

6 STEPS

TO BECOMING A PROFITABLE

GO-TO BUSINESS



LORRAINE AND ROB MCGREGOR



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lorraine McGregor has developed and helped implement growth strategies for more than 100 companies from start ups to multi-million dollar companies. She is the co-author with her husband and business partner Rob McGregor of, “Fast-Track Secrets for Making Your Business Saleable” the first step by step manual and workbook on how to make a company worth what the owner wants to sell it for. Lorraine and Rob have proven with their own clients that a saleable business is a more profitable business. A company that has learned how to bottle their secret sauce has the essential ingredients for growth and saleability.

Rob and Lorraine developed the Make Your Business Saleable Resource System, a self-guided four step program that helps business owners make the right changes inside their company to make it more profitable and attract a premium buy-out offer. The Make Your Business Saleable Resource System includes books and workbooks and interviews with 19 experts to guide owners step by step through the process of becoming saleable, including how to think like a buyer.

Lorraine is also the past-president of the Vancouver Chapter of the Association for Corporate Growth, the leading mergers and acquisitions association for Dealmakers, the people who manage the transaction of buying and selling companies. She holds a Masters in Business Administration from Simon Fraser University.

Rob holds a BA in Psychology, a Masters in Divinity, a Masters in Business Administration and a Certificate in Conflict Resolution. He coaches leaders in making high-impact changes that empower their management teams to achieve growth.

Lorraine and Rob enjoy sailing their Catalina through the islands in the magnificent waters off the BC and Washington coast.

DISCLAIMER

The information contained in this document is subject to change without notice, and it represents the current view of the author(s).

Complying with all applicable copyright laws is the responsibility of the user. Without limiting the rights under copyright, you may not reproduce any part of this document, store or introduce any content contained herein into a retrieval system, transmit in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), or for any purpose without the express written permission of the author(s).

The information contained in this document is proprietary and the exclusive property of the author(s), except as otherwise indicated.

The information in this document provides content for discussion and general informational purposes only. The author MAKES NO REPRESENTATIONS, WARRANTIES, EXPRESS, IMPLIED OR STATUTORY, REGARDING THE INFORMATION IN THIS DOCUMENT. Nothing in this document constitutes investment, accounting, tax or legal advice. The reader is solely responsible for any use or application of the information or results achieved from the content. The author advises you to seek appropriate investment, accounting, tax, legal and other professional advice regarding your applicable jurisdictions, prior to acting or relying on any of the strategies in this book.

The case studies included in this book are based on our client files. Names, numbers, strategies and defining features have been changed, and some of the characters are composites of several people. All of the achieved results are factual.

6 STEPS

TO BECOMING A PROFITABLE

GO-TO BUSINESS





WANT A PROFITABLE AND SALEABLE BUSINESS? BECOME A “GO-TO” COMPANY

6 UNKNOWN SECRETS TO SEPARATE YOURSELF FROM THE PACK

You’ve started your business, you have a big dream—you are committed to working hard to position yourself as a leader in your industry—your market place. You want your name on customers’ lips. You want it all!

But how do you actually make that happen?

Well before we answer that question, let me ask you a bigger question that may help you answer it.

When you started your company, how did you intend to get a return on your investment? What’s your exit strategy? (*Don’t say ‘go public’ or ‘sell one day’.* Neither get you where you really want to go.)

Imagine this: Your brainchild could become a winning lottery ticket, if you take the right steps and make it saleable at the same time you are building for growth...long before you want to exit.

One of the secrets to grow your business to the next level and become saleable (*because you never know when a buyer will knock on your door interested in making an acquisition and you a millionaire*) is to become a ‘go-to’ company.

You are about to learn how to uncover and use the Secret Sauce hiding in your company. Your secret sauce is what makes you, in the minds of your customers, or clients, a ‘go-to’ company.

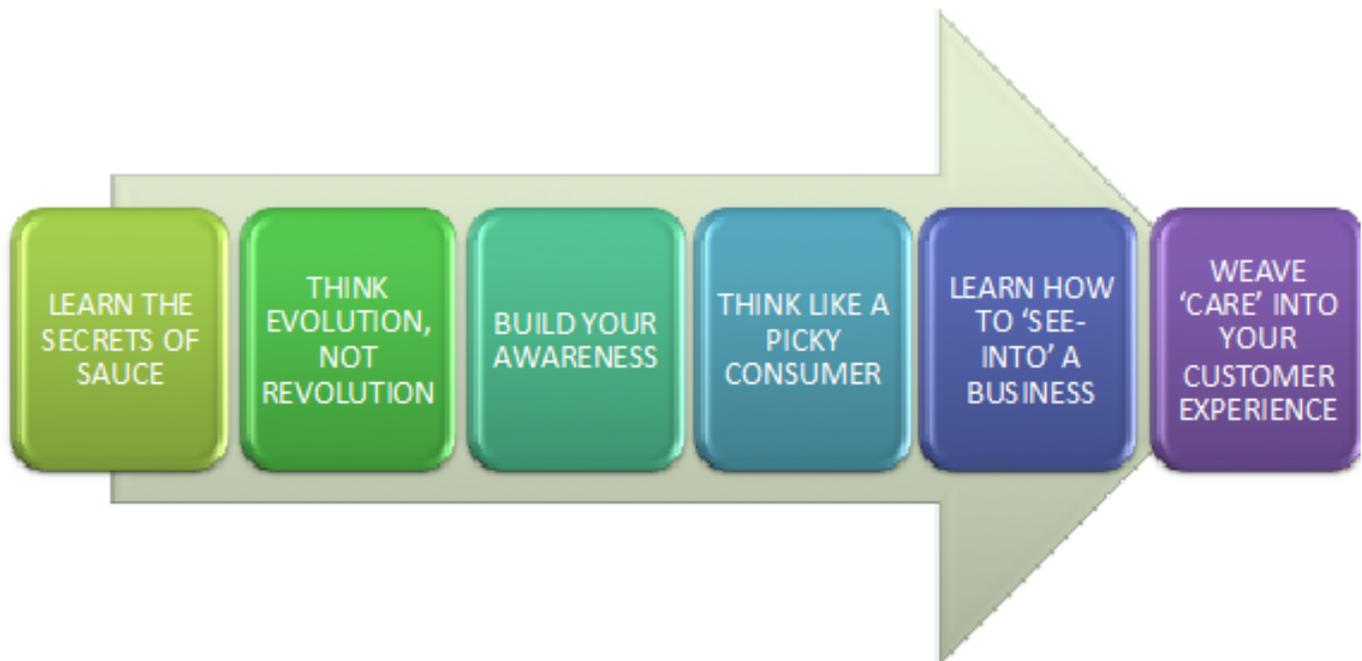
'Go-to' companies protect and grow their profits by effortlessly attracting new fans. Not by social media. Not by blogging. Not with enviously gripping marketing copy. With intangibles that are hard to copy.

