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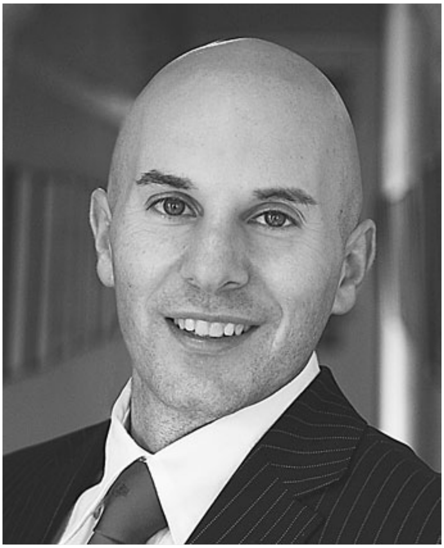

BAKOUS MAKARI

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BAKOUS MAKARI

The youngest of four gifted children, Bakous Makari was born in north Lebanon, in 1967. The following year, his family immigrated to Sydney, where his parents instilled in their children the importance of hard work and education in achieving success.

As a young boy, Bakous was fascinated by what made wealthy people so successful. As important as a proper education was, he knew that there was more to wealth than he could learn in the classroom.

The turning point came when he decided to buy some simple gym equipment. His friends wondered what he was doing when he bought a rusty pair of weights for $10, until the next week when they saw those same weights cleaned, polished, and being resold for $100. That was all he needed to make him realise that those who understood how money worked, and had the right mind-set, could create wealth.

After achieving his CPA in 1993, Bakous worked in a number of accounting firms, but became frustrated with the traditional approach. Instead of merely recording history, he wanted to unlock the opportunities he knew existed.

In 1997 he started Makari & Co, a business founded on the principle of 'We See Opportunities, You See Results'. In the last few years he has helped his clients save millions of dollars in tax and put those savings to work with investments that, by conservative estimation, will reap tens of millions of dollars in the next ten years.

His work has attracted the attention of Jay Abraham, who has actively endorsed Bakous's wealth creation service. He has been profiled in *BRW* and in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and provides tax tips with Paul Clitheroe on Sydney's 2GB radio station.

When he's not helping others on their way to financial freedom, Bakous maintains a healthy, balanced lifestyle, keeping fit and enjoying time with his wife, Marcha, and their two children.

You are now in the business of wealth creation. Why did you choose to begin your career as an accountant?

I was always fascinated with what made successful people wealthy. The idea I had was to become an accountant and analyse the accounts of a whole range of individuals and businesses: some unsuccessful ones, some moderately successful and some spectacularly successful. Over the years, I got to understand how successful people built their businesses, how wealth works and how it is created. I became very close to some of my clients and in return for the financial management advice I gave them, many of them shared their secrets of wealth creation.

I also knew that to help others create wealth, I needed a very deep insight into how money worked, particularly the very complex area of taxation. There was no better training ground than the accounting profession.

What made you decide to leave your comfort zone and set up your own practice?

From the very beginning I knew that I wouldn't be a run-of-the-mill accountant. Most accountants are fairly conservative people, who get satisfaction from ensuring all the numbers add up and all the details are correct. More importantly, they focus on recording history rather than looking at how things can be optimised for the future.

I learnt very early that the real value of my profession is in helping others see opportunities and assisting them in achieving results. Many wealth creation opportunities are hidden, but after a while you become very good at looking at someone's balance sheet and seeing opportunities for investment and other smart ways of using the money that they have in order to create wealth. It is a proactive, rather than reactive, way of looking at the profession. When I started to suggest those types of ideas to my earliest employers they understood, but it was just too far outside their way of thinking. I had no choice but to set up my own business and run it my way. This way, I could achieve my own ambition to help

> “I had no choice but to set up my own business and run it my way.”

my clients see opportunities and achieve results that they never thought possible. That really is the reason why so many people start out in business, because they see a better way of doing things.

Who are the mentors that have inspired you? What important lessons have you learnt from them?

Like a lot of people in business I’ve learnt from many different people, but probably what sticks in my mind the most was the investment mind-set lesson I learnt from the Symond family. Many people would know John Symond, founder of Aussie Home Loans, but the whole family has also been successful, including his father, who is an entrepreneur and property investor.

