ICE

Taking your company to new heights

DREAM CATCHERS
“A new way to run your business based on a very clear business philosophy so you can build something you can be truly proud of.”

“Simple solutions to complex problems every company has to deal with sooner or later.”

“A wealth of often overlooked truths brought together to form a surprisingly effective system to help a company grow towards a happy and healthy future.”

“A new standard when it comes to managing a business.”

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## Table of content

**Foreword**  
4

**Part I**  

**ICE**  
8

**The Great Pyramid**  
12

**The System**  
15

**Penguins**  
18

**Question the question**  
20

**Common Sense**  
23

**Rules**  
28

**The Paradox**  
31

**The Truth™**  
33

**Like...you know, right?**  
36

**Symptoms of mass Destruction**  
38

**Know Thyself**  
43

**It. Is.**  
46

**Kindness**  
50

**The money mindfuck**  
60

**Results vs. Process**  
63

**‘Your life, your rules’**  
66

**The division**  
69

**Structure and organization**  
75

**Management**  
81

**Troubles in Paradise**  
85

**The Paradoxical Truth™**  
100
Foreword

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”
-Marcel Proust

Hi you,

Welcome to the future of successfully managing a company. In this day and age the possibilities seem to be more and more endless, not only for the employers and employees at work, but also in each and everyone’s personal lives. For some reason, though, we don’t seem to be doing a whole lot to take advantage of these possibilities.

We at Dreamcatchers Inc. have one dream, a mission if you will. That mission is spreading as much happiness as humanly possible. That’s the whole reason we came up with the idea to write down everything we have done so far and put it into a book. That, however, was not what we really were aiming for in the end. We sat down and decided that our mission would be better served when we would use what we already had written to explain what we do so people themselves can do themselves what we do.

‘Why?’

Good question indeed. During the work we do and or did at a lot of different companies, it became painfully clear that most people we encountered were not very happy with their jobs or the work they were doing. Cause for this unhappiness ranges from a brain cell annihilating job to office politics to, unconsciously, doing work on auto-pilot. In order to tackle these problems we have set out to create a structure or a system to reduce and, eventually, eliminate these recurring issues at different organizations.

We have tested everything, changed a couple of ideas that weren’t yielding the desired results or didn’t make up for the effort that went into doing things differently. We kept adding and testing, discarding and streamlining until all parties were content with the initial end result. During our consultancy projects we have since then implemented most of what you can find in this book you are holding. Because the results were a bit better than we had anticipated beforehand, and they only improve over time, we figured it would be a good thing to share with the world.

When it comes to improving a company or letting it grow, we are all more or less inclined to look at the numbers below the last line of any forecast or report. While reading you will discover that it is only half of any story. We did the exact opposite, not denying the importance of numbers; we took a good look at the people doing the actual work and the processes and the thinking behind it all. Which internal processes are at play and how they work
together, or not, and how the communication flows throughout the organization. Company communication is usually work-related and not much more than a one-way street. Seeing that as a big missed opportunity, ICE was born: Internal Communication Engineering.

There was also another reason for the creation of ICE. Throughout any population, the one thing that consistently takes up a large chunk of everyone’s time is, you guessed it, work. Work, in general, adds to the feeling of accomplishment at the end of the day. This is the reason people that are unemployed for longer periods of time are often suffering from depressions and other ailments. This sense of accomplishment is very important for one’s well-being. Quite the paradox: work being a great source of (potential) happiness and one of the biggest factors of unhappiness in the first and second world countries.

When it comes to work, for most people, it is no more than the means to an end. They do something for their company during a set amount of time and in return they receive their salary, the money earned. If everything goes well, they contribute to the prosperity of the business so they can work there longer and keep on making more money for both the company and themselves.

How they contribute to the goals of the company exactly as well as how they can help themselves help the company is seriously neglected in each and every industry. We all perceive contracts as a mutual agreement to trade the labor we do and the time we spend doing it for money from the organization while it can be so much more for the employee as well as the employer.

Businesses are more and more customer-focused, filling their thoughts and frames with words as customer engagement, customer satisfaction and customer experience. That’s very good for the customers, also for the company, don’t get us wrong, as they need to sell as much stuff as they can, but there is at the same time a growing problem when structural problems are rearing their ugly heads. The internal health of companies is suffering from it, invisible to the outsiders and clients of the company. You can only sell so much effectively and efficiently when the inside is an unquantifiable mess kept behind closed doors.

Employee engagement, employee satisfaction and employee experience are alien, non-existent words. Hollow. ‘Human Resources’ is a company department, in most companies anyway or the same thing with a different name, but it has drifted far from what its initial purpose was: managing the people working in the organization and making sure that everyone can do their job to the best of their abilities. That is a pity, to say the least, as a company’s biggest assets are not the buildings, the machines or patents they own. A company’s biggest capital, excusez le mot, is its staff, the people executing a CEO’s vision, or lack thereof.
The practices in this book will help you create a more flexible, adaptable and, more importantly, a more social company. The cherry on the cake, to us, and it is the biggest selling point for companies, is that ICE will also improve innovation and revenues in creative new ways. At the same time it will give you something to talk and to think about because all of the above cannot be realized successfully without either of these two things. You can also read all of it as a new philosophy, a way of seeing things from a different angle as this book is also a celebration of all things human and an ode to communication on a professional level.

However, before we get to the fun stuff and the good stuff, you will need to know a little bit about some terms and general principles we have liberally scattered throughout the book on more than one occasion as they form the core of our philosophy, and hopefully become part of yours as well.

We will also delve deeper into company structures and ways to innovate that already exist, the different types of companies and the common structural problems they will have to deal with on a regular basis.

When you are all set and up to speed, we start with the preparation for the implementation of ICE and the various ways you can do that. Whether you choose to give it a shot or discard it as trash, we hope at the very least that you see that there is more than one way to get to Rome.

Nevertheless we do have to start with a warning of sorts: be critical. Be critical on yourself, on others, the organization you work for, or maybe even how the company is run, but most importantly you need to be critical on us and everything we have written on these pages.

Simply put: some things might seem simple, some things might seem logical and others will go against every grain of common sense you possess. And then we also have put in some flagrant bullshit disguised as truth that will encourage you, hopefully, to think for yourself about certain terms and ideas so you can form your own (well-informed) opinion. Doing what everybody else is doing is one of the biggest risks any person can take and the same goes for any company.

We wish you all the best and a lot of happiness.

-The Dreamcatchers team-
Part I

- An extensive introduction -
ICE

“Human behavior flows from three main sources: desire, emotion and knowledge”
- Plato

Maybe you were curious. Maybe you have heard others talk about ICE. Maybe it is no more than a happy coincidence that you are reading this right now. Either way, it seems to us that before we take off, it might be handy that you know exactly what ICE is and what it aims to accomplish. The how we will save for later as that will be the main part of the book and we are nowhere near there.

Simply put, ICE is a philosophy and an organizational structure which is based on that foundation. We will explain our philosophy in the next chapter as this part will be consecrated to the general structure.

Long lasting changes are rarely radical in nature and immediately visible. Instead they are more often than not gradual and slow, relatively slow. Because of that characteristic, they require processes to build their momentum before you can savor its fruits. ICE is no exception. Normally a process is implemented, some things or facets of an organization or a small part of another process is changed to achieve the results if all goes well. Then people choose a new project or thing to improve upon. ICE is different as it doesn’t stop there; you don’t go around optimize something else you have set your mind on. ICE is feeding itself as it were and, as a result, is much more fluent in creating innovation opportunities, growth and optimization as one idea flows from the other.

In general you could say that corporations that are constantly innovating and optimizing are in a perpetual state of flux. The reason they do this is because they need to constantly improve numbers, processes and designing new products, but in reality they are making changes all over the place without a single goal in mind: there is no line they are following. Aleister Crowley said that “The joy of life consists in the exercise of one’s energies, continual growth, constant change, the enjoyment of every new experience. To stop means simply to die. The eternal mistake of mankind is to set up an attainable ideal.” This goes for people as much as it does for companies. The difference is that companies are not following a process for improvements, they simply do. ICE is very different as it is a process for improvement but organically in nature.

The processes of ICE’s architecture are all communication-based and the results of that deliberate communication are all geared towards ‘doing’. The focus underneath is the happiness of the staff and as a result of that, an increase in efficiency and productivity of all employees and thus as of the business as a whole. And yes, when you want something to change, you’ll
always need a carrot to get people to start moving. In this case we have a field full of them and some of these, as weird as it might sound, we don’t even know about. You will understand what we mean by that later on as you start to see the bigger picture.

One very important aspect of ICE is that it does not require anyone to change who they are, what they do or where in the hierarchy someone might be sitting. The same goes for the overall structure of the organization or the way it is organized, except for one small department that doesn’t exist yet. The most practical way of describing the way ICE should be used, is as a complementary philosophy that will naturally change the way some aspects of the company are handled or regarded. The key word here is complimentary as changing things is not obligatory in almost all cases.

LEAN, just to take an example, is on the opposite end of the spectrum as it does require a complete overhaul of the company’s organization and processes. For most companies it is not practical or at all doable. ICE is therefore more of a practical application of a way of thinking. That way, more companies and thus more people, can profit from our collective experiences.

To sum it up briefly: ICE is a way of thinking that is complimentary to most, if not all, companies, businesses and societies to slightly alter how things are done internally to improve everything that has anything to do with the company. Great! But you still have no clue as to what it is based around. To keep it simple, as we like to keep things, we aim to increase overall happiness at work and on the job.

By creating feedback loops inside the company structure, communication will become more cyclical and no longer top-down only. This is namely the case in most companies because of a work environment where people are busy trying to climb the ladder and are less concerned about their actual work. We will get back at this problem in a later chapter, but know that communication, even in a smaller company or a flat organization is often filtered. Especially big corporations have a severely crippled communication flow. It goes from top to bottom and sometimes it goes horizontal; people on the same hierarchical level talk to each other about work and stuff, but it rarely goes up from bottom to top. It is a bit like little kids sitting in a circle and they have to whisper a short story or a phrase around until it reaches the ears of the first person that told it. It always comes back a lot different from the original.

Next to those feedback loops, we will also address big, commonly recurring structural problems most companies will have to deal with at times that will hinder people from being able to do the job they were hired to do to their full capacity. Lastly, we will focus on the part that, unfortunately, needs the most attention: the development of self. You could say that ICE has two pillars:
company structure and/ or organization and the other side is the human part of the equation.