Did you know that becoming a 'go to' company is essential if you want to:

- Be more profitable for you, the current owner.
- Scale your business so that double-digit growth is possible.
- Attract your next owner, so that you can get a return on your investment in your business by selling it on the way up. (*Not on the way down as un-prepared owners do!*)

There are six steps to uncovering your sauce, embedding it in your operation and working it to attract fans.

6 STEPS TO BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL 'GO-TO' BUSINESS



STEP 1: LEARN THE SECRETS OF SAUCE

HOW DO YOU DISTINGUISH A COMPANY'S SECRET SAUCE FROM ITS CORE COMPETENCY?

All businesses have core competency. Your Secret Sauce is embedded in *'how'* you deliver that core competency.

To succeed in business, you and your team have to be stellar in your core competency. That's a given if you want to be profitable and have a chance at growth. But will that expertise turn you into a 'go-to' company? You don't need more expertise. What you really need is more intangible. Your Secret Sauce is reflected by the attitude, approach, and methods you design to deliver that core competency.

Let's take restaurants, an experience we can all relate to. Why would you select one over another? Generally, we might all agree that the hallmarks that guide your selection are in how you are treated, the taste of the food, the cost, the atmosphere, convenience and your last experience there.

But these basics are not enough to bring repeat business.

The Secret Sauce adds the magic layer.

Given two restaurants to choose from that have all met your criteria, which will win you over?

For restaurants, it's about how authentically they treat you, how much 'fun' you feel you are having and how much you felt cared about without being intruded upon. These subtleties are hard to master if you are the owner. But these Secret Sauce intangibles are what

will guide you either consciously or unconsciously in your choice next time someone asks “where shall we go for dinner?”

In business to business, the customer experience is also guided by our consumer experiences. Put your business hat on. Think about your favorite place to order products or services in your business? Your distributor may have all of the parts needed, but our favorite example of a distributor who gets Secret Sauce, offers to share its facilities with the contractors who are on the road all day.

Their customers go out of their way to buy from this distributor over its competitors. What makes this distributor so great? Contractors love this company: They provide clean washrooms, a barista station with healthy snacks, and a contractor lounge where the contractors talk sports, technical issues, and share tips on a variety of topics. The customer lounge sports free Internet. The computer home page that offers that free internet is set to show the distributor’s online catalog in case these chat sessions jog their memories that they need more of something.

This distributor gains substantial market share because it considers its customers’ best interests first. You see, it’s the service solutions and the environment that entices customers to return—not once, but several times.

Lesson? Build your customer experience for a narrow niche.

Fact is, all successful name brands have Secret Sauce, and they use it to their advantage (*are you devoted to one coffee shop brand over another?*).

But, don’t make the mistake that Secret Sauce is just another way of describing branding—oh, no—it’s far more than that!

Secret Sauce makes or breaks the brand. It’s that simple. A successful brand requires compelling, magnetic, and consistent products. They must be personal, refreshing, and meaningful to a defined target market.

What’s the story behind your Secret Sauce?

It’s the service solutions and the environment that entices customers to return—not once, but several times.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOUR COMPANY

What does it mean to be a go-to company? Well, we believe it means being relevant to a select group of people's problems or needs, as well as your company's expertise to deliver with respect to those problems or needs.

Like the distributor to its contractor customers, the way your company is relevant, is delightful, a breath of fresh air, and informative—business owners and their staff awaken from their stupor and say, *Wow, impressive! I like this place! I like these people, and I like how they work with me!*

Here's the bottom line—if you're struggling with the economy, declining sales, or changes in your industry or locale, or are tired of being small and want to rocket, achieving status as the go-to company may be the smartest decision you ever made!

If you're struggling with the economy, declining sales or changes in your industry or local, achieving status as the go-to company may be the smartest decision you ever made!

So, what happens when your company becomes the go-to company?