I was at their home one evening and I asked John’s mother what makes the family so successful. She told me that from the earliest days of arriving in Australia they were determined to make a success of things. They went straight into business, even though they came with very little money, and they instilled in themselves and in their children an investment mind-set - a belief that you can succeed if you really put everything you have behind your venture. Of course, they have had their setbacks. In the early 90s John faced bankruptcy, but by sheer determination and using the values taught by his family, he recovered to create the very successful business venture, Aussie Home Loans.

How did you establish your initial customer base and get your business off the ground?

Like most people starting out in business I had no clients to begin with. On day one, I sat in my office and although there was a lot to do, there were no clients to talk to. It’s very hard in the beginning. I had to do everything that every other business has to do to start up – I started networking and talking to everybody about my intentions, but most importantly, I had my unique selling proposition (USP). That is probably a young business's greatest asset. It doesn't have a long history of success, it doesn't have a big client base, it can't talk about an installed base of customers, so it works on a promise and that promise is the USP.

I got everybody I knew to help spread the word. I met with key people, networked, went to seminars, and used every opportunity I could to let people know that we were not an average accounting firm, but a firm that helped people create wealth. Like most small businesses, we were able to breathe a sigh of relief when the word spread and we were able to start servicing a regular group of clients. That at least gave us the beginnings of a positive business.

What was behind our extraordinary growth was that we delivered on our motto – 'We See Opportunities, You See Results'. We not only did the books, the tax returns and the company BAS statements like all other accountants, we looked deeper inside the financials to find the hidden opportunities and help our clients create wealth. We were able to do that in two ways:

First, by developing a superior tax knowledge. Tax is a business's single biggest expense – it dwarfs most other expenses. We focused on structuring things so that clients could utilise existing tax laws to dramatically lower their tax bill legally, and then use that money to create further wealth. To achieve these results, we knew that we had to be more knowledgeable about tax than any other accountant in our field.

Second, by reducing a client's tax bill, we were able to gain access to cash (funds) and this assisted us to understand how to help clients create wealth. We always encourage clients to reinvest the money we save them. By using tax-effective investment strategies, our clients achieve their financial goals far earlier than they ever expected.

Over the years you have reviewed the financials of over a thousand companies. What do these numbers tell you about businesses in general?

My experience shows me quite clearly that there are basically two types of companies:

1. *Companies that will probably never achieve their potential.* These companies will probably never go on to be much bigger than they are now. They have many of the classic problems that I see the majority of companies have: very poor cash flow, a very average type of service and nothing unique that distinguishes the business from its competitors. They don't seek to give their clients a unique experience. In other words, they are average businesses achieving average results, even though it's clear to me that the potential of some of these businesses is far greater.

2. *Companies that are already on a rapid trajectory of growth.* These companies do exactly the opposite of what the first group do. They seek to define something unique about their business, they manage their cash flow with great discipline, and they go all out to give their customers a terrific experience.

Very often these two groups, or members of these two groups, might be in the same industry. Even more surprising is that the successful group has an owner who may be less qualified or perhaps less intelligent. The fundamental difference between these two groups of companies is in the mind-set of the owner. The first group tend to be plagued by limiting beliefs and get so caught up working *in* their business that they forget to work *on* their business. The second group, on the other hand, believe strongly that their business and their own personal wealth is destined for growth, so they focus a lot more on working on their business to make it more successful.

Telling people what to do is one thing, changing their mind-set to implement it is another. How have you learnt to manage this issue?

It is true that you cannot force change on anyone, no matter how sure you are that the change is for the better. I have found that the technique of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) has been one of the most useful aspects of my communication with my team members, associates and clients. I became a master practitioner in NLP and I frequently use techniques like future pacing to help motivate a client to achieve something they've never achieved before.

I had a client who I knew could do so much more with her retail business, but it wasn't good enough just to tell her that she could do it. I had to help her internalise the result, start visualising the future, and feel inside what it would be like to achieve that result. I reinforced this with a number of positive affirmations, which was easy to do because I really believed that this client was capable of achieving her goals.

So often, right from our earliest days, we are continually given negative, limiting messages about what we can achieve and what we are capable of. If we believe that we're never going to amount to much, then chances are things will happen to us that will make that true. But if we believe fundamentally that we are destined for great things, and we carry out actions consistent with that belief, then we find that things around us tend to happen to make that belief true as well. That's why they call it the law of attraction.