This is what you could call the practical theory. The actual implementation is the actual practical. Before you can even start, you need to be in as good a position as you can be. That is where the philosophy behind everything we do comes into play. You need to know who you are, where you are now, where you want to eventually go and how you want to get there. This also applies to any business. ‘Know thyself.’, as Shakespeare would put it. Make no mistake, and we will repeat this on more than one occasion, but this is by far the hardest part to do right, or do at all. Why that is the case, you will see for yourself in the coming chapters. Do not skip over any of this as this is called “an extensive introduction” for a good reason: without this, it will turn into a swimming contest without ever having swum.

Secondary benefits of this quite lengthy introduction are that you will have a better understanding of what you want, how and why. That will make the implementation a lot easier and quicker, much more focused as you know the end goal and, above all, it will make the process a lot more fun. With the knowledge gained here, you can increase congruency company-wide and during the implementation process you gain more unison as you will be better at voicing what you want, how and why.

Just one thing to keep in mind: take your time because some things need time to sink in and a couple of topics in the next chapter are a little controversial but contain important building blocks for the rest of the book (and maybe even for the rest of your personal and professional life). If you are put off because it goes against anything you have been raised to believe or against everything you have ‘learned’ in your life. If for some reason you can’t stand less than politically incorrect opinions, we implore you to close the book and walk away: we won’t be able to help you and neither can this book. There is no shame there.


Still here? Okidoki, you seem determined. Let’s get on with the show.

So we said in the foreword that you need to be critical on the things you might encounter on these pages as well that you need to be critical on yourself. When you find something you will want to dismiss (outright), ask yourself why you want to do that. The answers you will get might not be answers you will like or do not want to hear. You might want to tear pages out of this book, but refrain from that as you have a chance to learn. You might not like the answers, but these answers are the ones you will need. Life doesn’t give you what you want, only what you need. Same thing.
Questioning yourself is not the goal, nor is getting the answers. The goal is not to drive you nuts, that is nothing more than a happy side effect. The reason you do this is to grow and expand your own knowledge of yourself, become more conscience of what you think and where it all comes from. You could say that you will be more focused on how you see the world around you. Improving your starting position is in part improving you, what you know and knowing how you think.

With that in mind we can finally start with one of the more quirky and going-against-the-grain ideas that form our basis, our core and our heart.
The great pyramid

“

“A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be at peace with himself”

Abraham Maslow

The ancient Egyptians believed that through the help of their great pyramids, they could ascend to the heavens and join their gods among the stars in the afterlife. In death they would become immortal. This endeavor took tremendous amounts of time, resources and lives. It was probably the most important goal to accomplish during their lifetime. That was then.

Now, as we write this, there is an immortal walking amongst us on this very planet. The difference was that it was more or less by accident than it was intentional. Still, he pulled it off. Like the ancient pharaohs, he too has built a pyramid and that too took a lot of effort, time and resources. The tragedy is that almost everybody has heard his name at least once and most have also heard about the pyramid he has built, but that very few have completed this man’s work. In case you are wondering if he did, or didn’t finish his own pyramid, seeing as he is immortal after all, we can’t ask him that. Immortality requires sacrifices. The biggest and most notable, paradoxical sacrifice of all the lot is one’s own life. Immortality is only obtained after death. Afterlife says it all: after life.

Who was he? His name was Abraham Maslow. He was a psychologist that studied human nature. This served as his basis upon which he has built his famous motivation theory. He figured out that individual development consists of five stages or needs. The lowest ones must be fulfilled in order to be able to ascend to the one above it.

The first is the physiological needs: you need food, a roof over your head, you need enough fluids to stay alive. Sex is also part of this group. Prostitution is the oldest trade in the world... now you know why. This is all pretty straightforward. No food? You die if you can’t eat so you’ll do anything to get your hands on something to fill your belly. Survival instincts kick in to keep the body alive. Pretty self-explanatory. What is a lesser known reason is that, once these needs have been satisfied, you will be ‘motivated’ to rise up in the pyramid. Motivated stands between apostrophes, because this is not a mental motivation: these needs are all sub-conscious so the best way to describe it would be spiritual motivation, but we go off track.

Safety is the next one and this one is more emotional in nature: it is about feeling safe and secure about your health, financial situation, emotional state and personal security. Both the first and this layer have in common that, in richer parts of the world, the government takes care of these needs in one way or another. That’s good news, but those same governments cast a deep, dark shadow over the pyramid, but we will get to that later.
When you no longer have to be afraid of dying due to starvation, losing everything you own as a result of some catastrophe or having a dinosaur showing up in your backyard that rips you to shreds when you are watering your plants, you will want to rise up another level. You will want more. This ‘more’ is belonging to a group and be socially active. That is the third step in the pyramid. Being accepted by friends and family is a big deal. That’s also the reason why peer-pressure is so bloody hard to resist: it works sub-consciously. As a person it is unwise to fall out of a group’s good graces. Looking at this from an evolutionary perspective it makes sense as surviving on your own with predators on the prowl is a sure-fire way to get yourself killed and eaten. In the present it is not as lethal as it used to be, but it will lead to feelings of uneasiness. The bottom-line is that you want to be loved by your loved ones and lover(s).

This is also the part where governments and societies cast their tall shadows. Through law and regulations they can steer a population in the direction they want them to go. For example: if they want people to marry one another, they can offer a more easily obtainable mortgage or other financial benefits. With these tools they can create a mass of people that all want the same thing and uphold the status quo as a result by wanting all the same things. How they rationalize wanting what they want... well... people get creative to say the least. Peer-pressure will do the rest. Knowing or thinking to know what you want is all framed and measured by what is deemed socially acceptable. If your preferences are not in line with the preferences of the masses, you risk becoming an outcast. It might seem like a luxury problem, but the consequences are very dire and farther reaching than you might think, as we will show you in the next layer: esteem.

This is the place where the ego is developed. Self-esteem and self-respect have both their place here. Scientists have done tons of research on this subject matter and they have created an equal amount of theories. The theory Maslow has created is, to us, a thing of beauty: simple, elegant and crystal clear.

Esteem is about status and right now, status rules the world. It does not matter if it is online or offline. Nevertheless, you can cover up a turd and Photoshop the shit out of it, but in the end, it will still be a turd. Self-esteem built upon not being able to accept that a turd is a turd, is hollow and holds no value whatsoever. A = A.

According to Maslow, there are two different types of self-esteem. There is an internal form and an external form. The latter is the one that causes the most issues: it is all about how you are perceived by others and how you are treated by those same people. The ego is fed by social media, parents and friends in that order more or less. In time, egos grow to the size of city busses. When an ego is that big, it will become impossible to fill such a massive black
hole. It will leave a void that can’t be filled and you will feel an inexplicable emptiness. Maybe this sounds familiar, maybe not or you are in denial. Either way, you are stuck. You can’t go up the pyramid because your ego got in the way.

We live in an era of enormous wealth but we have never quite enough. We want more but we don’t do anything to get it as we are all so special that it should drop in our laps because we deserve it. We are too distracted by ourselves and our individuality that we are stuck and never become a proper individual. We know the Truth™ and ignore the reality in front of us. Ascension to true individuality is out of reach.

The last part of the pyramid is self-actualization. The realization of one’s full potential. Being the best you can be, the way you want it to be and doing it in the same way you want it to be. This is individuality as pure as it gets: mastery of self. Knowing what you can do and can’t do, but that last part is up for debate. It also encompasses knowing what you want, why and how. Profound happiness as its own reward. Getting here is one thing, but actually doing it is a whole other story. ICE, as a secondary benefit, can be a valuable ally in the ‘doing part’ of self-actualization.

Later on, Maslow added another layer to the last and called transcendence. It is the path to escape individualism by contributing to the lives of others. It is about shifting the focus from self to selfless. This will sound like the handy work of a very deranged person because individuality, true individuality, will require belonging to a group, leaving it and its status quo to escape individuality to do something for the group you left or used to belong to. At first glance it is madness, but when you think about it, like we have, in time you will see its brilliance. You could also keep on reading as we will be coming back to this idea a couple of times.

We have put these last two layers together and called it ‘adding depth and meaning’. Yes, we are well aware that it is a super duper creative name. Self-actualization, or Dreamcatching as we like to call it, is mastery of self and it is quite intolerant to distractions from the ego. The whole reason for writing this wall of text is to get to the point of asking you one question: “What is holding you back?”

We hope you know by now why that is. The one thing that is in our way is the fact that this is all theory. Theory without practical application is useless. It is no more than a bunch of grouped up thoughts and assumptions that do absolutely nothing. However, going for practical application, while blind to how things really work and function in the real world, is a good way to fail every time. So in order to be able to apply our ideas, you need to possess a clear understanding of reality and how certain things function within the bigger picture: society itself.
The System.

“A system of morality which is based on relative emotional values is a mere illusion, a thoroughly vulgar conception which has nothing sound in it and nothing true.”
Socrates

Systems are a beautiful thing, as long as they are doing what they are meant to be doing. Usually the function of any system is to improve efficiency, productivity, equality and/or transparency. Let’s take the law for example: it creates equality for all citizens and the codes of conduct they enforce are known to all and therefore it creates transparency. An online-shopping system allows people to order their groceries at home and this leads to more efficiency for the shop and its customers.

Great! Right? Sometimes, it really is a blessing and makes life for everybody better or easier. Whenever there is a problem, it’s usually easily fixed with a small change so everybody can keep doing what it is they do without interruptions. Over time, these small changes can make a simple and great system a complex and impossible to navigate monstrosity. Why? Exceptions are added every now and then and a lot of exceptions will inevitably create conflicts within the system. Those conflicts are the reason why lawyers (barristers if you prefer) have a job in the first place.

Every system that governs our daily lives has the same problem: complexity. And although we can implement small changes, we will never be able to change the system as a whole: we will have to build a new one from the ground on up. The problem is that most will not want to do that: we would rather ‘improve’ the old and obsolete system than build a new one. That is a recipe for disaster for the long-term and yet, that is exactly what we are all doing. Be it adversity to change, uncertainty, or any other fear-related objection. Even if it is about tax reforms or healthcare which would without a doubt better the lives of all, it would not matter: the system is designed to keep itself in place. Take a look at governments or even our own way of thinking: we keep doing what we always do and nothing will ever change. Small changes, yes. But radical ones, even if they are for our own benefit, cannot be changed by using the system to our advantage. You need to be aware that it exists, but changing it, that will not happen. Period.

