

## THE BIG IDEAS

### Clouds + Dirt

Push both edges.

### Oxygen + DNA

= Cash flow + strengths.

### Hustle

Secret sauce.

### Religion of Value

Practice it.

### Be Willing to Suck

Self-awareness + tranquility.



## #ASKGARYVEE

One Entrepreneur's Take on Leadership, Social Media, and Self-Awareness

BY GARY VAYNERCHUK · HARPERBUSINESS © 2016 · 384 PAGES

“My hope is that after you read this you’ll feel empowered and armed with a deeper understanding of the current business environment, including the ins and outs; the black, the white, and the gray; the IQ and the EQ; the details and the big picture surrounding everything it takes to be a successful entrepreneur, executive, CEO, and manager. I’ve been spending a ton of hours on Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, Snapchat, Meerkat, Periscope, LinkedIn, and many other platforms, and from this man’s point of view we are living in an unbelievably interesting time. I haven’t felt this sense of disruption since 2006-2007, when Facebook and Twitter started eating away at Friendster and MySpace. The stakes and the opportunities are high, and the next thirty-six months of hustle just might pay off more than usual for those people willing to put in the time and effort. See, many people are only just settling into Facebook and Twitter, not realizing the world has already embraced other opportunities as well. The advantage is yours if you want it.”

~ Gary Vaynerchuk from #ASKGARYVEE

Gary Vaynerchuk.

Better known by those in the know as Gary Vee—the jumbo intense, uber-passionate wine-guy entrepreneur turned social media maven/investor extraordinaire who happens to have a strong opinion on everything!

A bunch of our members asked me to cover this book and the publisher actually sent me an advanced copy. I read it months ago and I’m just now getting to the Note.

In this book, we get the best Ideas from his #AskGaryVee show. It’s packed with Gary’s insights on everything from entrepreneurship to social media. If you’re a fan of Gary and his work, I think you’ll dig it! (Get the book [here](#).)

I’m going to leave the social media stuff for the book, and, as always, focus on the practical lover-of-wisdom stuff we can apply to our lives today. (I’ll also share a couple thoughts on our biz.)

I’m excited to share a handful of my favorite Ideas so let’s jump straight in!

## THE CLOUDS AND THE DIRT

“I spend all my time in the clouds and the dirt.

The clouds are the high-end philosophy and beliefs that are at the heart of everything I am personally and everything I do professionally.

... the clouds don’t just represent the big picture; they represent the huge picture, the everything. They are not goals. Goals can be achieved and set aside or moved. I’m Going to Buy the Jets is a goal. It drives me, too, but it’s not at the core of how I run my businesses.

The dirt is about being a practitioner and executing toward those clouds. It’s the hard work. ...

*“Consider #AskGaryVee my marketing master class. The difference between it and anything else you might have studied in school is that I don’t want you to regurgitate what you learn; I want you to act on it right now.”*

~ Gary Vaynerchuk

*"Always play the long game of lifetime value."*

~ Gary Vaynerchuk

Everyone has their own definition of clouds and dirt, but if there's any advice I can offer you that will change the entire trajectory of your career, it's to start pushing on both edges. Raise the bar on your business philosophy, dig deeper into your craft. You want to be an equally good architect as you are a mason. You've got to be able to simultaneously think at a high level and get your hands dirty."

The clouds. And the dirt.

Visionary. And practical.

As we know, we need both.

And, as Gary says, we need to push the edge on both sides.

It's one of John Maxwell's [21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership](#). Here's how he puts it: "Great leaders always seem to embody two seemingly disparate qualities. They are both highly visionary and highly practical. Their vision enables them to see beyond the immediate. They can envision what's coming and what must be done. Leaders possess an understanding of how:

*Mission provides purpose—answering the question, Why?*

*Vision provides picture—answering the question, What?*

*Strategy provides a plan—answering the question, How?*

As author Hans Finzel observed, 'Leaders are paid to be dreamers. The higher you go in leadership, the more your work is about the future.'

At the same time, leaders are practical enough to know that vision without action achieves nothing. They make themselves responsible for helping their followers take action."

What's your guiding vision? Your ultimate purpose. Get comfy on that cloud up in the sky.