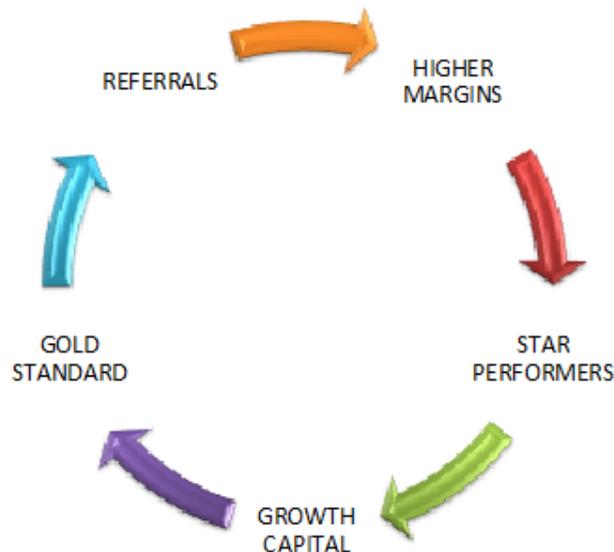
1. **REFERRALS.** *People bring their friends to your business.*
 - a. You gain more fans because people share their experiences of working with your company. Referrals inspire trust, so others want to do business with you, too.
2. **HIGHER MARGINS.** *You have pricing power.*
 - a. You can charge what the market will bear for your products or services rather than being forced to price at your competitors' rates. The additional revenue adds pure profit to your bottom line.
3. **STAR PERFORMERS.** *Your company attracts star performers.*
 - a. Not only does word get out to new prospects that your company is great,

your business also gains a reputation as a great place to work. You will attract people with skill sets and experience.

4. **GROWTH CAPITAL.** *Your bottom line is available to grow your top line.*
 - a. When you charge what the market will bear and keep costs in line, the additional profit drops to your bottom line. Volume increases. Increasing retained earnings will fund your company's growth, and you can invest in your future because you have that bankable, reliable 'go-to' cache.

5. **GOLD STANDARD.** *Your business model of delivering value becomes the gold standard.* How you deliver that gold is a black box to outsiders, and that's what makes it difficult to compete with your business.
 - a. Business owners often think they have to model their structure and business methods so it is identical to their competitors' because that's how it's done in our industry. Nonsense! That's not competing—it's copying. Your Secret Sauce is about how you deliver value, and that's different from your competitors. You're not the same!

BECOMING THE 'GO TO' COMPANY DRIVES GROWTH



STEP 2: THINK EVOLUTION, NOT REVOLUTION

Becoming the go-to company doesn't happen overnight—it isn't a destination. It's an evolution. Think this way—*we keep getting better at solving the right problem in ways that make us more relevant to our clients.* That philosophy, thinking ability, and way of leading is what you are cultivating in your people. The more you practice and act on it, the more your Secret Sauce will evolve and improve. Learn from practice—it enriches the experience of your prospects and customers, and they'll come back for more!

YOUR COMPANY CAN DEVELOP A SECRET SAUCE

Yes! We see commodity priced products become branded with greater convenience or cache and command high prices. Think produce – a head of lettuce next to a salad ready to go in a bag. Think computers – a clunky plastic box next to a slim gleaming stainless steel machine. Think professional services – a marketing consultant next to an expert who can grow your business to the next level.

Each of these commodities were drowning in a sea of competitors. Then they found their Secret Sauce and leaped to the forefront of consumer minds by repositioning the problem they solved, the products offered, and the way they delivered service value.

Here's the cool part—competitors are thinking: *How come they're winning business and we're not?* It's because these companies have Secret Sauce, and they don't!

Many of your competitors are stuck in a scarcity mindset, worrying about the economy, government, how it used to be or about cutting costs. Maybe they're afraid of change.

HOW YOU WILL REALIZE A CHANGE IN YOUR FORTUNES

First—get comfortable with being uncomfortable. It will require change to find and arm yourself with your Secret Sauce. Change is uncomfortable for many business owners because they fear losing—losing control, customers, and money.

Always put the needs of the company first. When you do, you're really saying, *we want to put our customers first.*

Your first mindset change is to understand you may limit yourself by how you think about your company's current circumstances. Do you think about what you want or don't want? If so, switch your focus. Concentrate on what you really want. The key is to reframe your inner fear, frustration, or chatter. Instead of thinking about losing customers, envision gaining fans who want your fabulous products and services!

Think about investing in your business as your second shift in perspective. Discovering and amplifying your Secret Sauce may take an investment, and that may cause you to pause for a second. However, if you regard investing as too risky because you don't want your costs to go up, then you won't realize the exponential benefits created by distinguishing your company as the go-to business in your market or industry. Remember—*stick with what you have been doing, and you will get more of what you already have!*

Your third shift in perspective aids in painting your fresh canvas, and you have to stop thinking like a business owner and start thinking like one of your clients or customers.

Always put the needs of the company first. When you do, you're really saying *we want to put our customers first.*

1. Adding Secret Sauce means re-inventing the business so it works for the people you serve.
2. Re-inventing may cost you at first and then pay off. It reduces business risk.
3. Be your customer. Think about your business like the person you are when you are not working—you know, the weekend person who consumes stuff.

STEP 3: BUILD YOUR AWARENESS

Here are a few exercises to get you into the Secret Sauce mindset—nothing heavy, and all you need is a notebook.