Don’t get me wrong: the law is a good system at its very core; otherwise people would be shooting everybody in the face when they think that they have given them a funny look. That would lead to a world where a good sense of humor is the primary cause of death. The law no longer is a system that propagates equality anymore, let alone transparency.

If you want to change your country, you’ll need to do so form within. At least, that is what everybody seems to be doing, but slowly the system will take over.
out of fear or complacency. Even people, who have overthrown their own
government for the best of the nation, will turn into dictators or bureaucrats.
Neither will lead to the desired changes. How? They never changed their way
of thinking and fell back on what they knew: the system.

What does this have to do with Dreamcatching or ICE? Everything. Even at
work, there is a way of doing your job: that too is a system. Yet no-one will find
an accurate and precise definition of the work they should be doing. You’ll
know when you do it differently until you do it exactly as the system needs you
to do it: pre-programmed robots with a heartbeat. The way you think and
approach issues that arise in your life (personal or professional) will have the
same outcome. You need a new system or approach to deal with the things
you want to take care of when they are different from the things everybody
else seems to want. You’ll need a way of doing things outside of the systems.
All of it? No, most things can be done with the help of society or cannot be
done outside of the system as it doesn’t go anywhere anytime soon. Just
don’t count on it for the completion of your goals that are very different from
everyone else’s goals.

The first thing to keep in mind is to keep it small and simple. That is how you
can keep track in an organized and efficient manner. To do so, there is one
system that you need to know about. That system is what we call society.
Society is as complex as it gets. It consists of people with each their own goals
and ambitions, it is based on a framework of laws and morale, virtues and
vices. Keeping everything and everyone in check is no small feat to
accomplish. Yet, it does seem to be doing a reasonably good job in doing
just that. How does society do that? Mass psychology. When everybody does
more or less the same thing, has more or less the same ambitions and wants
more or less the same things, it is not any more difficult to orga
nize and
monitor a society than it is to do it for one single person.

Uniformity, not to be confused with unity or unison, is the key in this case. We
think we are all different, but are we really that different? We act the same;
we seem to want the same. Why? We never really asked ourselves what we
really want. We simply don’t get the chance. We are bombarded with worries
and emotions, every day. We go to school, we study for a job we think we
like, we work, we retire and we die. Our daily lives are filled with things we
think we need to do and things we think we ought to do. Where does that
leave us? Given the statistics, we end up in divorce, kids in between,
hopefully with a job and a severe case of a mid-life crisis, an insurmountable
mountain of debt and a burn-out. We keep ourselves busy or we are being
kept busy. No time to be asking questions about what we want.

That is the system. That is society. If everybody wants something else, it would
complicate things for any country. As social creatures, we cannot exist
outside a cohesive group or society. Such is our nature. We cannot control
this, unfortunately. No matter how you do it, you will need to be part of
society and contribute in one way or another. The good news is that in spite of the system, you can ask yourself questions to find out what you really want, how to do it and how to succeed. It’s a matter of prioritizing and being aware of the world around you. Your ego will need to be silenced a little though: social validation and “look-at-me-mentality” will take a giant hit, but that is well worth the price.

So stop for a moment and think about what you want, or used to want prior to ‘growing up’. Write it down and try to figure out where things went sideways. ‘Life happened’ is probably the most common explanation. Life without happiness, profound happiness, is not life. ‘The system happened’ is a more accurate description. It took over and it seemed to make things easier, clearer, at least for a while; you were being kept busy. Don’t worry, you know now, that means you can change it. Awareness and knowing that the system cares about its own survival will keep you on your path: you don’t owe anything to it. The only one you owe anything to is you, yourself...

It doesn’t matter if you are mad as a door, as long as you are functional and contribute to the system, you will be fine. It cares that you are alive and consume without asking too many complicated questions. If one person really starts living, it doesn’t cause any problems. It does when a lot of people start living and doing things their way as it will make regulating a mass impossible in the long run. Not to mention that if they are really living their own life, they have been doing some soul-searching and think for themselves. This makes them a lot harder to manipulate and control. Anarchy is derived from Latin and means, bluntly put, without leaders. It is not about the rampant destruction most people seem to be associating with the meaning of the word, but more about taking responsibility for yourself and the life you want to live as that will unequivocally bring down any system that tries to govern the lives of the masses.

The biggest anarchists on this planet are, surprisingly, penguins. What we have been smoking? Nothing. Are we joking? Nope. They always live in big groups but always without any sort of leadership. That is very interesting to say the least, but more importantly, it will teach us something about ourselves (and penguins too which never hurts).
Penguins are awesome. Why? They’re cute, fun to watch and they all have their own personalities. They’re just like us. Less annoying to work with, though. Plus one for them.

Like us, penguins have two modes, beside sleep-mode. They either stand there, thousands of ’em together, doing absolutely nothing until one starts doing something and they all seem to wake up and switch over to go-mode. Just like us. We stand around worrying about stupid things, finding excuses to be able to do nothing and keep doing nothing.

We. Stand. Still.

‘Nothing ever changes.’ is a commonly heard complaint. Guess why... And then, when someone finally decides to take action and do something, we all run around doing what that person is doing because he is doing it and we don’t want to miss out on anything. FOMO and all that jazz. We don’t care why he does what he does, we don’t think about the reasons he or she might have for doing whatever it is he or she is doing, we simply do because he does. Herd mentality. Just like the colonies of penguins.

Take a good look at the picture I’ve chosen to use for this. This isn’t just because it’s a pretty picture. This isn’t just because we happen to like penguins. This, to us, is a pretty good example of the state of mind of mankind in this day and age. Especially the second to last one on the right. Just a note: penguins resist the freezing cold of the water they dive in better than man. They will survive without any hassle. We...not so much. Plus one for the penguins.
There is more though. Otherwise this would be pointless: to us, freedom is being able to do. Being able to do, you need to be able to think, freedom of thought. Fuck freedom of speech. At the end of the day, words are just words. Words don't do anything. They can lead to people doing something, but most of the time it's all talk. We spend quite a bit of time on liberating your way of thinking. This is the reason why: a true free choice on what to do, when and why, can only be made when your thinking is not limited by the ideas others have enforced upon you. Freedom to be able to act upon those new ideas is true freedom. Your life, your rules. Freedom is about what you do, why you want to do it and how. What values you hold dear, your principles, your spine all make up your foundation and in which direction your actions will take you.

That direction, as you will learn when you find your path, is usually away from what the masses are doing. This is the road to individuality, your individuality to be precise. You'll become, slowly but steady, 'different'. Others will notice and start to do what you do until you either are criticized and ridiculed, or become the status quo. That's when things change. Things change for YOU. Not for anybody else, because they run around like headless chickens. Why? Because you are part of the system whether you like it or not. When you do grasp your freedom and hold it tightly, you will realize that you HAVE to act. You will realize that you will have to DO, independently of what others will think, say and do.

Doing is only doing if it is done according to your code and congruent with the person you are deep down. When you do according to what others are doing, you're done and you'll become, bit by bit, piece by piece, a prisoner of the system. How you'll know? You'll use words to tell what you want to do or think of doing. Words, when used correctly, are important. Dangerous sometimes. This is one of those cases: they form the iron from which your cage is made. You are the architect of your own prison. So, the question you'll have to ask yourself is this one: is your prison comfortable, do you want to talk your way out of it or is it time to do something about it and dive in? Which penguin are you?

When you have made your choice, you have to own it. Penguins do communicate, at least, they should. In our world, we communicate all the time, even when we don’t speak. We have to find our place in society and, sometimes, we will have to fight for it with fists or words. Social interactions come in a wide variety of different interactions. Being conscientious of you and what you want is important, but the same goes for what others might want and, more importantly, why.

That is why we have to talk a little about other people and their motives.
Question the question.

**Disclaimer:** This part might leave you questioning your sanity, our sanity and the sanity of the other people around you. Don’t worry, that’s exactly the whole point of this little gem. So, without further ado...Let’s get confused.

Questions and requests are part of any group of people who interact with one another. We answer, we comply or we flat out refuse a request. It’s how we get ahead in life and how we navigate the social jungle we call society. That’s a no-brainer. What we almost never do, is question why someone asks us for a favor or makes some kind of other request. What’s behind them doing that?

We know that this sounds like the ramblings of a paranoid mind. ‘Ramblings of a paranoid mind.’ Why do we write that here? You don’t want to be seen like that, so you won’t want to openly question someone’s motives for making a simple request. You see what we did there? To make you paranoid of being seen as paranoid by feeding your paranoia with a non-existent fear that we pointed out to you so it became a real ‘fear’.

It’s a lot safer to comply with a request or simply refuse to do something for someone than it is to find out what’s behind it. To answer the question ‘Why?’. A question can be answered with a question. We know this and yet, we don’t act upon that knowledge.

Question. The. Question.

The way people ask you to do something, is often a very well-designed roadmap with the specific intention of making you do exactly what they would like you to do. Be it knowingly or unknowingly. It makes you fall into their frame, as they like to call it in neuro-linguistic programming.

To give you a simple example of how this works, we have a look at privacy laws.

We have the right, the constitutional right no less, to have things remain private, not public goods. Governments, since the bombings and other terrorist activities, have a complete opposite agenda when it comes to monitoring its populace to see what each and everybody is up to. To push this agenda and reform laws protecting our privacy, they launched campaigns. So how did they influence public opinion? They, subtly, attacked everybody, verbally, that was against these reforms. How?

“You don’t have to worry as long as you don’t have something to hide. You don’t have anything to hide, right?”

The logical response is to immediately defend yourself by telling them “Of
course we don’t have anything to hide (I’m innocent).”. Because you feel like you have to defend yourself, you don’t stop and think for a moment, but immediately respond to their passive-aggressive accusation and enter the carefully crafted funnel they have set up for you. Anything you say is calculated and the more you argue, the deeper you get stuck in there. It ends with you thinking, by your own logical reasoning, that it’s perfectly acceptable to resign your privacy. Later, way too late, you wonder what the actual fuck has happened.

What happened was that you never questioned the question. That is what the actual fuck happened.