What are the most important things you have learnt about growing a business?

It's unbelievable that there are so many ways to grow your business as well as make it more profitable. I have seen many

> “That's why they call it the law of attraction.”

of my clients really grow their businesses and their personal wealth by thinking outside the usual way of doing things. All of these ideas can be grouped under three simple goals:

1. Get more customers.
2. Get each customer spending more each time they buy.
3. Get each customer buying from you more often.

Everybody knows about advertising, direct mail and discount sales, but what about running education nights to help your existing customers and generate new leads? Or packaging complimentary products together to increase the size of a purchase? Or communicating with your customers regularly with helpful information or 'limited release' offers to keep them interested and buying more frequently? These are all great ways to grow a business. However, in my opinion the best way to grow a business is to have a Unique Selling Proposition (USP). Every successful business has one – a promise that they can deliver that nobody else can, thereby making them absolutely unique.

You are a big fan of the Pareto Principle. What does it mean and how do you apply this concept to business?

Pareto was an Italian economist of the early twentieth century. Unlike a lot of economists, he was a very practical guy who had a lot of practical lessons for real businesspeople. He is best known for the 80/20 Principle (the Pareto Principle), which says that 80 per cent of your profits come from the top 20 per cent of your products or customers. The other side of the coin is that 80 per cent of your problems come from the bottom 20 per cent of your products or customers.

The way you use that in a real business is to identify those customers who are most profitable and do everything you can to maximise the satisfaction and loyalty of those customers. I have shown countless clients (and it surprises them every time) that you can actually make more profit by having fewer clients. In other words, it is quality, not quantity, that really matters.

What do you think holds businesses back from maximising profits and achieving their full potential?

Inadequate cash flow. Many people are amazed to know that most businesses that fail are actually profitable. Unfortunately, the business owner becomes so focused on trying to do the best that he or she can that they lose sight of the cash that is coming into and going out of the business. As a result they get caught in a cash flow squeeze, where they're not getting enough money in time to satisfy creditors who are demanding payment. So frequently, the result is that they get wound up. This to me is one of the great tragedies of small business in Australia and all around the world.

Inadequate systems. Many people believe that having strong systems will stultify their business and hamper creativity. That is just not true. Systems make the routine, day-to-day running of the business so much easier. Businesses without systems are disorganised – they spend a lot of time looking for things, losing things, and re-creating things because no one remembers when things were done before. As a result, they not only waste time but also drive up their costs.

Limiting beliefs. This is probably the most important thing that holds businesses back. These beliefs can manifest into reality for people who think they will not be able to handle more than one or two employees, or manage any more growth, or be able to cope with competition from larger players. There are many stories in the world about small businesses that have grown to be great businesses, successfully operating in the most competitive marketplaces because the owners truly believed in themselves and what their business stood for.

How should someone go about using key performance indicators (KPIs) in their business?

We often say that something cannot be managed if it cannot be measured. KPIs are a management tool that keep you focused on managing and measuring the most important aspects of your business performance.

> "The most important thing that a business owner can do is learn everything they can."

As a start, you would measure things like your cash flow – how much cash you have available in the bank every week. You would also measure profitability and work in progress, if that was relevant to your business. Most businesses would want to measure the number of customers that they have and the amount they have spent this year. Larger companies would measure employee numbers, sick leave, absenteeism and all the other things that would give them an indication of the overall satisfaction of their employee team. Other performance measures might be the number of new customers that come on board every week or month, the amount spent on advertising, and the cost per lead or new customer.

What a business decides to measure is quite important, because these measurements together give you a quick picture of how your business is performing. Over time they tell you in advance whether there is a problem looming or whether you are hitting on a golden opportunity.

A client of mine was spending a huge amount on advertising, but wasn't sure what was working and what wasn't. By measuring the actual cost per lead (dollar amount of each campaign divided by the number of respondents) she literally doubled her advertising value by focusing on the campaigns that were really working for her.

These measurements should be done daily, weekly or monthly depending on the circumstances. There should be someone whose job it is to provide these measurements in each of the areas and they should become a regular feature of your management reviews. Absolute discipline is required to work with these numbers – they provide valuable signposts in letting you know about opportunities or threats, and give you confidence to pursue further growth.

What recommendations would you make to someone who wants to improve their business knowledge and become more effective at what they do?