Then build your way up to that cloud with the next-step masonry work.

World-class architects. World-class masons.

That's how we roll.

P.S. This is basically what I journal every morning—reflecting on the highest level virtues I'm committed to embodying then moving through Purpose + Mission + Strategy all the way down to the nuts and bolts of THE next most important thing I need to do in my AM1 Deep Work slot.

## **CASH = OXYGEN. STRENGTHS = DNA**

"So let's say you've got a good handle on your cash flow. How do you figure out what's next?

Focus on your strengths. What else are you really good at? Design? Growth hacking? Nail these skills down, and then drill deep with them. If cash is your company's oxygen, your strongest skills are its DNA. Develop and cultivate them because they will be the hallmark of your company. ...

Bet on your strengths. It's an underrated business strategy in a world where so many people are obsessed with fixing their weakness they give short shrift to the skills they were born with."

This is, primarily, a business book written for entrepreneurs, leaders and managers.

Gary makes the essential point that cash flow is OXYGEN to your business. Without it, well, you suffocate and die.

(Btw: Did you know that "affluence" literally means "abundant flow"? Yep. Thank you Eric Butterworth via [Spiritual Economics](#): "The word affluence is an overworked word in our time, usually implying cars and houses and baubles of all kinds. Its literal meaning is 'an

*"You may have aspirations of being an entrepreneur, and you may have entrepreneurial tendencies, but if you are born to be an entrepreneur you will not be able to breathe for more than ten minutes in a 'real' job."*

~ Gary Vaynerchuk

*abundant flow,' and not things at all. When we are consciously centered in the universal flow, we experience inner direction and the unfoldment of creative activity. Things come too, but prosperity is not just having things. It is the consciousness that attracts things.")*

Another great body-metaphor I love is the idea that profits are like red blood cells for a business. Just as a human body can't live without healthy red blood cells, a business can't live without healthy profits.

But, here's the deal.

Although we need red blood cells to live, we don't live *for* the red blood cells.

Guess what?

Same thing with our business. We need profits to live but we (at least conscious/optimal businesses) don't live *FOR* the profits.

We live for a higher purpose and simply use those profits to serve the bigger end.

Oxygen. Blood cells. Important.

Then we have the DNA: Our strengths.

Love what Gary has to say here and every time I read about strengths I think of how Tom Rath brilliantly puts it in [Are You Fully Charged?](#) where he tells us: *"If you spend most of your life trying to be good at everything, you eliminate your chances of being great at anything. Unless your goal is to be mediocre at a lot of things, starting with what you are naturally good at is a matter of efficiency. Focusing on strengths is in many ways a basic time-allocation issue. Every hour you invest in an area where you have natural talent has a multiplying effect, whereas each hour you spend trying to remedy a weakness is like working against a gravitational force. Yet many people spend years or even decades working on weaknesses in hopes that doing so will make them well-rounded. Do everything you can to avoid falling into this trap. While well-roundedness may be helpful for acquiring the basic tools in any trade—such as reading, writing, and arithmetic—it loses value as you get closer to finding a career. At that point, what's more important and relevant is what sets you apart. If you want to be great at something in your lifetime, double down on your talents at every turn."*

Let's get a solid base and then double down!!

P.S. With Optimize, I OBSESSED about creating a healthy, profitable business. I've raised over \$10m and built and sold two businesses over the course of my entrepreneurial career but neither of my prior two businesses ever made money—they were just great ideas we executed on pretty well before running out of steam and choosing to sell. Thankfully we got away with it in terms of good investor ROI's but our businesses never actualized their potential because we never figured out the oxygen/red blood cell side of things.

This time around I knew I wanted to dedicate my life to creating something great and that we needed that solid base of oxygen. I'm excited to report that in our first \$1m of annual recurring revenue, we're able to put \$250k+ of profits right back into the business.

Now we get to take nice, deep breaths as we climb the mountain peaks we're after to truly change the world (and add even more affluence to the supplies!).

How about you?

Have you taken care of the most basic fundamental needs of your business/personal life? If that's still an issue (I definitely know the feeling), what can you do to focus your energies on getting the oxygen supply optimized?!