Whether or not you have something to hide was never the question because it’s absolutely irrelevant. What they never wanted you to ask was: “Why do you want to take away my right to have some semblance of privacy?” That was what the whole deal was about, but the discussion was always turned to having people defend themselves from stupid allegations and guilt that had nothing to do with what was going on in the first place. Question the question to find the question which constitutes the real answer.

If you want to build your life the way you want to shape it, you will face some tough choices. Those choices will be influences by your surroundings and the people around you. Some of those people will help you achieve these dreams you hold dear, while others will do nothing but stop you from reaching them. To be able to distinguish between those two groups, you will need to question their motives from time to time. Question their actions. Don’t take their word for it. Look at what they do. One can tell lies, but one cannot show that which is not.

You might have heard of this term before: ‘Frame’. The above example is a good example of making others do what you want them to do by using powerful so-called framing techniques. Companies and politicians use them all the time to dodge responsibility or to make them look better than they are. Fundraisers, anyone? What they do, is they influence your perception.

One of the most-used techniques is diversion: distract them with something else (or what might seem like something related. Even in the old times of the Roman Empire, they already knew of this technique: hence the games in the coliseum. Give the people bread and games and they will, albeit temporarily, forget about their problems so you have less trouble to deal with. Divide and conquer at its simplest. It’s also the reason why social media is as big as it is. It’s a pleasant distraction from the real world.

Funny enough, social media use algorithms to figure out what you like and where your interests lie. What falls into your frame. Your frame, when you break it down, stems from a combination of your principles, your values and your opinions. All of these come from experiences you’ve had over time. In
order for you to build a truly ironclad frame, it will need to be challenged by others and their different views.

Sometimes this will have you change your mind on some issues while at other times, things become a non-issue. What will be left is all that truly matters to you. Only the important things remain. Things you value highly. People giving you shit? Instead of reacting, you ignore them because it’s not important to you and a waste of your time. You remain calm en go on with your merry life. Perfection is not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to remove.

Clarity is always preceded by confusion and the best way to sow confusion is by questioning the question.

Dreamcatching or developing a long-term vision for your company isn’t easy because you’ll need to have answers to questions you might have never asked before, so you can see what others can’t or don’t want to see. In doing so, the question becomes: ‘Do you stumble around in the dark, or do you want to see what really is going on?’

Before you do decide, however, you might want to ask yourself if we have been setting up a funnel of our own. Question our motives for writing this. Is it actually necessary for you to open your eyes? Is this nothing but a distraction? Or are you becoming paranoid, thinking you’re starting to see clearly now?

Are. You. Confused?

Good. Once you are sufficiently confused, you can actually start using your common sense the way it should be used.
Common sense.

“Common sense is not so common.”
Voltaire

Like any half-decent Sherlock Holmes, you might have deducted from the previous sections that we hold common sense in high esteem. It’s not necessarily a skill per se, but valuable nonetheless and something we all need to work on from time to time. You lose what you don’t use.

Another thing that might prevent us from using our brains the way they are supposed to be used is that most things are quite logical when it’s explained, but we simply don’t have the time to stop and think anymore. Emotions override all and any form of rigid thinking. When you need to make a decision, don’t react immediately. Let things sink in, let your emotions run their course and wait until you’re calm. “Doh, everybody knows that!” you might be thinking or screaming to your phone/monitor/tablet or the book you are holding in your hands right now. It’s a lot harder than you might think. It takes practice.

Speaking of thinking, we all think we know a lot and that stops us from learning. When you know something, there is no need to learn it; you won’t fill a barrel you think is already full. Know that you know very little. Common sense, right? In order to learn, you need to know what you know, but also what you do not know.

This is all pretty obvious in one way or another. Common sense is important. We could give you more examples of that, but that won’t do much. Instead, We’d like to address the two times that you don’t want to use your common sense.

The first is when you have been thinking about the pros and cons and either decision is equal in its positives and negatives. Use your gut instinct. We are built to have some kind of sixth sense for doing what we should be doing. It’s hard to explain but most if not all people have these instincts and we are pretty sure that you know what we mean. Use it only in the above situation.

The other instance where you actually don’t want to be using your common sense is when you want something better and/or different. When you do exactly what everyone else is doing, you get what all the others get. So if you want to achieve better results, you will have to do the same things better than all the rest or do it differently. Both require a different approach than what everyone would consider common sense. This way, YOUR common sense should tell you that you need to use another form of common sense; we call it counter-intuitive thinking. If your head is spinning right now, let it spin. It’ll wear off.
We are animals living in a globalized pack, if you will. If nobody is doing something in a certain way, it shouldn’t work. That’s how we are wired: follow the group. Sometimes it won’t work, true. Most of the time, it will work in one way or another and the results tend to be spectacular. If no one is doing something in a specific way, it’s because they haven’t thought of doing it that way. Keep that in mind; we don’t do it often but we are very capable of thinking for ourselves. We will be touching on this subject a little later again and dive deeper into the matter to really mess up your common sense. You’ll see that it will be quite liberating.

To stick with the theme of using and when you should not be using ‘common common sense’, we would like to explain to you what exactly we mean by simplifying.

‘The world is complex.’ ‘It isn’t that easy.’ ‘That will never work.’ You must have heard these things before and most of them were said when you were just a little kid trying to understand the world around you. Kids have a way of thinking most adults should be envious of. We are so proud of our knowledge that simple solutions are dismissed almost immediately when offered. How come? We have a nasty habit of looking at systems, problems and solutions as giant monsters. When we actually want to tackle something, we look at the entity in question as one big, massive thing. Truth is that it is made of a lot of smaller pieces and maybe one or two are not doing what they are supposed to be doing.

Let’s say we have a classroom full of kids and they are impossible to control and won’t do what you want them to do. You could call up all their parents to tell them they need to talk to them because of their behavior. You could suspend them all. Maybe it works for a little while, provided that their parents actually care and do as you ask. Most likely not happening. So why not isolate the trouble makers and kick their ass, remove them from the class, call the inspection of education? You only have to deal with one or two of them and the classroom will become that sanctuary where everybody can do what they need to do. Common sense. Yet, we all insist that ‘The world is more complex.’ and ‘It isn’t that simple.’.

Maybe the troublesome students we talked about have some kind of issue or they are too smart for the level they are on and because of that, they get bored. Maybe they are just rodents that need to be exterminated. We don’t know. Find the root cause of the problem. How? Simplify and pick each and everything apart. Small parts that are part of something bigger are easier to understand and their interaction with other bits and pieces as well. Simplifying is the key. When you’ll start building a life or a company the way you want it to be, start big and then make it smaller to be able to build it up when you get started with turning that dream into reality.

We would like to be seen as smart, we hide our insecurities behind expensive
words, and we cover up our errors and flaws with complexity. Politicians do it. Bankers do it. IT guys tend to do it. You do it and we do it, when we are not paying attention. Less is more in this case. This is one of the most important aspects in finding solutions for the above mentioned reason. It’s not all there is to it though.

Reverse-engineering this concept, we state that complex entities are made up of a lot of tiny pieces. A mountain is a lot of small pebbles pressed together. For learning and understanding, you need to pick apart something complex. When you start building or making something complex from scratch, or almost from scratch, you make a lot of little things and have them form that big, complex system.

Learning a language is learning small bits of grammar, words, syntax, et cetera. One thing at the time allows you to learn a language, trying to do it all at once is guaranteed to result in failure and what’s worse: you won’t be able to learn from it. You did too much at the same time to be able to figure out that learning the words was at the heart of the problem. You can only realize this if you focused on learning vocabulary. It’s paradoxical and it will need some time to sink in, but know that most things that work fantastically are, in essence, a paradox and require counter-intuitive thinking. Keep in mind though that when you start to simplify something, you do it wrong when you make it easier: the goal is to make it easier to UNDERSTAND.

There are a lot of things that can go wrong when you start to use the ‘more or less’- approach the wrong way while there is so much to gain when done right. That is why we are showing you some simplifying that had a different result than anticipated.

Next to helping companies getting their implementation of ICE on track, we also help companies get their vision, strategy or innovation moving in the right direction. We do this by looking at where they are and what they aim to accomplish. It is quite broad, but most things work themselves out when the foundation on which things are built is solid. We provide a solid base aimed at longevity, sustainability and health of the company and its employees.

One of the core principles is to keep things as simple as possible. As you will probably know by now, it is about making things simpler, but not necessarily easier. When you break things down into different parts, things that seem complex become easier to understand. They become stepping stones. Cause and effect. Simple.

These types of projects take time to accomplish. They range from 1 to 6 months, depending on the size of the company, number of employees, goals, starting point, et cetera. The variables are quite extensive. But this is not all that we do. Smaller projects entail getting grips on public perception of the organization or even coming up with new logo’s or slogans to improve
communication or process improvements. All adhere to the same principles, making things simpler among others.

One of the most crucial things, sadly often overlooked, is when people do not know a thing about your company; you will want them to know what it is that you do. You need to be recognizable. The easiest way is having a good, clear and simple logo accompanied by a slogan. Why? It might show the name of the company or your mission, what you stand for or even as simple in what sector you conduct your business. When clients do not know your name, they cannot find you. When they have no clue what services you offer, they will not hire you. If you have a name they have trouble with pronouncing, they are not going to bother. Again, pretty obvious and common sense can save the day in these kinds of situations.

We do a lot of gigs like this, even though it seems trivial. Step outside and when you see a mini-van with a logo you don’t know or some kind of brand or branding that you don’t recognize, see if you can figure out what it is they do simply by looking at their logo and slogan. Most of the time, you cannot. Why? Oversimplification. Simplification gone wrong or, our personal favorite: complification. To give you a better sense of how it is possible to screw up something so simple, we give you two examples. We will, however, omit the company’s names because of legal reasons.

So, imagine that you are attending a meeting with all the higher-ups to talk about a campaign to promote a new drug that will deal with lice and other parasites. It only works on dogs, but it’s developed for puppies specifically. Think about how you will want to create a poster to put on store windows so when people go shopping, it will catch their eye and it will tell them all they need to know. Remember: Keep it simple.