—Think of your own shopping habits. Let's start with coffee . . . If you're a coffee drinker, start with a comparison. Do you prefer Starbucks, 7Eleven, or your neighborhood mom and pop shop? Make note of your preference and why it matters to you.

Make note of strong opinions regarding taste, convenience, and atmosphere. Prices, Service, and Community. You get the idea. We term the total as 'customer experience'.

If coffee isn't ringing your bells, try this exercise—I think you'll enjoy it.

—Think of the last time you had a bad experience at a business (c'mon—you know you're good at remembering what you don't like!)

We'll call this company Business #1:

- What didn't work for you?
- Why won't you return to Business #1?

Now think about its competitor, Business #2:

- Why would you go to Business #2 instead Business #1?
- Jot down your reasons.

What did you notice? A few pet peeves? A lot of irritations?

Now, try this ‘Build Your Awareness’ exercise—awareness is a crucial weapon for discovering and developing your Secret Sauce.

—Think about these two companies, your experiences with them, and ask yourself the questions below.

Don’t move to the next question until you can describe your experience or observation for that question. Answer in narrative form rather than a number grade—you need to stretch your story telling and memory muscles to become much more articulate in order to increase your awareness. Remember— your future Secret Sauce is depending on you building your skills!

Once you’ve written your narrative for each business, then rate your answers by comparing Business #1 with Business #2.

Remember— your future Secret Sauce is depending on you building your skills! Here is an example of a narrative answer to question number 1, What did your five senses tell you?

“When we arrived, the parking lot had tight spaces and a lot of litter. The front entrance paint was peeling. My eye was then drawn to the window displays. I became curious about one of the products and wondered how I could find out more about it. We entered the store and smelled microwave popcorn. I really wanted some but it seemed only the staff had access to it. I looked for someone to help me find the product in the window. I had to wait to talk to someone so I started searching myself. I started to feel frustrated when I noticed a computer terminal. There was a system, just like at the library or bookstore, to locate a product in the store. I found it immediately and went to that aisle. But then I had more questions and no one to talk to about how to use it.”

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARENESS BUILDING

	Business #1 Name	Business #2 Name
1.	From the moment you arrive at this place of business until you leave, what did your five senses tell you?	
2.	How would you rate their convenience factor?	
3.	What was the atmosphere like when you walked in?	
4.	After you purchased your item, or service, did you start to compare prices, or was it deeply and satisfyingly worth every penny?	
5.	How did you feel after your experience being served? For example, did you feel grudgingly taken care of or genuinely taken care of?	
6.	What kind of sense of community did you experience being in their business?	

Business #1 Name

Business #2 Name

7. What did you notice about the facilities?
8. When did you notice you stopped thinking about your to-do list and became present to the people around you—what did they do to get your engagement?
9. How comfortable and relaxed did you feel?
10. What memories did you compare with the current experience?
11. How did this visit compare to previous visits?
12. What or whom did you appreciate most? How come? What did they do or say that made a difference for you?
13. Which business would you return to and why?

**YOUR CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE RATING**

COMPARE YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE BETWEEN BUSINESS #1 AND BUSINESS #2

Review your answers. Now assign a grade for each question and business on a scale from 1-5 where 5 is high and 1 is low. Then total the grades for each business. Which one gets your highest rating?

Based on your experience, why did you grade one business higher than the other? As you read your narratives, circle the ideas or attributes that made one business delightfully more tuned in to giving you the customer experience that really worked for you. Now list out the words you circled. Is there a common theme? Now do the same thing for the attributes that you found less than stellar. List them out. Is there a common theme?

As you reflect on the themes you've discovered, ask yourself if you've got any of these themes working in your business. Write down your thoughts about how these themes work or don't work in your company. Now put that list aside. We will build on it later.



STEP 4: THINK LIKE A PICKY CONSUMER

We are all Picky Consumers and, as a result, we're frustrated shoppers. We want to be treated the right way (the way you think you should be treated), or *you won't be back!*

However, despite our frustrations, most of us are unlikely to think deeply about what worked or what didn't work. We won't think in terms of the exercise you just completed—we carry on talking about what we didn't like. We leave the business with a vague feeling that something wasn't right—or, worse, we barely think about it as more than a ho hum experience, and we forget it!

That's the point—*how would you like to own a business that people easily forget or complain about over dinner conversations?* Listen to your Picky Consumer concerns so you can grow your observational muscles!

The sad thing is most companies don't find out they are considered ho-hum or a pain to do business with unless someone writes a review and addresses the company's inadequacies! The owners don't hear anything that's 'too bad' from customers and clients. They don't hear anything 'too good', either. Oh, oh! Not memorable! The slow kiss of death to a business owners' survival and growth dreams!

As Picky Consumers, most of us keep searching until we find that chemistry of flavor, service, and product mix. We keep searching for the hassle-free, responsive, problem-resolving experience. We keep seeking satisfying, inspirational, and get-it-right experiences. Or, we stop looking any further because:

Believe it or not, in business-to-business dealings we all think like the Picky Consumer. And, despite being Picky Consumers, we rationalize our frustrations regarding not resolving our problems, or being treated well until someone upsets the apple cart and delivers a refreshing experience that kicks excuses to the curb.



STEP 5: LEARN HOW TO SEE INTO A BUSINESS

K eep your Picky Consumer hat on here—don't drift back to your business-owner perspective quite yet. We aren't ready to work on your company's Secret Sauce yet, so continue jotting down your ideas.