*"If you're single-mindedly focused on your long-term goal, you'll be more effective in the short term and get there faster."*

~ Gary Vaynerchuk

## HUSTLE

"Here's a question that no one has yet asked me: What is the one tangible thing people can do to change the direction of their lives?"

Hustle.

Anyone who follows sports, and especially drafts, knows that a less gifted competitor can outplay even the most naturally talented athlete if that competitor has more hustle. Similarly, it's hustle, not talent, that is the differentiator between entrepreneurs who succeed and those who don't. I have never seen anyone increase his or her natural talent, but I have seen people transform themselves by increasing their hustle."

Hustle.

It's the secret sauce.

When Angela Duckworth describes the elements of [Grit](#) (which, as we know, outpredicts everything else for success), she echoes this wisdom—telling us that effort (hustle!) counts twice:

*"I have been working on a theory of the psychology of achievement since Marty scolded me for not having one. I have pages and pages of diagrams, filling more than a dozen lab notebooks. After more than a decade of thinking about it, sometimes alone, and sometimes in partnership with close colleagues, I finally published an article in which I lay down two simple equations that explain how you get from talent to achievement.*

*Here they are:*

***talent x effort = skill***

-----> ***skill x effort = achievement***

*Talent is how quickly your skills improve when you invest effort. Achievement is what happens when you take your acquired skills and use them. Of course, your opportunities—for example, having a great teacher—matter tremendously, too, and maybe more than anything about the individual. My theory doesn't address these outside forces, nor does it include luck. It's about the psychology of achievement, but because psychology isn't all that matters, it's incomplete.*

*Still, I think it's useful. What this theory says is that when you consider individuals in identical circumstances, what each achieves depends on just two things, talent and effort. Talent—how fast we can improve a skill—absolutely matters. But effort factors into the calculations twice, not once. Effort builds skill. At the very same time, effort makes skill productive."*

Remember (echo!) Hustle counts twice!!!

The passage also reminds me of Jim Afremow's wisdom from his great book [The Champion's Comeback](#) where he tells us we need to outperform our contract: "An uncompromising approach in training and continuous hustle in competition is vital to achieving sports-related goals. J.J. Watt is an NFL All-Pro defensive end for the Houston Texans. His willingness to embrace the extra effort required for excellence is one of the main reasons for his success. Here's what Watt says about working hard and representing yourself well: 'I think no matter what job you do—I don't care what job it is—you want to outperform your contract. I feel like that's how everybody should attack their job, at least. You should want people to think you're underpaid because of how hard you work, because of how well you do your job, because of how you go about your business.'

*Take a moment for honest self-reflection. Are you outperforming your contract? Are you attacking your job on a daily basis? What about in your sport? Are you one of the hardest workers on your team? Put in 100 percent maximum effort toward your goals and bring a passion to the work. Be willing to put in the blue-collar labor rather than wishing you had*

*"I think a lot of people make the mistake of assuming that if you believe in hustle, you can't ever take a step back. That's too narrow a definition. Hustle means adjusting to business opportunities as they come and adjusting to life as it changes. If your north star is family, then there's no shame in revolving your hustle around that. It's about quality vs. quantity, being fully engaged while you're working, not necessarily working every day of the week."*

~ Gary Vaynerchuk

*more talent so that everything would come easily. It never will. The great ones make it look easy, but only after they put in the time and work."*

Lewis Howes is all about the hustle as well.

Here's how he puts it in [The School of Greatness](#): "Chris was tapping into something that I think 18-time Olympic gold medalist Michael Phelps described best when he talked about his swim training: 'If you want to be the best, you have to do things that other people aren't willing to do.' ... He [Chris] was willing to do whatever it took: 'You have to chase opportunity whether you are an entrepreneur or an artist—especially for me, because I had to make up for so much lost time.'

*The irony is, we're all making up for lost time. That is the essence of hustle in the pursuit of greatness—doing whatever it takes and chasing opportunity with great urgency—like your life depends on it. Because it does. Greatness is really the survival of your vision across an extended timeline, based on your willingness to do whatever it takes in the face of adversity and to adopt the mind-set to seize opportunity wherever it lives."*

Let's flex the hustle muscle.