This is what they eventually came up with: one Chihuahua, a bulldog puppy and a cute golden retriever. White background. So far, so good. It ticks a few boxes, but it still needs something to tell the public what it does and convey the company’s specialty or something along those lines. This is where they made a huge mistake, or quite a funny one. Red banner, white lettering saying: ‘Parasite specialists’. Done. That was all there was on the poster. It made my day. They even forgot to put the company name on it. A logo was nowhere to be found. It took us a really long time to even find the company that was promoting their products like this.

As for the other example, it is not a poster, but a logo on their company vehicles. After going through the trouble of finding the company and trying to find out what they are all about, we threw in the towel: we couldn’t figure it out. After sending them an e-mail and receiving an answer, we are still none the wiser. Out on a limb here, but we assume their specialty is waste disposal and finding new ways of making it more ecologically sound. Why? Because they had ‘inno’ in their company name. What made us laugh was their
slogan. It said: 'Inspiring waste'. We know. We still do not know why or what they were thinking, but it is quite logical that more waste means more work for them. Still, I'm not convinced that that was what they were going for. It still ticks some boxes, but as you can see: they still have a long way to go.

In short: when simplifying, keep in mind that whatever it is that you want to simplify, it still needs to do what it is meant to be doing. Make things simpler, but not necessarily easier. Lastly, we have found that when something is works in theory, actual reality can catch up quickly.

Keeping things simple sounds simple enough, don’t you think? A little less simple is the one thing people, all of us, have a love-hate relationship with: rules. They govern pretty much all facets of our daily lives and, often, making it unnecessarily complicated.
Rules.

“Computers are like Old Testament gods; lots of rules and no mercy.”
Joseph Campbell

Don’t steal.
Don’t behave like an idiot.
It’s not allowed to pee on your neighbor’s lawn.

These are rules we’re expected to heed. It makes sense. What is not yours, is not yours to take. The interpretation of the second rule is up for grabs, but most people will agree with this one nevertheless. Agreeing on what it actually means or implies will be a lot harder though. That’s weird. We say and agree that it is a good rule, but we have no idea what it entails exactly: there is no clear criterion for what behaving like an idiot is. As for the last one, it’s something you just don’t do. Ever. Although, when you have an asshole-y neighbor, it’s perfectly acceptable to pee all over him or her, except when they are stung by a jellyfish. That would be a kind thing to do. You will get this joke later.

Back to the rules. What most rules have in common is that they are designed to tell you what NOT to do. The very few that don’t included the words ‘not’, ‘forbidden’ or ‘allowed’ are worded differently, but essentially come from the same place: what people don’t want to see others doing. Dress codes are a good example of this.

There is something else that is interesting about dress codes: they also come with a set of unwritten, implied rules. A man in a tuxedo is expected to behave in a certain way. You don’t see a lot of passed-out drunk guys in alleys wearing a tuxedo. Again, these ‘codes’ are not a written set of rules on how to behave in public, but more a covert contact between the maker and the people who adhere to this code. How not to behave. What is disallowed.

We all know what we don’t want, or what we think we don’t want. As a result we create a rule for every little thing we don’t want or don’t like. Then, because we like to think that the world is complicated, we create rules for each and every exception. We have been doing this so much, for such a long time, that the law is no longer about what is, generally agreed upon as, good behavior. It’s now all about finding a rule that will allow a judge to rule in your favor, indifferent from what is right or wrong. It’s the exact opposite of what it was meant to be doing. It is not about justice but about the rules and the correct, albeit a bit subjective interpretation of what they could mean in some cases.

In any, there are a lot of rules, be it in writing or implied. The goal of any rule, the desired result, is for people to comply with them for their own benefit, or yours if you’re the one making them. Yet, we are absolutely terrible when it
comes to listening to people telling us what not and how not to do something. Why? Because we want to be standing on our own two feet, to be independent of others and to be seen as an individual.

Are we advocating re-writing the law? Yes, we are. That, however, is not the point of this. This is about YOUR rules. Your personal law, code or however you want to call it. This is about what will keep you standing no matter what. This is about your backbone, your spine. If you don’t stand for something, you'll fall for anything. When you fall for anything, you can’t stand for this:

Be. Kind.

One of us helped a little boy get back to his homeland safely during a vacation. Why? Did he have to? No, he was under no obligation to help. So why? Because he could, it only took a couple of minutes and didn’t cost him much. They also asked him politely. If any of these factors would have been different, he wouldn't have helped him. Our time is precious and we value it highly. Money is less of an issue, but we are not ever paying for seats on an airplane just because we can afford it. Lastly, if his parents had demanded that the boy must have been helped, he would have flat-out refused any help whatsoever and would have slept like a baby, no problem.

Be. Kind.

It’s hard to find out what you want. The same applies to how you want to accomplish your dreams. Your code is not about how you do not want to realize it. That doesn’t work. Doing by knowing how not to do it, is not the same thing. Building a house by not using paper is not the same a building a house with bricks and cement.

Companies, like countries, suffer from the same malady. New rules or changes in the rules often form the proverbial iron bar that will have the whole system come to a screeching halt. The moment rules come in conflict with one another, is a good sign that it is time to throw the rulebook out of the window, or have it burned ritually by a shaman, if that's your cup of tea. Out with the old and in with the new.

A new rulebook. That sounds deceptively simple. Practice has revealed it to be quite an undertaking. What we learned, is that there are two things of importance. The first question you should be asking yourself is: 'What do I want to see happening?'. The second question is: 'What is the desired and actual result of this rule?'. Do note that this is about work, not about our motto or your personal life.

"That’s great and all, but without a dress code...What if someone wants to come to work, dressed like a pirate?"
-“Let them.”
"What? That’s crazy!"
-"Why?"
"They won’t be taken seriously."
-"Meaning?"
"Other people, when they see them dressed like a pirate...In a bank...Come on!"
-"If they are happier that way, their work will benefit from it. What is bad, is that you hire people at a bank and you expect the worst from them. Moreover, if they want to dress up like a pirate, at a bank for God’s sake, and that is troubling you, then that’s on you buddy. You are the one that hired them after all..."

We expect the worst. All the time. To prevent the worst, to have some semblance of control, we invent more rules. Put some faith in others and you’ll see that, more often than not, that faith will be rewarded. Give someone some responsibility over their job and the way they do it, i.e. their way, and they will become an asset. If you take away their responsibility, you also take away their accountability. That will not only make your job harder, but also theirs and that will bring out their worst. Just the way you had expected it to be. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

At work and your life outside of work, try it the other way around: less rules lead to more responsibility, which leads to more freedom and that will end up in more happiness. Do you know what the best part of it all is? The beauty is that the happier you are, the less need you have for rules because your expectations are way better. That too is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Not-doing is NOT doing. Hire a shaman and get to work. Everybody stands to gain from a good bonfire. Do bring marshmallows though.

This will sound like it is a bit of a paradox and that is very good news. Paradoxes are all around us and, to us and during our work, we try to find them as we go as every time we encounter one, it means that common sense can be utilized through counter-intuitive thinking to find simple and elegant solutions that seemed to elude us. But what is actually a paradox?
Paradox

“How wonderful that we have encountered a paradox. Now we have some hope of making progress.”
Niels Bohr

[par-uh-doks]

Noun

1. a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality expresses a possible truth.
2. a self-contradictory and false proposition.
3. any person, thing, or situation exhibiting an apparently contradictory nature.
4. an opinion or statement contrary to commonly accepted opinion.

The word paradox is probably the most confusing word in the English language. To us, though, it’s one of the most important ones: most things are a paradox. Things that shouldn’t work but do work marvelously. Things that everybody does, yet don’t contribute to anything. The list is enormous.

Everybody wants something specific and no-one does anything to obtain it. We stand still, hoping that whatever it is, it will come to us, that it will find us. That is as sane as going hunting with nothing but your hopes and wait until that giant grizzly walks up to you and falls dead before your feet and then starts skinning itself. Not happening.

Being selfish is another big one we see more every day. We care more about ourselves and do everything we can to keep our lives as good as possible. On a surface level anyway, but that is subject for another time. Often at the cost of someone else’s happiness. When we have happy people around us, we tend to be happier. People are more willing to help others when they feel good. The more you do at the expense of others, the more it will bite you in the ass in the long run. This is nothing more but common sense. Still we are so obsessed with our own well-being, that we forget our own well-being outside of ‘right now’. We are the architects of our own unhappiness.

We look, but we do not see. There’s another one. We fuss over details and are blind to the greater picture staring us right in the face. To find happiness in
everyday life, you don’t have to chase rainbows or trying to find unicorns that shit rainbows with pots of gold at the other end. All you need to do is open your eyes and see. Look around you. During a nice and sunny day, go to a park; sit down on a bench and watch. We bet that you will see things you have never seen before.

We could write a gigantic list of things that are paradoxes, but that would take away the true value: learning to see for yourself. Thinking outside of the proverbial box. The beauty is that everyone has their own way of looking at things. It’s like a sense of humor; there will be overlap and there will be differences. We are all the same in our uniqueness.

Things that work, yet do not seemed to be working. Things that should not work but do work wonders. It is not so complicated, but you do have to be aware of a difference between the truth and, what we call it, The Truth™. This is important as it will lead to missing a lot of simple solutions and a lot of problems down the line as accepting this difference is very hard. It will challenge the things you know or things you think you know. Moreover, if you cannot distinguish between these two terms, simplifying will become impossible with all the ensuing consequences. So let us explain it as simple as possible.
The Truth™

“The great advantage about telling the truth is that nobody ever believes it.”
Dorothy L. Sayers

An opinion is not always the truth: someone might see things the way they think it is or should be. Some base their opinion on facts, some on a gut feeling. When they express the way they see things, they have an opinion.

A fact is something that is proven: something that is or was. There are records of events that have transpired, what someone has said, research was done and based on accurate testing methods, control groups, etc. Something was or is proven to exist. That is what we call facts. Plain and simple.

We know that we are stating the obvious. The truth is or was a fact.

With the introduction of the internet, information can be found anywhere about practically anything, at any given time. Great … sometimes. People are lazy: do they verify the sources of the information they find? No. Ask yourself the same question: do you verify everything you find online? The answer is probably, or most likely a big fat “No”. So what is a fact and what is merely an opinion? We don’t know. Why? We simply do not have the time to fact-check what everyone claims to be the truth.

