

CEO POINT BLANK

Straight Talk for CEOs,
Business Owners, and
Entrepreneurs

ED JENKS



INDIE BOOKS
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DEDICATION

Okay, so most folks who take the time to sit down and put some words on paper have a flowery dedication to their wife or mother like they wrote the next Moby Dick. I don't pretend that this is the next coming or anything and to be truthful, I don't think it's worthy of my wife. But my hypocrisy knows no bounds and so I will succumb to the norm and dedicate this whatever-it-is to my business partner, one of the world's premier behaviorists, and my best friend; all who happen to double as my wife Sharon. Here's why. Most people say their marital vows once and then like everything else, they forget about them and go about their lives. Sharon doesn't. We've been rich and we've been poor (the latter mostly always my doing), we've been better and we've been worse (the latter mostly always my fault), and not one time, not even one small time without exception, has she ever complained or blamed me even when it was clearly my doing. I've given her so many causes over the years to kick me to the curb and yet she continues to be my number one fan. That's not to say that she doesn't get on my case because she isn't afraid to do that for a second. But she's also not afraid to let me challenge myself, my beliefs, my values, or my behavior until I'm dangling off the cliff

with the noose tightening. Then very calmly and without blame or ridicule, she pulls me back up, dusts me off, and sends me right back out into the fracas. The best friends you ever have will go with you into the dark, with no visible means of escape. She's my best friend and she's a one-of-a-kind which makes me, the luckiest guy on the planet.

PREFACE

I think it's important to the reader to clearly understand several things when you pick up a business book like this one so that you do not waste your time or have false expectations. First, unless you're just looking for airplane reading, you need to understand exactly who the author's target audience is so I'll clue you in straightaway.

My target audience is the young up-and-comers who have a vision of sitting in the chief executive officer chair one day. Those kids out there who think that they have what it takes to walk tall in the C-suite environment not simply for the money, but because they think they have what it takes to be there. To these folks, I say, go for it. No one is going to seek you out, you have to make it happen with a lot of confidence and as much experience as you can cram into your young life. Never be afraid and never think that age has anything to do with intelligence; just keep your chin up and go for it.

I also thought about young entrepreneurs and young family business owners who are consistently tasked with fast growth and legacy building, who understand that success has its own rewards as well as its own consequences. While you are not your father or

your mother, you may well find that the ways of the past might not work for the future and thus change falls on you to manage. Your family name may take you to the top spot but it will not make you invincible or worthy to lead an organization. I remind you that wealth and leadership do not necessarily run in parallel with intelligence, and absent great leaders the masses will follow the poor example just as quickly.

I did not write these words for the Fortune 1000 CEOs who already have the impressive pedigrees and the multi-million dollar no-cut contracts. Instead I choose the other 97 percent of the nation's business leaders who are out there every day working their tails off to manage their enterprise both large and small, to some level of success, who lead without a safety net and are still not afraid to take the plunge.

Finally I would tell you that advice is good for the person offering it and that this book has a lot of advice, so make of it what you will.

CHAPTER 1

So You Want to be a CEO?

The 2000s, in my opinion, have been the most trying and difficult times C-suite executives have ever faced in American history. Yup, even tougher than the Great Depression. Not only do we have a tougher business climate, we are faced with bigger competitors—global competitors that do not operate under the same set of rules as we do in the United States. The idea that globally things are “fair and even” and “may the best managed company win” are concepts and beliefs shared by no one I know.

The global economy and unfair competitive practices aside, we continue to legislate and regulate ourselves internally to the point where we spend the majority of time wallowing around trying to create some kind of competitive advantage out of thin air. I spend a lot of time thinking about exactly what happened to us as a country post World War II when we were filled with hope and confidence that when all else failed we could outwork you. I see great companies struggle with trying to find production efficiencies while their foreign competitors are allowed to flow

products into the American market unchecked and unregulated.

I must admit to being part of the problem. Here's why.

Post World War II, our economy was made up primarily of family businesses that covered the range of our needs from food to clothing, transportation, and manufacturing craftsmanship. Family businesses were passed down from generation to generation with the "secret sauce" that made the products or services unique to the region or geography they served. You knew where your food came from, where your clothes were made and you even knew the name of the family that made your car.

Our returning hero's average age was twenty-six and many were returning to the family business, or turning to trades they had learned while in the military. They were received into the workplace with open arms and the country was ready to step on the gas, fueling the largest generation of consumers the United States was ever to see.

The returning veterans were schooled in the family businesses and the discipline it took to operate them. They were charged with learning the tasks and craftsmanship of their trade because their mission was to protect the family homestead and their families relied on them. Those that had new talents put them to use still with the idea of making America stronger and their lives better.

The results speak for themselves. Some of the strongest financial years in America were from 1945 through 1965.

And then things got tweaked. Our foreign policy became unpopular. The average age of an infantryman in Vietnam was twenty-two. Our youth (I was one of them) rebelled against everything that even resembled someone telling us what to do.

Belonging to anything was frowned upon. I remember being at college one fall and seeing a group of guys spray painting a sign over a fraternity house door that said, “It’s wrong to belong.” We had begun to question everything, believe in nothing but freedom—whatever that was—and reject the foundational pillars that had given us the best economic conditions in the history of the world with the highest standard of living yet to be experienced.