There are many industries for which it's difficult to see into a business before you know you're going to get what you're seeking. It's critical as a business owner to recognize when people first work with a company, they are still evaluating whether it has a future in their lives. Remember—the Picky Consumer mindset does not rest after the first experience.

Take professional services—lawyers, accountants, financial planners, engineers, consultants, advisors, marketing, website experts for hire, architects, contractors, and engineers—all technical solution providers. This industry is full of price sensitive imitators and, as a Picky Consumer, you can't distinguish one from another. However, as Picky Consumers, we're going to try to glimpse the inside of the business anyway in order to make an educated guess about where to spend our money.

Professional service websites often look the same, and service providers have endless years of experience, and they profess to offer specialist expertise. They use their credentials as evidence and, perhaps, case studies. Is that what we need, though, in order to feel satisfied, safe, and secure in our selection process? Not really. It's what's inside the firm that counts . . . or,

It's critical as a business owner to recognize when people first work with a company, they are still evaluating whether it has a future in their lives.

**Most Picky
Consumers consider
credentials and
experience a given.
What we seek is more
intangible, and inside
those intangibles are
the ingredients of
your Secret Sauce.**

who is inside, because the professional services industry is always a people business.

It may come as a shock that most of us Picky Consumers consider credentials and experience a given. What we seek is more intangible, and inside those intangibles are the ingredients of your Secret Sauce (*hint . . . a key ingredient is how we are treated!*)

Let's use an example to see if you agree with our assessment . . .

Decide for yourself if this firm has secret sauce . . . oh, wait! You might think, "*why are they using a service business as the example? I own a product business—this won't work for me!*" Fact—

all companies are in the service business. Especially in this emerging, confusing, post-industrial economy. Why? Because we are Picky Consumers about how a business relates to us – that's service. Hold your skepticism for a minute and read on . . .

My business partner and I were looking for a tax specialist, and since websites rarely indicate if they'll solve our problem, we reached out to our network for a referral. We hoped a referral would shorten our search process. Have you noticed that referrals often just send you down a rabbit hole? What you need, and how your friend translates that need to fit the person they want to refer to you, doesn't always mesh.

It took a week to get an appointment. We waited in his reception area to see him. We met in his office, not the boardroom. We sat in stackable chairs, still in our coats, facing his wall of achievements and credentials.

The accountant sat in a big, comfortable chair at his desk. He asked us two questions.

"How can I help you?" and "What kind of business do you have?"

We spent five minutes explaining our situation. He didn't ask further clarifying questions. I wondered if we said enough to give him an adequate picture—I don't know. He's the expert. *Should I say something else? Should I ask him a question? I don't know what I don't know.* The feeling was unsettling.

Rather than answering our questions or understanding what we are attempting to do, he spends an hour describing his wizardry rescuing people from Catch 22 tax problems. Fascinating. Except we don't have a Catch 22. We need advice regarding how to avoid getting caught in a Catch 22!

We sat there for over an hour attempting to re-direct his stories to our concerns.

We finally arrived at the limit of our patience. We asked one more time how he could help us, and he said he would send us some articles to read. We left more confused and frustrated than when we arrived, and he appeared happy to get us out of his office.

A week passed. An envelope arrived, but it didn't contain articles on how to deal with an anticipated tax problem. What did we get instead? An invoice for the privilege of listening to him for that hour. Really?

HOW TO BURY YOUR SECRET SAUCE!

By seeing the flaws as pointed out, do you now see what needs to be changed to add the Secret Sauce this man is missing?

Do you think he has any Secret Sauce? *Surprise! Yes and No.* He has a core competency. But he has not aimed his talents towards a specific niche. He also hasn't added that magic layer that makes his prospects come back for more.

So how do we experience his firm? As unable to meet our specific needs.

Despite the fact someone in the accountant's network thought well enough of his skills to make this referral, he is unable to capture the interest of his prospects so he can't 'close' his referrals, the hardest to get and most desirable lead of all.

Why can't he? Without knowing his core competency and adding some Secret Sauce—he alienated us from the start with his poor communications skills, and his inability to connect to us or our situation. You can have all the core competency in the world, but if you don't get this right, your expertise doesn't matter.

What is his core competency? He is an expert pattern recognizer (your team's unique

expert mindset is the seed of Secret Sauce!) Clearly, he rescues people from their Catch 22s (expert pattern recognition)—in fact, he loves it over anything else!

What he doesn't know is his unique talent is part of his Secret Sauce but won't satisfy the entire recipe. His talent is buried, rather than aimed at particular target market, because he considers himself a highly credentialed accountant not a tax rescuer. He thinks he can also provide services to people who want to learn about preventive measures before stepping onto tax landmines and tax preparation and financial statements and... Except that he's really not into these scenes. And he doesn't get it.

He should narrow his focus and declare to the world "Got yourself in tax hot water? Call Ronny the Tax Rescuer." And do nothing else. No tax preparation. No financial statements. No tax prevention schemes. He will be able to charge a lot more and be sought after for his specialty. He also needs some coaching in how to build relationships, active listening skills, good questioning and a front office staff that makes all that stuff easy for him.

And what we really needed was an expert pattern recognizer who exclusively focuses on "*Want to avoid tax landmines? Call Tommy the Tax Preventer.*" Do you think Tommy's friends would recognize a referral opportunity with this positioning statement?