The most important thing that a business owner can do is learn everything they can about their industry, running a business and making it successful. It is interesting to see the effort required of sporting champions for them to reach the top of their field – how hard they train, how long they work, their intensive coaching – yet we seem to expect businesspeople to be successful without much training at all.

Smart business owners know that they don't know everything! Instead, they seek advice from mentors and well-respected professionals. This is one of the most important business investments they can make.

When did you meet Jay Abraham, one of the world's greatest marketers?

I met Jay in one of his business building boot camps. I've always been a great fan of building business through attending seminars and industry events, and I've always practised what I preach. So I attended Jay's Ultimate Business Building Boot Camp held in Sydney, and gained valuable ideas, as well as a deep insight into the mind-set of the world's foremost marketing and business building genius.

In January this year, I attended his Private Strategic Partnership Workshop, a five-day event in Bali. That was where I really got to know Jay. He became interested in our innovative approach to legal tax minimisation and investment, and gave me a one-on-one interview (over a full hour). Of all the attendees at that workshop, our wealth creation service was the only business that Jay Abraham volunteered to actively endorse.

What were some of the most important marketing lessons you learnt from Jay Abraham?

Four of the most important lessons Jay taught me are:

1. *Lifetime value of a client.* Look at the total value of revenue and profit that a client or a customer will bring to a business over the whole time that they remain a customer. With this new perspective you start to look more closely at what each of your clients is truly worth.

2. *Risk reversal.* Many people feel nervous about investing a significant amount of money in a business's product or service. You can distinguish yourself from your competitors by taking on a lot of that risk. A classic example is a satisfaction or money-back guarantee. Remember that the business owner is in a better place to be able to manage risk than the customer. If someone wants to return a product, you can often resell it to someone else. The money it costs you is far less than the increased profit you make by having more people decide in your favour.

3. *Referral system.* People are often apprehensive about asking clients to give their name to someone else who may be able to benefit from the business. However, if you have done the right thing by them, they are usually more than happy to refer you to other people whom they know. It is probably one of the best ways of growing your business.

4. *Joint venture.* This does not have to be a huge undertaking. It can simply be a strategic partnership where you find a business that provides a complimentary service or product to yours. A very good example might be a computer hardware manufacturer and a software supplier. Neither business is interested in doing what the other one does, but between them, they can provide something close to a complete solution for a customer. You can also share your customer databases and grow your businesses in a very low-risk way.

Can you explain how host beneficiary relationships work?

The host beneficiary relationship is one of the cleverest ideas in marketing, and I've seen it in action. A friend of mine is an optometrist, who prides himself on giving a high standard of service. He knew of a dentist in his area who also provides a very good level of service. So they agreed to each write a letter to their respective customers recommending the services of the other. As an optometrist, he wrote to his clients when it was time for their check-up, as he always does, but he also suggested that they visit this dentist for their dental needs, and if they mention the referral they get a 10 per cent discount on the first consultation. The dentist honoured that commitment and returned the initiative.

Host beneficiary relationships work because two parties can lever off each other's loyal client base in a way that benefits not only each other, but also the clients who receive the letters. Everyone wins.

Can you explain the right mind-set required for wealth creation?

It is probably easier to illustrate this mind-set by describing two people I have dealt with over the last few years.

One of them was a lady who owned a pizza shop, making a profit of around $150,000 per year. We asked her what she was doing with the money and then we spoke about her buying an investment property. To most of us, this is a fairly simple investment and we tend to see it as low risk, but she struggled with the idea. She laboured with an outdated belief that the only money you should make is money you earn from hard work. She did not have an investment mind-set. In the end she decided not to go ahead with the investment property. It was a

“You can distinguish yourself from your competitors by taking on a lot of that risk.”

shame because that investment would have trebled her money over the last eight years and greatly increased her net worth, instead of working extra hours behind a pizza oven!

Compare this to a gentleman who was not a business owner, but an employee earning slightly below the average wage. His biggest priorities were making sure his children had schooling, enough to eat, and were able to go on outings – the basic things that an average family needs to be concerned about. Yet he believed that there was something better for his family. He believed that if he got his money working smarter, his family could be a lot better off. We looked at some investment properties and found one for around $150,000. His savings were enough for the $30,000 deposit, legals and stamp duty, and he borrowed the remaining $120,000.