Are YOU outperforming your contract with life?

How can you step it up a little more today?

P.S. Gary makes the point that he's not talking about working all the time. He's talking about approaching your entire life with a fierce intensity that cherishes your precious time and energy!

## **PRACTICE THE RELIGION OF PROVIDING VALUE**

**"Don't skip this one if you don't think of yourself as a salesperson because if you're running a business or trying to make money of any kind, you're in sales, and here's the cardinal rule everyone in sales needs to follow: Don't close too early.**

**Most people don't jab—bring value—enough before pulling back for the right hook—going in for the sale. They're less concerned with providing value than with making the sale, and it backfires every time. ... You want to be tactical, but you have to practice the religion of providing value first. How many people put out stories, give free stuff, or engage with people? Probably quite a lot. Now, how many do that without any expectations in return? Very, very few. Be one of those few. When you have no expectations people can sense it, and funny enough, the absence of pressure or obligation actually makes them want to reciprocate.**

**That's the best advice I can offer."**

*"Practice the religion of providing value."*

<— That's a very succinct description of a great (and very fun to execute) sales and marketing strategy. And, of course, it's what we aspire to do here at Optimize.

As you probably know, one of our favorite words is to *astonish*—to make you say, "What? I get all this for \$10?!" It's basically one big game for us to see just how much we can do to help you Optimize. Laughing as I type this but just yesterday we got an email from a member saying that our free daily emails are worth more to him than the thousands of dollars he's spent on other products. (Hah!)

As my coach [Steve Chandler](#) would remind me, it's ALL about serving profoundly.

Let's be one of the few as we strive to create as much value as we possibly can for the individuals we're blessed to have the opportunity to serve.

"But is not a word to use when you talk about your aspirations. If you are serious about reaching your dreams, nothing will get in the way."

~ Gary Vaynerchuk

## BEING WILLING TO SUCK

**Q:** What was the biggest decision in your life that made you successful today?

It was the day I made the choice to suck at school.

Fourth grade. Mr. Mulnar's science class. I got an F on a science test. To make shit worse, I had to get it signed by my mom. To avoid being punished, I hid it under my bed, where it sat for two days until my conscience got the better of me and I showed it to my mother.

Until that moment, though, I was in hell. I distinctly remember sitting in my small bedroom, crying and trying to make sense of why I was having such an intense reaction to this test. And then it hit me, the thought that changed everything: 'Screw school. I'm a businessman.'

I laughed out loud with joy when I read that passage. That's some pretty admirable gritty self-awareness for a 4th-grader, eh? :) Gary's point? *"That moment marked the first time I decided to fight what society expected of me and deliver on what made me happy. And you should, too. Bottom line: Stop doing things that make you unhappy."*

Gary still had to struggle through years of poor grades in school. But the clarity delivered through that pain wound up bringing priceless, purpose-driven tranquility a la Ryan Holiday's great wisdom from *Ego Is the Enemy*. (See those Notes for more on the Greek idea of *euthymia*.)

Every morning I write down "Energized Tranquility" to remind myself of the importance of walking my own, authentic path—not comparing myself to others or second-guessing our strategy every 5 seconds.

How about *you*? Is there anything you need to decide to suck at so you can walk your own heroic path with energized tranquility and calm confidence?

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
Chief Philosopher

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you'll probably like...

[The 10x Rule](#)

[Grit](#)

[The School of Greatness](#)

[Ego Is the Enemy](#)

[The Champion's Comeback](#)

[Mastery](#)

[So Good They Can't Ignore You](#)

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### About the Author of "#ASKGARYVEE"

GARY VAYNERCHUK



Gary Vaynerchuk is an entrepreneur, tech investor, and CEO of one of the fastest-growing digital agencies in the world. Host of *The #AskGaryVee Show*, Gary has been named to both *Crain's New York Business's* and *Fortune* magazine's 40 Under 40 lists, as well as *Business Week's* list of the top 20 people every entrepreneur should follow on social media. Connect: [garyvaynerchuk.com](http://garyvaynerchuk.com).

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at [optimize.me](http://optimize.me).