After reading our story, how many professional service advisors do you know who are technically tight, poorly positioned and interpersonally inept?

STEP 6: WEAVE CARE INTO YOUR CUSTOMERS' EXPERIENCE

THE HEART AND SOUL OF SECRET SAUCE!

Layer in this next ingredient.

Maybe the secret is starting to be clear for you. The reason so many businesses don't have Secret Sauce is they are looking in the wrong places, and missing the right tools to enable the Secret Sauce to work effectively. And, there's one more thing—there is also a master ingredient in Secret Sauce that business leaders and front line staff must model to generate delicious, mouth watering, have to have more, Secret Sauce.

Businesses that earn 'Go-to' status with their fans are authentic in communication, presentation, and 'how' they use their problem-solving abilities. Leaders and their staff know how to conduct authentic conversations with each other, exchanging critical information so they can all be authentic in return with prospects and customers. The management team models authenticity with its front-line staff.

Owners, top brass, leaders all walk their talk.

What do we mean by authentic? It's the ability to speak frankly, transparently. It's the ability to ask great questions because of genuine curiosity about needs, problems, and dilemmas. *You* are curious because you value making a difference in the lives of others—your coworkers, customers, and your boss.

THE SECRET TO ‘SECRET SAUCE’ IS TO ACTIVELY CARE ABOUT PEOPLE AND THEIR EXPERIENCES!

Yes, we’re talking about care. Yikes! Emotions in the workplace kind of ‘care’?! Not drama. Empathy. Not gushiness, or gossip. We’re talking about good curious questions and observations that help you learn how to help a prospect. Remember—curiosity is a delightful, refreshing way to show you care! When you show you care, people will choose your business.

Genuine curiosity sounds like this: “Tell me more about what’s important to you about this situation. What outcome are you hoping for?”

Connecting effectively is about meeting real needs, not pretend needs. It’s about connecting to each other through meaningful exchange. When people know you care, they respond.

Connection is what makes the world go round. Connection is essential to business growth, health, and wealth.

Connecting effectively is about meeting real needs, not pretend needs. It’s about connecting to each other through meaningful exchange. When people know you care, they respond.

HOW CONNECTED TO CARING ARE YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS?

It’s a sad fact that in today’s society people are indifferent, disconnected, disengaged, and disinterested. They want to talk about what they care about—or, they ignore you. People who don’t connect, however, are on cruise control or they’re engaged with people who are not there, but are someplace else (Facebook? Texting? Video games?) When we don’t connect, we don’t renew our energy, and we don’t discover validating and meaningful interactions. We don’t give acknowledgement, so we don’t receive acknowledgement.

It's like trying to run your car on fumes.

The accounting firm we visited will always struggle to acquire clients, make a worthwhile living for the partners, or provide a secure, enjoyable, and collaborative environment for employees. They don't know how to connect. They don't see how their poorly thought out, 'customer touch points' alienate their prospects.

Owning a company where everyone connects authentically is one of the most fulfilling and rewarding experiences of an entrepreneurs' life. These are the magical ingredients your company needs as part of your Secret Sauce Recipe:

- Model transparency, authenticity and curiosity to generate mouth watering, have to have more, Secret Sauce.
- You and your team are curious because you value making a difference in the lives of others—your coworkers, customers, and your boss.
- Genuine curiosity sounds like this: “Tell me more about what's important to you about this situation. What outcome are you hoping for?”

Masters of the “go-to” game know how to ask the right questions to gain and exchange meaningful relevant information.

When people hear/see/feel you care, they respond.

IT'S TIME TO INVITE PICKY CONSUMERS TO SHOP YOUR BUSINESS.

What would happen if we came shopping at your business? Would we find any of the pet peeves you experience when you wear your Picky Consumer hat? Would we see your expert pattern recognition ability on display so that we know that you can help us with the problem we want to solve?

Your newly acquired awareness means it's time to invite a few colleagues, employees, and customers to be the Picky Consumers of your business. Here's who to ask to participate. Think about your repeat customers. You want to understand what keeps them coming back... and then find more people like that. For balance, ask people who have only

sampled your products or services once or twice too.

Ask both customer types to observe your business as if they were a prospect, new to your business. Make it easy for them to ‘shop’ your company. Provide permission to tell you the truth—then, have them write a narrative on the questions you used to analyze business #1 and business #2. Adjust any questions on the list of sample questions below accordingly so they represent the customer touch points in your type of business.

Be prepared to hear the results! Get comfortable with the uncomfortable!

Remember, there’s no need to take it personally. You’re on a quest to improve. What you have built has served you well, but now you want to take your company to the next level. When you review your Picky Consumer’s perceptions, you’ll hear about your unique talents, Core Competencies (or, lack of), and you’ll recognize the missing ingredients you need to add to your Secret Sauce Recipe.

QUESTIONS FOR CUSTOMERS

Your Company Name

1. From the moment you arrive at this place of business until you leave, what did your five senses tell you when you walked in or first experienced an interaction with the company?
2. How would you rate their convenience factor on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is extremely convenient and 1 very difficult to access? What factors contributed to your rating?

Your Company Name

3. What was the atmosphere like when you walked in?
Could you tell what kind of mood people were in or how they felt about seeing you?
4. After you purchased your item, or service, did you start to compare prices when you were receiving service or getting the product or was it deeply and satisfyingly worth every penny?
5. How did you feel after your experience being served?
For example, did you feel grudgingly taken care of or genuinely taken care of?
6. What kind of sense of community did you experience being in their business?
7. What did you notice about the facilities?
8. When did you notice you stopped thinking about your to-do list and became present to the people around you— what did they do to get your engagement?