To make matters worse: the harder someone screams that they are right, the more we are inclined to believe them. People state a couple of numbers from some kind of experiment and we believe them: it is supposedly based on research done by really smart people. We don’t ask ourselves if these numbers are correct or if they come from a viable experiment. We don’t ask if the context of that experiment is applicable to this situation or how it is framed and if so, if it is done correctly. Why? We like to hear others telling us that we were right all along. We like to think that we know the Truth™.

We live in our own information bubbles for such a long time, that we hardly see other sides of the equation. We only see what we believe to be the truth, the real world. Anyone claiming something that conflicts with our world view will set us off. We freak out and start raving, insults follow and we have a screaming contest. All that because our egos are fed on a daily basis with being right all the time, that it has become a monstrosity incapable to see that things are different from what we’d like them to be.

When parents keep telling their children that they are perfect over and over again, these children will start to believe that they are indeed perfect. It’s the Truth™. Everybody tells them the same thing, so it must be true. In school, they will gradually find out, hopefully sooner than later, that they are not as perfect as they were lead to believe to be. What happens next is they give up, get depressed or lash out. Cognitive dissonance, they call it. Their world and the
real world are not the same. Do these kids learn anything from this experience? That depends largely on their ego: the bigger it already is, the less likely that it will be a humbling and learning experience.

In a world where everyone has monopolized the truth, it is pretty hard to focus on things you want to do differently or the different things you want to do. What you want to do and what you ought to do is governed by what everyone else wants to do and ought to do. Breaking free of the stigmas will be brutal.

Our experiences have taught us that what we truly want is not what the rest of the people seem to want. The reason being that most don’t know what they really want: they are sheep following an invisible shepherd. Monkey see, monkey do, because they think that it is what they are supposed to want and do. This will lead to massive unhappiness and incongruent behavior that will fuel their cognitive dissonance even more to the point where their cognitive dissonance has a cognitive dissonance.

When you start to discover what you want now and in the future, you better be ready to defend what you stand for. When you work on you, your life and your happiness, others will feel threatened by it. You start doing what they didn’t want to do or couldn’t do. That will cause a conflict with the Truth™. Egos won’t be able to handle that.

When you decide to go into the world and live your life, enjoy it thoroughly. It’s a giant wonderful trip, but do yourself a favor and leave your ego at home: wings and shackles don’t go well together.

We are always occupied by what we think we want and what we should be doing based on the truth we think we know, but if what we know is not actually based on how things actually work in the real world, we cannot make a change to benefit us or the company we run or work for as they have no real world value because the foundation resides in Wonderland with Alice, having a cup of tea together.

Before undertaking anything at all and having a shot at succeeding, you need to know how the world actually works, practically speaking. The Truth™ gets in the way of this and circumventing this is spending time on learning from your own experience, or the experiences of others in one way or form. To be able to break through this circle, the paradox will give you hints at doing things differently to help you grow your knowledge base and flexibility because you will challenge the status quo, as well as your own convictions. Why do you think the way you think?

Speaking of thoughts or words in general, they can have much more influence than you might think. You do have to use them correctly and specifically: ambiguous language, today’s standard language, is often too
vague to be of use other than dodging responsibility. So before we go on with the people behind businesses, we spend some time on a couple of words and its mis-uses.
It’s like, you know…right?

“It is no wonder that truth is stranger than fiction. Fiction has to make sense.”
Mark Twain

What do you want to be doing and how? It’s baffling how many people and companies have no vision behind their actions. Doing without thinking. Going somewhere but without a clue as to where they are going. This causes quite a few problems down the line. That’s all right though: it’s the reason why we can do what we love to do; helping people and their companies. What makes it difficult is that the same people we want to help also lack a sense of direction in the way they talk. One speaks with the sole purpose of conveying as little information as possible and to avoid assuming any responsibility whenever possible.

“It’s, like, you know, a thingy these days to…you know what I mean.”
-“Do I?”
-“Yeah, on what we talked about the other day.”
-“Right…Which day?”
“The big one when we had that meeting.”
-“Of course, but what meeting?”
“You know. The one where, like, everyone was.”
-“The big shots?”
“Yeah, that’s the one.”
-“Ah, why didn’t you say so at the beginning?”

Speaking plainly and being eloquently specific when it comes to the sounds you make, you know, like, real communication, has become a rare art these days. Ambiguous language filled with nonsensical vagueness and random assumptions make life seemingly easier. Why? Because it allows us to keep up appearances of being social while avoiding reality: We are stuck in a swamp, not knowing how we got to be stuck there and, therefore, unable to figure out how to get out of the predicament. All we do is trudging on like we have always been doing.

Asking for help is a good way to see in what category someone falls you have decided to ask for help or advice. When they have something to contribute to a possible solution, you will know and hear it because of the specifics. The inverse is also true.

Most will come up with non-helpful one-liners as: “Do it with love.” “Keep going, you’ll get there.” “You’re perfect the way you are. Don’t change a thing.” “It’ll work out eventually.” They mean well, but have no clue that they don’t have a clue and in the case that they do, they can’t or won’t want to help you. Status or too occupied with their own perception of how you perceive them. Most are, unknowingly, looking for affirmation or a compliment to justify not doing what they know they SHOULD be doing, like,
you know, right now. Don’t you think? It’s like…Seriously?

Anyway...you get it, right? I mean...obviously...erm...no?"

That’s the key to speaking your mind (the part people will want to hear): avoid interjections and non-words. Non-words are, by the way, words that add nothing of any significance to what you say so you shouldn’t bother taking the effort of pronouncing them in the first place. Mmmkay? To know what you want to say precedes saying it. Own what you say: they are your words for a reason. It’ll make your life a whole lot easier (as well as the people you can have an actual conversation with).

Be specific or be lost sums it up quite nicely. Concerned with your ego, as we have already said, will stop you dead in your tracks if you aspire to become a true individual, true to yourself. That requires taking responsibility for yourself and everything you do or do not do. That requires a change in the words you choose to use. Responsibility is a tricky subject because we all think we have it, but most of us try very hard to avoid as much of it as possible due to not being able to handle it...-cough- stress –cough...

Not being to handle responsibility and accountability is one of the symptoms of (unconscious) self-destruction.
Symptoms of mass destruction

“If you get your ego in your way, you will only look to other people and circumstances to blame.”
Jocko Wiltink

“You have to solve this, not us!”
- “I have given you options and you’ve told me time and time again that those wouldn’t do.”
- “Because they don’t solve my problem.”
- “They do. Thing is...they’re not the solution you want and are, therefore, not a solution according to you.”
- “No, I want you to solve it like this and no other way!”
- “And I have told you that what you want is not within my, or anyone else’s power to do.”
- “You have to solve…”
- Click-
- “Hello? Hellooo?”

Some people are rude, some are not. Some people are incapable of discerning emotions from facts, some are. You can’t always choose with whom you’re dealing with, but you can ALWAYS choose how you deal with them. The same principle applies to finding and applying solutions. Some can, some can’t.


Even when it doesn’t seem like it, you do.

It’s possible that the choice you are faced with might be a choice between two evils. It can be excruciating at times, but it remains preferable to being stuck in the same situation. The lesser of two evils is still an evil, some might say. They willfully ignore the fact that making a choice, acting, will help you get further and make progress. It, however, does require a certain degree of flexibility on your part. To be able to do that, you have to be able to accept reality as it is, factual of circumstances.

We are lazy. When was the last time you memorized a phone number that was not yours? We bet it is a pretty long time ago. The reason is, thanks to the progress made in electronics that we no longer have to learn numbers by heart. The memory on your phone or laptop has replaced the one we’re born with. Do you want to feel better? Open up Facebook, go to Reddit and post a gut-wrenching story and watch your likes explode or receive a heap of comments to make you feel better. Don’t get us started on liking a sad story, that’s a sad story in its own right, but we get off topic.

The point is that we have everything we might need at the tip of our fingers.
Trouble stirs when a real problem looms on the horizon, a real-world problem. We are lost, stuck and get angry or start crying that someone (else) has to solve our problem using our solution. Having lost track of reality, we out-source our problems but get angry when we realize that the solutions are outsourced as well. We take no action but don’t want to accept the solution of others. Which is the lesser of the evils now? Might it be...You?

We become less and less flexible and less and less free. We become the architects of our own prisons and, finally, our own destruction. We refute solutions and complain about solutions others have imposed and actions taken because we didn't. And still, we stand by the sideline screaming that it's unfair that the world is turning.

We lose control because we feel no longer in control of our own lives because of the choices made all the while we surrendered control a long time ago. Willingly, to make matters worse. Why? We are lazy. "But I can't get it back." Of course you can, slowly; gradually you can take it back. "It's complicated. "That's because your solution or goal is getting it back all at the same time. That doesn't work: you get it back the way you lost it: gradually. It is the same sliding scale but in reverse. When you lose the keys to your house, you backtrack and go over everything you did up until you get to the moment that you actually lost them. You will find the time and the place where you lost it and there you will find the answer you're looking for, or in this case, your keys.

Getting angry will not get you your keys back. Telling someone else to find you your keys is plain nuts for obvious reasons and will only make your predicament much worse. Looking for them yourself is and always will be the best and fastest way to go: you know what they look like and where to find them.

We all know quite a few people like this. Now think for a moment and count how many of them you knew a couple of years ago. Let's say ten years ago. Compare that number to the number of people you know now that behave in this way. Surprise! They are growing in number. A couple of people that need help because they can't figure it out anymore, is not that big of a deal, but imagine the chaos that will ensue when a quarter or more of a population can't solve their own problems anymore, ignoring if they do not want to or simply cannot. When we are the very few left that even have time to spare to even consider helping another out, more and more will get into trouble and will, at a certain point, demand that you help them and solve their issues for them. The need of the many outweigh the need of the few...

You can help others when you have your shit together. Like loving someone and giving them the love they deserve while not being able to love yourself. That is a train wreck waiting to happen. When you sit in a plane and the oxygen masks fall out of the ceiling, you put it on your face first. You can't
help anyone when you're dead. It's all a matter of common sense.

It's taking on the properties of an infectious disease and it's spreading quickly. Look around you: they are everywhere. Don't believe us? Talk with teachers of all ages. Slowly but steady, we become paralyzed as a whole. Help is given or earned, sometimes it's asked for and given, but never when it's demanded or extorted. The question we wanted to ask you is this one: "Should we amputate the infected limbs or do we let it fester?" Does the humane side of things have a place here or is the fact that we base the answer on 'humane options' our undoing in the end? Will the humane end humanity?