It took a few years for the rebellious students of the 1960s and 1970s to get around to work, as most of us went to college, and many on the six year plan. As we began to assume positions of authority, we slowly began to bring our rebellious nature to the workplace. We threw out tradition. We didn’t need to wear a stinking tie—we worked better in flip flops. We worked in cubicles because offices created “silos.” I remember listening with rapt attention to one of the long-haired business gurus of the time with a prime time audience tell us to break down the silos, that big oil was making too much money, and the banks were ripping us off. He had all the answers. Get your people a meditation room—that’s what attracts the real talent.

We all drank that Kool-Aid and we changed the face of American business just as we had changed the face of American culture fifteen years prior. The results speak for themselves.

Please understand that I am not accusing, because I was part of that movement and I was a leader at the C-suite level. As I look back at my career, I always felt like something was missing. No matter my success, I always felt a bit hollow. I think back on my college days and wonder why I didn’t buck the trend and rush that fraternity.

We had all lost our business discipline. I could make money; that was the easy part. But I couldn't control my attitude and approach to anything that resembled authority and control, and believe me, I wasn't alone. Everyone was stupid, no one could keep up with me, and I wanted to run ahead of them and demand they keep up with me. Rules were for other people, not for me. I was so good at the money making part that most of the time, people would leave me alone because they knew inherently that they were better off for me running off like a mad man and putting money in their pockets.

So, here I am at sixty years old, having lived life well, still discovering and facing the truth about myself and looking to be better for it. I came to realize I have two goals yet to accomplish.

First, I want to be the person who finds a way to get through to other C-suite executives and prove to them that silos work, we can be competitive globally, it is okay to be a leader, and that the single greatest gift you can bring to an organization is discipline: order overlaid with a huge dose of forgiveness. If we are to bring our economy back to any level of dominance, we must be disciplined in our approach and willing to subjugate ourselves to our mission.

I have not been idle since my last engagement. In fact, I have done some of the best thinking of my life. When all is said and done, I have found six indelible qualities that we need to regain if we are to bring this economy back to any degree of ease.

I began to poke around a bit about credibility when I came across an article about a military special operations unit that had rescued two people that had been grabbed by some bad

guys in Northern Africa. The story was an incredible tribute to a team of Americans who selflessly, and without any fanfare, put their lives at extreme risk by jumping out of an airplane at 15,000 feet, moving stealthily through a war zone undetected, finding the proverbial needle in a haystack, engaging the enemy at close quarters, protecting the hostages by laying on top of them throughout an extreme firefight, and extracting them from harm's way.

This one story was my answer. I had the material, but I needed a way of delivering the message that was credible and experiential enough to make a CEO listen. I found the Navy Special Warfare Unit, or as you know them, the Navy SEALs. Arguably the best trained task-to-mission instructors in the world, they exude confidence and credibility that can only be derived from experience gathered with personal discipline in an extreme team environment.

With their help, and a lot of luck, I created a program that brings into focus the need for discipline and order in American business. We do this in a rough-and-tumble environment where the lessons learned often come with a dose of reality that cannot be experienced in any other training venue. Spending a day in executive training with the SEALs is a day spent that will not soon be forgotten. (If you think your team is up for the challenge, you can find it on my website under S.O.S.T.) Hopefully my contribution to this effort will be worth the time.

My second goal: I want to be a CEO again. I want to sit in the driver's seat one more time before I hang up my briefcase, my United Airlines Red Carpet Club membership, and my three

cell phones. I feel renewed, I feel like a better person, and for the first time in my life, I feel like all the holes are filled up. Gaining the benefit of discipline, both personally and professionally, at sixty years old is like getting another crack at winning the lotto. So if you have an underperforming portfolio company, or you're tired and want out, or you're just motivated enough to see how someone else might do it, give me a shout out. I'm an easy guy to find.

I took the liberty of changing names and in some cases timelines as it serves no purpose in content to expose folks I've worked with to my perception of reality. I have been fortunate to work with some incredible organizations and some incredible people. I do not for one second kid myself into believing that they were all excited to work for me or with me, but I selfishly hope they all learned something from the experience.

Being a chief executive is like no other life experience; it's a thrill no drug or activity can replace and you either love it or don't want anything to do with it. We are not mysterious creatures. Most of us have souls, and contrary to the general opinion of most people, the majority really do want the best for our organizations, the folks that work there, and the shareholders that believe in us. We have feelings beyond greed. Most of us are not overpaid for the responsibility we carry, and we do lose sleep over terminations and downsizing. There is not a day that goes by that I do not spend time re-thinking careers that have been lost over my decisions and the cost of decisions that I've made in terms of both human and financial capital.

This book is both case study and advisory and it is written for

a specific community: those who envision themselves sitting in the top organizational chair. If you are tentative and unsure if the top is the right place for you, please understand that it is not my intention to scare you away, but rather to inform and advise you of some of the challenges you may encounter. Men and women who choose this career path are driven to it, and no matter what I write, they will believe they will be better than me, won't make the mistakes and most likely will read the book for entertainment, but not because they feel they need to. These folks are the "Type A", "High D" driven people who cannot be stopped by anything. They will make decisions quickly, recover if they make a mistake, and what they don't know they'll learn. They will outmuscle you if they are challenged. Most of these individuals have great oratory ability, are extremely quick on their feet, and most important, don't know how to be in a room without being the leader.

My journey has taught me many valuable lessons. For those of you who want an opinionated insider's survival secrets for being a successful CEO, read on. Let your journey begin here.