Your Company Name

9. How comfortable and relaxed did you feel?
10. What memories of other businesses or shopping experiences did you compare with the current experience?
11. How did this visit compare to previous visits?
12. What or whom did you appreciate most? How come? What did they do or say that made a difference for you?
13. Would you return again to this business? If so why? If not, why not? What would have to change or improve for you to return?

YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE RATING

Ask your chosen 5 shoppers to write a narrative for each answer. Provide them the same example about how to write their narrative that we gave you on page 16. Ask them to then apply a rating between 1-5 for each question and each business and total all their ratings.

Review their narratives. You'll see your company's and employees' unique talents, core competencies (or, lack of), and you'll recognize the missing 'care' ingredients needed to amplify Secret Sauce because of your new awareness comparing your own favorite haunts. Look for the themes across all the responses you receive, just as you did in your own

analysis of other businesses, by circling the ideas and attributes as we described on page 19.

Once you get your feedback, invite your staff to hear about what you have learned. Then ask them to help you brainstorm ideas to amplify your Secret Sauce (what your shoppers loved) and reduce the hassles (what they found difficult or irritating... or ignored) with solutions that make life easier for your narrower market niche. Remember to use your expert pattern recognition skills in all parts of the business. It's the patterns in our own business routines that can be hard to spot until you 'turn on' that perspective and shine that light on the systems, procedures, policies, methods, habits and attitudes that your company follows. Your expert pattern recognition skills will help you to notice that some of these ways of working are fantastically easy for you and your staff but are 'head-shakers' for your customers or clients. That's what you're looking for.

SECRET SAUCE IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

Now that you know how to find your Secret Sauce, it's time to build a plan for your company to capture and bottle it. Follow these six steps:

1. **Get comfortable with the process** of finding the ingredients of your Sauce as we defined them in this ebook. The more you stop defining the 'hassles' you uncover as 'problems', 'failures', 'mistakes', 'let-downs', 'disappointments', 'screw-ups' and the people who run those departments as 'responsible' and 'to blame', the faster you will uncover the silver linings that you will transform into gold. Bottom line? This is an improvement project to elevate your secret sauce. Your words will make or break the project's success.
2. Think of the changes you're considering as **Evolutionary steps, rather than Revolutionary leaps**. You add more Sauce as you learn more about how your customers interact with your business. Don't make big changes all at once without a feedback loop.

Amplifying your Secret Sauce is a 'go-to' strategy that puts your business on a buyer's radar.

3. Discovering your company's Secret Sauce requires you to **Build Your Awareness** of your own shopping habits. Ask your management team to do the same since everyone has differing perspectives on what we like and don't like.
4. **Think like a Picky Consumer** as you evaluate all of your customer touch points.
5. **Learn how to See Into Your Own Business** by looking for the Secret Sauce (or, lack thereof) in other businesses—especially your competitors'.
6. **Weave Care into Your Daily Business Practices.** Make it easier, remove the hassles, give customers something surprising that has real value (not trade show swag value), and makes a real difference. A sure fire strategy is to use your 'expert pattern recognition skills' so your customers avoid making mistakes.

Finding your Secret Sauce will help your business grow to the next level. Removing the hassles will make it more profitable. These two steps are some of what your business needs to become saleable. Remember, the way to get a return on your investment in your business is to make it saleable! Amplifying your Secret Sauce is a 'go-to' strategy that puts your business on a buyer's radar.

Given that 90% of companies are un-saleable, despite the fact they are successful, adding Secret Sauce puts you way out in front of the race, ahead of all the other owners in your industry that don't know these strategies.

Take the time to work through the feedback exercises so you gain clarity about what you already do well. Many times, your Secret Sauce is right in front of your eyes! You just didn't recognize it, so you didn't amplify it. By working through the exercises, you could uncover your greatest asset in the next few minutes.

Once you know your Secret Sauce and you're ready to share it with the world, follow these tips for how to make the changes in your organization so your Sauce touches everything you do:

1. **GET STRATEGIC:** Any decision to amplify your secret Sauce should have the company's best interests as top priority. Not the best interests of your heads of marketing, sales, your product guru, or even the owner's. What's best for the company rises all boats.
2. **GROWTH:** Make sure you want growth. Secret Sauce drives it. Ensure your operation is scalable.

3. **IT'S A PROJECT:** Creating and spreading your Secret Sauce is an organizational change project.
4. **LEAD THE PROJECT:** Assign project leadership responsibility to someone. Then, grant them the authority to lead the project. Remember, change can be bumpy and uncomfortable. Tell everyone ahead of time what's coming their way. If they have been part of collecting the Secret Sauce feedback and coming up with solutions, they should be ready to jump on the band wagon. Create a feedback loop so you can deal with the bumps and surprises.
5. **PATIENCE:** It can take three months to a year to find and road test your Secret Sauce project. It's a journey, not a destination. Think of this time period as a learning lab, and an investment in your success.
6. **BEST INTERESTS:** In the end, your Secret Sauce solutions have to be in the best interests of the company and exceed the needs (or solve the right problem) of the ideal target market. If the ideas don't meet these two guidelines, they aren't worth implementing. You may want to narrow your target market to a more specific group of people who have the problem you are solving AND want your way of solving it. Remember the contractors lounge? That distributor catered to contractors who like to be social and share on-the-job tips and stories, regardless of the size of their business. It's the exchange of tips through social interaction that spur higher dollar per transaction growth!
7. **BE OPEN TO CHANGE:** Your current target market might not be your ideal market as the tax accountant could have learned. His best target market is people who are in the middle of a big Catch 22 problem—not the people seeking to prevent the problem. Be open to change who you do business with from the beginning of this process. Then learn how to cater to that specific type

Your Secret Sauce solutions have to be in the best interests of the company and exceed the needs (or solve the right problem) of the ideal target market. If the ideas don't meet these two guidelines, they aren't worth implementing.

of person.