Ten years later he sold the property for $450,000. Remember that he only invested $30,000, but his capital profit was $300,000 (the $450,000 minus the $150,000 purchase price). During that time, rental increases eventually balanced out the interest payments, so over the ten years during which he owned the property, he increased his initial investment by a factor of ten.

That is the difference between someone who has an investment mind-set and someone who does not. Those with an investment mind-set believe that over the long term there are opportunities for wealth creation worth going for. They do involve risk, and sometimes they do involve going without what you would like for a while, but in the long term you create wealth and security for yourself and for your family far in excess of what otherwise would have been possible.

The great investment paradox is that over the long term, it is actually the people who fail to invest for the future who are at most risk.

You believe that business should be used as a path to wealth. Can you explain what you mean by that?

There are many ways to build wealth, but probably the most efficient and personally satisfying way is to set up your own business. When a business is established and profitable, it gives you many advantages.

- Unlike a high-paying job, you have a saleable asset at the end of it. You build a business for ten, 15 or 20 years and during that time you are drawing a salary – if you have really built up business goodwill then you can sell that business, often for millions of dollars. That truly is wealth creation.

- Owning a business assists greatly with tax planning. There are many expenses that you can include as legitimate business expenses. You will find it a lot easier to manage your tax affairs when you have a business rather than when you are an employee.

- With a business there is a virtually limitless upside. Yes, there are risks associated with business, as there are with any investment. If there were no risks, there wouldn't be high returns. However with a business, particularly a well-run business, there is a potentially huge upside opportunity for wealth creation, much more so than with other avenues. Sometimes we see spectacular gains in property, but on average it will grow about ten to 11 per cent per year over the long term. Many businesses grow far in excess of that. It is truly an avenue of wealth creation that can be influenced by your own hard work and ingenuity, as well as your ability as a leader.

- You have the opportunity to leverage off the efforts of other people. When you are an employee, even a very highly paid employee, the amount you earn is typically limited by the number of hours you work. However, when you run a business you are leading teams of other people who are earning more for your business than their salary. This not only covers other overheads – it ultimately provides the capital for further investment and wealth creation.

> “Owning your own business is hard work, but extremely rewarding.”

What is a person’s annual wealth creation income?

I use this as a wake-up call to many of my clients, including some who have been in business for over 20 years. It’s a simple three-step calculation:

1. Calculate your net worth (all your assets minus all your debts). Let’s say this is $450,000.
2. Divide this number by the total number of years you have been working. Let’s say 20 for this example.
3. The answer is your annual wealth creation income. In this example, $450,000 divided by 20 equals only *$22,500*.

People then realise how much of their income they have been using for immediate consumption, and how hard they have worked with so little to show for it.

Owning your own business is hard work, but extremely rewarding. My advice is to remember to pay yourself first, develop and maintain an investment mind-set, and utilise tax-effective investments to increase your long-term wealth so that you can enjoy the rewards of your hard work and initiative.

What is the best way for people to increase their wealth?

I’m a great believer in minimising tax legally, then ploughing what you’ve saved back into tax-effective investment strategies. This is not just theory. Each year we save our clients literally millions of dollars in tax and help them with investment strategies that will make them many times that amount in the long term.

Unfortunately, many people like to spend money on things that decrease in value over time. A great example is buying the most expensive car you can afford – it's good for your ego, but it inevitably declines in value. It's not surprising that, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 94 per cent of all Australians retire broke.

Financially intelligent people put extra cash into tax-effective investments, which increase in value over time. They are less concerned with how much money they're making than they are about how much money they're keeping, and how hard that money works for them.

What are some examples of investments that are available to businesspeople?

There are many investments that a surprising number of people are just completely unaware of. Most people understand property investing, but are unaware that you can buy options on property. This is where you do not actually purchase a property, but pay a small fraction, maybe one per cent, of the price for the option to purchase it for a fixed price at some time in the future. When that time comes, if the property has increased beyond the agreed value, you can purchase the property at the original (lower) price, or you can sell the option at a hugely profitable amount. Like most strategies, there are calculated risks associated with this investment strategy. In this case, the maximum risk is that the price of the property declines unexpectedly, so the option lapses with no value. In other words, there is a limited downside risk of capital loss, and a virtually unlimited prospect of capital gain.

The second example is joint venture deals, where you can partner with another company and develop property or businesses, sharing the risks, the effort and, of course, the rewards. For many investors this allows them to access greater investment opportunities than they would have had the capital to fund alone.