Which is the lesser of two evils?

This is becoming a more and more serious problem for a lot more people than we would like to admit. Why that is, is because there is always a turning point where there are enough people screaming and cursing because of their own inaction due to a lack of responsible and critical thinking. When that moment comes, it will take away so much time and resources from the people who are actually doing something and taking the helm of their lives. Fortunately, both the problem and the solution can be found in the same place: you.

Yep, you read that correctly. You are one of the biggest factors of interference to the growing unhappiness in your environment as well as the biggest source for the exact opposite. Before you blow your own mind, let us show you that with an example. ‘What do you do?’ is a pretty common question and it refers to what JOB someone does. We are defined by the work we do while we do and are so much more. From that job we derive our status and our sense of self-worth. It's a pretty common question when you meet someone new and no one questions why we ask something like that. When you really want to get to know someone, does it matter what job they do or does it tell you something about their personality? The short answer is ‘nope’ and the long one is ‘hell no.’

When we are answering the question what we would like to do, a job is implied. So the question becomes what would you like to do to make money and keep your status. No one ever asks if you actually like your job because it is less important than to assess someone’s worth based on status and income. Both feed the ego which we value in today’s world. This stems from the hierarchy of living in tribes and the most powerful person was the one sleeping with the women to reproduce. It was and still is a race to the top. We are biologically wired to behave like this. Evolution is slow to catch up to modern times, unfortunately.

Our instincts are no longer necessary for our survival or hunting needs. All the hunting we do is going to the grocery store and we buy what we need (and then some). No spears are required. Our primitive brain still functions the way it always has and we act on it. In our pursuit to find suitable partners we still do
the same thing. We react in the same way to loud and sudden noises. We are civilized, so we don’t murder anyone on the streets who insults us, but we still react the same way: we retaliate in one way or another. Back in the day, it was a matter of survival: the weak would perish by themselves or at the hands of the stronger.

Today, reacting emotional has never been easier and more (or less) accepted. We can spit out how we feel about any number of topics to a global audience through digital media. Thanks to the technology we have at our disposal, we can not only ‘share’ our grief, we are also reinforced by the support we collect in the form of likes, comments and re-tweets. We matter and we see it confirmed. We are important and we know it. The nasty consequence is that we are living in a smaller and smaller bubble. In that bubble other opinions don’t matter or can’t reach our ears. Our egos start to grow like balloons and like balloons, the bigger they get, the more they can’t handle pressure from the outside. Ignoring the endorphin production that goes into hyper drive and causes all those lovely feelings in your body to swirl, we are stuck and drift away from who we really are.

We are addicted to ourselves in a very dangerous way: how we think others see us. We propagate that image for the world to see. We are the stars in the movie of our own life. We are the editor, casting director, star actor/actress and the audience, but we relinquished the direction and writing of the script. Our self-image is based on the opinion of others. The ‘others’ are fickle and emotional, just like you. Think about that.

We scream for the freedom of speech, while wanting to ban all conflicting opinions from the world. Freedom of thought is demanded yet not used. Everyone is fundamentally unique, we’ve said it before and we’ll say it again. Everyone is just as unique, deep down.

Thanks to all the above influences, we suffer from the so-called 'Snowflake-syndrome’. It stems from the fact that snowflakes look absolutely stunning under a microscope but they are extremely fragile. What we don’t realize is that other people are like us: snowflakes and just as beautiful and special. We are all the same. Now that we all want the same things and are all chasing our own tail, can you really claim to be special? No, you are not special, not in the slightest. You are just like everyone else. Sucks doesn’t it?

Tim Ferris, a writer/investor, once wrote this: “But what if someone has an emergency? It doesn’t happen. My contacts know now that I don’t respond to emergencies, so the emergencies somehow don’t exist or don’t come to me. Problems, as a rule, solve themselves or disappear if you remove yourself as an information bottleneck, and empower others.”

We mean well, most of the time, but fighting for the rights of another group, be it ethnical or based on convictions is belligerent and (sometimes) pretty
We are expendable.

Get that through your head and be free. Really, when you know that you are unique like everyone else, only then can you accept responsibility for your actions or inertia. That's a paradox, we know.

When you finally do, a whole lot less people will be dependent on you. When you are pissed at us for saying you are ordinary, we will address that later, but know that that is a good thing. You are free, liberated. Your only responsibility is you. No one is going to take responsibility for you, assuming you are over 18. No one gives a fuck for the above reasons. There are exceptions like friends and family (in most situations), so you can always turn to them for help but the responsibility in the end, is yours to bear.

The truth hurts, we know. We all know that it hurts to find out the world is not Disneyland. We don’t know the truth and all we have is The Truth™. “The truth will set you free” couldn’t be more appropriate. How the ego is tied into this, you already know, you just have a clearer picture of it all. Bite through the pain to get to the good part: once you are free in your thinking, you can liberate your mind from all the clutter that is hampering your personal and professional development (or the development of the company you are running).

We have written a short blog post about knowing yourself. Part of that is not falling for your own made up ‘logic’ behind actions or fooling yourself. We thought it would be a good addition to really hammer the point home we are trying to make here: learning can only be done by learning from your own mistakes and those of others.
Know thyself.

“Life is the art of drawing without an eraser.”
John W. Gardner

I can do a lot of things. Really. Everything is a learnable skill. Sure, some things take a little more time to learn than others. Some people tell me that I am the exception when they see the things I can do and do well. The thing is: you can do all these things as well. You can learn everything you want. It is just a matter of doing it, backed up by a solid plan as to why and how you want to learn the things you want to learn. Growing as a person, self-development, when done right, is pretty fun.

The beauty is also that you don’t have to learn to do everything yourself. If you want, you can simply let others do the things you need to get done. It might cost some money, but it will save you time. Great. Everybody has their own strengths and weaknesses. We can complement those with the strengths and weaknesses of others to help each other out in different ways. It does not matter what you want to accomplish, but with enough time, everything is possible. Preparation is the key. In order to be prepared properly, you do need to know your own strengths and weaknesses.

My sense of direction is about as good as that of a very, very drunk squirrel. I also have a knack for saying the wrong things at the very wrong time and I have had online conversations go very wrong, very fast. Why? My sense of humor is not suited for online use as irony and sarcasm cannot be expressed with emojis. Just to name a few. In short: some things can end up giving me a massive headache and create problems in ways that are very detrimental to my dreams and aspirations. The same goes for everyone. There is no shame in admitting that. There IS shame in not doing something to solve those issues. And that is the problem these days: we complain that we suck at everything, but we do nothing to alleviate them.

I had to learn the hard way that sometimes it is best to keep my mouth shut and that I needed to think before speaking. Online conversations are limited to the bare necessary minimum and I prefer to set up a meeting as fast as humanly possible, be it dating or for business.

I’m not perfect, far from it, but since I changed my ways of doing certain things slightly different, life has become a little easier. I mess up from time to time, but it does not cause as much trouble as it used to. Life as a whole becomes a lot easier and, more importantly, a lot more fun, when all the small things no longer cause trouble as they used to do. Not only will it save me a lot of time in the long run, but also the trivialities of day-to-day life stop being a source of frustration, or worse.

Think of the things you can do to mitigate frustration on a daily basis. The
payoff might not seem like it will be worth it, but give it a shot. Find one thing to change, something small, for a month. You might not even notice a difference, but if you do this for a year, you change one thing each month, it adds up and it adds up fast. But no matter, it all begins with admitting that you have imperfections like the rest of us. You cannot change that which you do not acknowledge. Therefore I recommend everybody to go and hit the gym. Why?

First of all: working out keeps you healthy. It keeps your blood flowing and your heart pumping. It stops cardiovascular problems down the line (if you eat right). It can help alleviate spinal problems; respiratory problems will be less of a concern; your muscles will be reinforced, etc. What most people don’t know, if they have never worked out before, is that it also keeps you mentally fit. Draining yourself of leftover energy reinvigorates you in ways that only sex can, but let’s face it, that counts as cardio. So in short being active keeps you where you are or in slightly better place than before.

This brings us to our second why; it encourages growth as a person. The physical component of this statement is a no-brainer. So what does this have to do with the psychological aspect? Inherently, people need to be challenged to feel fulfilled and happy. Learning to set goals in the gym is by far the easiest way to go about it. It’s easily measured and clear as day when and or how you achieved your goal. So getting used to setting goals or mapping out small steps to get there, should be second nature after 6 months. In the meantime it creates structure and discipline in your daily life, which leads to a more steady state of mind. The added motivation that will be the result of all this hard work is the proverbial icing on the cake.

Is that all? Hardly. Most people tend to put their clothes in their locker and start doing whatever it is they do. That is where the problems come in for most people. They get injured because they pick the heavy weights before figuring out how to do the exercises right or they simply don’t get along with teammates or fault them for losing a game. In each case, they forgot to put the most important thing in their locker: their ego. When you do something with others, mess yourself up or mess up yourself: mostly it is one’s ego and/ or impatience that wreaks havoc on our well-being and the well-being of others. That is another lesson that it is much easier to learn while working out than in the ‘real world’.

Last but certainly not least, is asking for help. Knowing that you do not know how to do something that you want to learn, that’s the first step. Accepting the fact that you are not perfect, despite what your Instafap-account might lead to believe. The good news is that neither are the others around you. They too had to learn the hard way, or by asking how to do something. I would pick option two any day of the week: we are too smart to be making the same mistakes others have been making before us.
Self-reliance is also about knowing what you can do, what you want to do and how to do it. What you cannot do is implied. Asking for help is no sign of weakness: we all know that there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Be honest with yourself and go to the gym to look better for the opposite sex. You’ll thank me later.

Not easy stuff to apply most of the time. Not to mention all the distractions and problems that you will encounter; life is not life without some unexpected things happening. How you choose to deal with that all, it pays off to have a contingency plan at the ready. For that, we go into a small introduction to different schools of thought on how to handle that which is or comes along once in a while.
It is.

“We never reflect how pleasant it is to ask for nothing.”
Seneca

Welcome to today’s philosophy class where we will be discussing some common misconceptions that will influence your thinking in more ways than you might imagine. At least, if all goes according to plan. You will get that joke by the time we get to the end of this lesson.