8. **IT'S ABOUT PEOPLE:** Secret Sauce is often found in how people do things, as well as the expertise they share with prospects and existing customers. To release the magic of how they do it will require capturing that expertise, turning it into knowledge, and making it available to the whole company so everyone walks the talk genuinely.
9. **CROSS-COMPANY TEAM:** Secret Sauce isn't one department's responsibility. It takes all departments to discover and work together using your Secret Sauce, and then rewiring the processes to deliver it consistently.

Let's wrap up with an example from one of our clients to help you get the idea of what a Secret Sauce project might look like.

This manufacturing company had heard anecdotally that their distributors found it hard to make promises to their clients when they had no control over how long it took the manufacturer to respond. They found that this 'hassle' affected their own reputation and the 'delays' lost them business they had already won.

From the manufacturers perspective, they got their products out when promised and worked as fast as they could. They published their shipping dates and rarely missed them so what was the problem? As far as they were concerned, the Distributors were just trying to win business by making unreasonable promises.

This adversarial communication went on for two years until the CEO learned about how to find and add Secret Sauce. Here was there 7 step plan for getting to the bottom of the problem.

1. Accept the Distributor's perspective as real.
2. Collect the detail about all their hassles trying to do business with the manufacturer. Listen and ask questions until there was no more to be heard.
3. Assign a cross-disciplinary team to this project charged with resolving as many of the issues as possible. Give them permission and a mentor with clout to help get them the buy-in and resources they needed.
4. Theme the complaints. Communication methods was at the top of the list.

5. Look for the opportunities. Distributors wanted to be able to say “hey, you can have that in five days or less.”
6. The team figured out which products they could ‘rush ship’ anywhere. They also set up an emergency ship program for crises.
7. The concepts for the new program were presented to management and the distributors. Refinements were made to iron-out the last few wrinkles. This process brought buy-in from everyone across the entire organization. The manufacturer added a fee to rush ship and an even higher fee for emergency shipping.

They suggested to their distributors that their clients who wanted something fast would be willing to pay for it when offered the choice of dates for delivery. The team who put this program together created a ‘talking points’ script to help distributors build their case effectively with their prospects. The team also suggested that these programs would also add to the distributor’s margins.

As the distributors were part of the creation of these programs they did not object to the fees or the changes. Rather they saw that all their hassles would be resolved by these two programs and how much help was being provided so they could easily ‘sell’ the value to their own prospects. They also didn’t mind that they had to do more paperwork to relieve the manufacturer’s expediting department. To them, there were enough high value tradeoffs that the extra work on their part was worth it to them.

Bottom line? By listening and truly understanding their distributors hassles, they made more money for their own company, more flexibility and value for the distributors, which earned them higher margins on these programs, add differentiated them from competitors in the market place.

Result? Happier distributors meant they won more customers. Less paperwork for shipping meant they could process more orders. Two new higher margin programs were used constantly growing profitability. An empowered cross-funtional team that knows how to make systemic changes across the organization whenever they arise means this is a company that can cope with growth and is saleable.

The critical success factors?

- A CEO ready and willing to listen instead of denying the complaints as

irrelevant to their business.

- A cross-functional team empowered to solve the problem.
- Managed as a project with a leader and a team given permission to engage all parts of the business and their channel.
- Inviting the people with the problem to provide feedback on the draft plans.
- Building tangible value into the program for everyone in the solution.

Did this team find the first project easy? Nope. Did the CEO always like and agree with their ideas? Not initially until she had time to ask the right questions to fully understand their game plan. They had to persevere to work through many internal glitches. But, then, it is not easy owning a business that struggles to stand out in the market place.

Want to comment on this publication, then please share your thoughts and questions on our Facebook Wall at:

www.Facebook.com/SpiritWest

If you want more support with how to implement the Secret Sauce strategy, or interpretation regarding how this might work for your company, get in touch. If you're serious about your commitment to making your business the go-to company in your market, get in touch. If you're serious about touching people with the Secret Sauce (the Sauce your competitors can't see), get in touch.

We'll be in touch as soon as you take this minute to request our complimentary 30-minute consultation at:

www.spiritwest.com/schedule-a-30-min-call/

Finally, remember the most important part of the recipe is when you lead with your Secret Sauce: with care, and authenticity—it gives permission for everyone else to do the same.

We wish you the best in your quest to uncover and bottle your Secret Sauce. You've already taken the first step by reading this e-book—your next step is to turn these ideas into action plans and projects that your team manages. Then you will be on your way to growing your business to the next level, which makes it more profitable and on your way to making the company saleable. Now that's Secret Sauce you can bank on.

Wishing you a stellar 'go-to company' future,

Lorraine and Rob McGregor