There are many other opportunities as well, such as:

- instalment warrants
- covered calls
- contracts for difference
- share options (where you can make money even if the market goes down)
- purchasing multiple properties with no money down.

These arrangements can get fairly involved and will require expert advice, like a lot of investment strategies. What is important though, is that beyond simple property and share transactions there are investment opportunities available to people, especially business owners, who have an investment mind-set and enough income and/or capital to be able to utilise them.

What is your view on short-term versus long-term investing?

Both have their place, but I have a strong preference for a long-term approach. Anyone can make money in the short term, but luck typically plays a big part in this success, and luck often runs out sooner than we'd like. The people we have helped over the last few years have all benefited from a broader approach, which involves three steps:

1. Developing the investment mind-set, because it is the key to a sustained increase in wealth despite the inevitable ups and downs of the market and your own personal situation.
2. Looking closely at your goals and financial capacity (as well as your current tax situation). There is often huge potential to unlock capital and make it available for wealth enhancement.
3. Setting up investments that maximise wealth over the long-term and fit within your own risk appetite.

By taking a long-term view, risk becomes easier to manage, you are less prone to losing money through incorrect timing of buy and sell decisions, and you can adjust your lifestyle to become an investor rather than a consumer. This last point is vital, because we often see people who make a lot of money but fail to have anything to show for it after many years. By taking a long-term view of investment and integrating the investment mind-set into their lives, they learn to seek out opportunities and put their money into things that grow in value rather than consume it. That's the best part of my business – watching people become far wealthier than they ever imagined.

You say that fear and procrastination are the twin killers of business and investment success. What steps can business owners take to overcome them?

In my practice I see many professionals and business owners over the age of 50 who own perhaps one or two investment properties. I also see many people under the age of 30 who own 20 or more properties. That's an extraordinary difference! When you really talk to each of these groups, you realise that the lower achievers are either too scared to act, or just don't see what the hurry is and continually put off investing in their future. They remain spectators in the wealth creation game.

For a long time, I have maintained a seven-step pathway to effective investment thinking:

1. *Develop confidence* in your business, yourself and your prospects for the future.
2. *Set goals* and remain focused on them.
3. *Vividly imagine* the future to keep motivated.
4. Develop and exercise *self-discipline*.
5. Replace limiting beliefs with *reinforcing beliefs*. Remind yourself of them daily.
6. *Think, talk and act* like someone who is a success already.
7. *Take action*.

I use this seven-step strategy to remain focused on achieving my own wealth creation objectives.

You have often said that business leaders and wealth creators share many common characteristics. Can you describe some of these?

I could probably summarise it all in six qualities:

1. *Determination.* The most important aspect of being a great leader is determination and persistence. This comes back to the story about the Symond family and what John Symond's mother told me that night: every great business leader has had setbacks, but persistence and determination succeed where everything else fails. There are many things that can happen to you on your path to wealth creation, but people who are persistent and determined will see a worthwhile project through to the end. It is often said that many failures are experienced by people who gave up when they were so close to success.

2. *Focus.* Successful wealth creators are very focused people. That's not to say they're not balanced, they do keep a good work/life balance. However, when they're at work they remain focused on the most important things that they have to do. They are very good at prioritising in a multi-tasking world.

3. *Passion.* This is something that is very easy to see. Business leaders believe so strongly in the business they are building that the passion manifests itself in the quality of work they do and the amount they can achieve. Their passion is contagious for their clients and for the people they work with.

4. *Strategic learners.* Successful business leaders and wealth creators are very good strategists. While managers concentrate on doing a good job, leaders decide what needs to be done by concentrating on the big picture.

5. *Lateral thinkers.* Wealth creators are able to think outside the box. Most of the successful businesses you see are doing something that is different to their competitors. This is related to their USP. To be able

to create real value over and above what your competitors are doing, you've got to do things differently, and you've got to think differently. Successful passive investors are also willing to find new ways of using money. If you keep doing what everybody else is doing you become like everybody else and there is nothing to differentiate you.

6. *Inspirational.* Successful people are inspiring people. They are motivating, not just for their team, but also for their customers. Often money is not enough to motivate employees, particularly in the modern age, and cheaper prices are not enough to motivate customers to keep coming back. So often we look at the inspirational nature of the leader to drive the business forward.

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