it afterward if you like. Just weed

out any good ideas that surfaced and save them before you light the match. You may end up writing 50 really dumb things down, but once your mind starts going, an innovative thought will eventually crop up. Some like to call this exercise “composting.”

Try this exercise out as a group. Gather your staff together and make sure they understand the rules are—no rules. You may be very surprised at what people come up with when they start bouncing ideas off each other. It also demonstrates to your employees that they can bring up anything without being shot down by the boss. A simple exercise in silliness may end up creating a more collaborative environment in the workplace.

Go ahead and put in the time to come up with an innovative idea. It is well worth it. Innovation doesn’t necessarily mean that you have to come up with something brand new. You can rearrange something you already have in a new way, and that counts! Many innovative ideas are just looking at old ideas in new ways.

We are all unique, so no matter how uncreative you think you are, you will eventually come up with an innovative notion. Just give it time, and keep composting.

Finally, creating value for your clients is **emotional**. Customers do not want to be anonymous. They want to feel special, whether they are picking up their laundry or having their house remodeled. You should feel as though you have a personal stake in your customer’s happiness and well being. Don’t think of them as stick figures with dollar signs on their foreheads. Create an emotional bond.