Fatalism is quite often misunderstood. Originally it was a way of thinking that all is linked and coincidences do not exist: everything was pre-determined and there was nothing you could do about it whatsoever. In dire times where we were looking for an answer or a reasonable explanation as to why we didn’t seem to be getting a break, fatalism provided one. The eternal struggle against external influences that governed our lives made bearable by accepting that God™ had a plan for us. The key here is that even our actions are pre-determined and part of the Plan©. No matter what we do, the results will be the same.

Still commonly seen in religious environments and sects to ‘help’ people and make them more docile. We are hamsters running around in a labyrinth not knowing where we will end up, or if we are even able to make it out alive. It is all set up, pre-determined. Questions will not be asked because it’s futile or answered with a non-answer.

‘It is not my fault, it is supposed to be like this’.

Nowadays, fatalism is often, unwittingly, confused with the ideas of defeatism: accepting that things are as they are. Accept that you are going to die, accept that you have lost your job, accept ...whatever. Mostly bad things happening to you. Happening to you, not because of you, that is the key-word here. Defeatism, however, is more and more a way of putting the responsibility that you sucked at your job on someone or something else. There is no Plan©, just misery. The difference between this way of thinking and the first one is that defeatism is solely focused on the bad and the ugly. It does not apply to love, kindness and other positive actions. Only the bad things happening to you will be blame-shifted to the unexplainable and the external. Mostly to other people or innocent bystanders though.

‘It’s not my fault, it’s because of…’.

There is another way of thinking that is very similar and best illustrated with an example. Shooting a couple of people on a schoolyard and pleading to a judge that God™ made you do it. However the situation will pan out, something happened and you refuse to accept the fact that things are as
they are while refusing to take responsibility for the fact by shifting the blame to external circumstances. This is where you fight an action taken: you don’t refuse to accept what was, but you will try to fight the consequences of what has transpired. You are not responsible for the consequences of your own voluntary actions.

‘It’s not my fault, they made me do it’.

A couple of very different schools of thought and yet so very often confused with another one, but we will get to that one later. First, we have to explain why we are writing about it because, at first glance, it’ll seem out of place.

We teach a couple of very important principles and they’re all geared towards your freedom; the freedom to shape your business, your life and your future in accordance to what you value and what you want to take out of it. The one that has the most influence on your success is the ability to accept and take responsibility for your actions. This is both a blessing and a burden. Once you know that you are the only one that really cares about your own future, or the only one who can actually do something about it, the only that can make a change to your life and your future, you will be free to do what you want to do. Yet, you will be shackled to your own principles more than most. Freedom is not free. Quite the opposite: it is one of the most costly things to acquire. This goes against everything from the above listed schools of thinking. So what the hell does this have to do with us?

Most people like to take the easy way out. Cheat in any way they can. Doing things the hard way, the right way is often the only way to find out if something is worth it. Part of that is taking responsibility. Taking responsibility of what is and what is done, is something we see less and less. Drug use is on an all-time high among teenagers, in companies it’s no longer about doing your job better than anyone else to be able to rise to the top, but about out-smarting the rest and having others taking the burden of your fuck-ups and, as a result, suffering the consequences. Politics and ostriches. But that is a topic for another time. Assuming responsibility for your own actions, taking charge of your life is becoming a thing of the past more often than not. We, however, are pro-responsibility. This is what we teach, live and breathe.

You have your plan, you know what you want, you are on your path to make your Dreams factual reality and something happens that will throw things upside down and you feel like you have to start all over. That sucks balls. We’ve all been there and it hasn’t been the last time that your plans have been messed up. Do you give in? Do you give up? Throw in the towel? Go back to the drawing board and come up with something else?

If you’ve found your direction in life, your true goal and you know, feel, that it is what you want to do with your life; you won’t want to give it up. Why? You know it’s worth fighting for. You stick to your guns. You have accepted your
blessing and will happily bear its burden. God's™ Plan© be damned: this is what you want to be doing and you’re going for it. It is not because of something or someone that you will stop, it is no-one’s fault. Circumstances changed and there is absolutely no-one who made you do anything. You choose freedom. You chose the freedom to choose and do what you want to be doing. Not for a second will you be considering throwing in the towel. Will that be easy? Far from it. It’ll be hard. Maybe the hardest thing you will ever do.


It. Is.

Let us illustrate what we mean by this with an example. You’re walking in a forest. You’ve found your path. Halfway through you see a tree blocking the road and there is no way you can climb over it. You have to make a choice.

Fatalist will go around it and think that this is all part of the Plan© and they try to find a new path while going around it because that is God’s Will™. And each and every time the encounter a new tree blocking their newly chosen path, they make the same choice: coincidences do not exist. They stick to their idea that it is all part of a plan and keep on changing direction, staying a victim of external circumstances for the rest of their lives.

Defeatists will walk around the forest until they come upon that same tree. They look around and see no way to climb over it. They will sit on the ground and start blaming everything and everybody for the tree blocking the path. Then they start crying and when they are finally done, the walk back and at the edge of the forest, they walk back in, hoping that the bad things that happened in there are now a thing of the past. That will end well, don’t you think?

Others will also take a walk in the forest and they too will encounter that same tree. They too will stop at the tree and see that there is no way to climb over it. Some will walk back while others will go around and get angry. In their anger, they will kill a butterfly that was minding its own business. When asked what happened in that forest they will immediately get defensive and blame the tree for killing the butterfly: without the tree blocking the path, they would have never encountered the sweet little butterfly: ipso facto, the tree is the guilty party.

We teach you to know the path before going into the forest. You will know that there will be obstacles in all forms and shapes. Where and when, you have no clue. All you know is that they are there. When you get to the tree, you calmly walk around and find the path again you chose to take, no
matter how long it takes. You will find your path. What about the tree? Nothing: it is simply there.

It. Is.

Stoicism it’s called and more often than not confused with all types of defeatist thinking. Sometimes even will you be blamed to not care or of not caring enough. That is where most people miss the point. That’s okay too. It is what it is: you can’t change it.

It. Is.

There is never a need to fight external circumstances over which you have no control whatsoever; it’s only a waste of energy. Energy you need to find back your path.

It. Is.

What do you do with what is given? No matter the circumstances you find yourself in, only YOU have the freedom to see that what is, is. It is, is about what you do when you have accepted the price of freedom. That’s what we are about:

It. Is. Freedom.

Quite liberating, accepting responsibility. Something else you can choose is how you deal with people, as you have read a couple of pages ago. When we combine the above with that, we get to be called a ‘nice person’. That is bullshit. However, we are not assholes either. No, we are something else.
Kindness.

“Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.”
Mark Twain

Egoism. Thinking about yourself. It's a bad word. Calling someone egotistical is a pretty serious insult or accusation that will, in most cases, lead to the accused listing ways in which he or she is not an egoist. You never hear someone say: "Gee, thank you so much", smile and walk away. We should do so more often though. Much more often. It's fun. That, however, is beside the point of this.

"Nice guys (always) finish last."

You've heard this saying before. It's more than just a saying though: they're words of wisdom. Neglected wisdom to be precise. Why it is not heeded? Lack of egoism is seen as a virtue. Praised we are for being a selfless martyr. Suffering through our life and being praised for how nice we are. The keyword here is selfless. It's not you. You're without a self, it is in the word itself: self-less. You are there for everyone. The proverbial doormat.

"Sure I'll do it." "Don't worry, I'll find a way to find the time to do it for you." All very acceptable answers to any request. "What's in it for me?"...Not so much. Try a decisive 'No' for a change. It's more likely that people will look at you with a mix of sheer confusion and anger. Why? Denying them a simple request is uncommon, to say the least. They will not reciprocate your gesture and simply assume that you would want to help them out, no strings attached; you have been like that all the time. Why the change of heart? They see you as their doormat or lapdog. You're a nice person. That's what is expected of you by your environment, the society.

You. Finish. Last.

We should be nice to everybody. That's how we are raised. Hell, we watch documentaries where it is explained that without reciprocating, we will be cast out of our group of chimpanzees. What goes around comes around. Bad people in your life? Be nice to them and eventually they will be nice to you. Really? No. They will ask you to do more and more. They will use up more and more of your precious time and at the end of the day, you'll have nothing to show for it. This will seep through the rest of your day too: more time taken by your job, less time you have for other things.

You. Finish. Last.

We have said it before and we will say it again: think of yourself first and when you have your shit together, think about others. You can't save someone when you're buried beneath a mountain of pebbles.
You don’t want to be not-nice, but you probably don’t want to be an asshole either. That leaves you in quite an awkward predicament, doesn’t it? Good thing that this chapter isn’t finished yet. So, what then is the solution we propose?

Be. Kind.

"That's the same damn thing!"
-"Nope."
"Are you barking mad? Same. Damn. Thing!"
-"I am, but that is beside the point."

Words have a meaning. That is important. Over time, the meaning of words can change or they cease being used altogether. Kind is one of those words. The difference between nice and kind lies in the perception of others, something we are so worried about nowadays. A doormat equals a nice person. A good person equals being kind.

An act of kindness is different in the sense that it comes from you, from within you. No hidden agenda and, equally important, it's effortless on your part. Also, it should not deduct form your happiness or time not spent doing something that doesn’t make you happy. Helping someone moving because you like the exercise or because it is fun to do because you are doing it with friends, that is an act of kindness. Sure, it costs energy. Sure it takes up your time, but it's time spent well. Helping your mother-in-law because 'it's the right thing to do', does not count as time spent well and we urge you to fix your priorities first.

Paying a compliment to someone because of the effort that went in the thing you’re complimenting on, or thought that went into it, is kind. If you want to get laid and you’re complimenting a girl for being pretty, that’s not kind. Hidden agenda. Remember that the next time you step into a bar with a boner.

It is all very subtle, but very noticeable. Make no mistake: despite our flaws, we are all very good at detecting the difference. Do you have the feeling that you are finishing last? This is most certainly the reason why. Be kind and others will be kind to you. Be nice and they walk all over you. This brings us to our favorite part of subject.

Nice guys or girls becoming nuclear bombs or just really, really asshole-y people no-one wants to be around. Again, we have to explain a subtle difference in signification of the words ‘assholes’ and ‘asshole-y people.’ Just to avoid unnecessary confusion and people calling us out on our asshole-y behavior, while they clearly mean asshole-behavior.
Assholes can be fun and charming. They are not all bad. Just...let’s say...rough around the edges and in some cases make it a point of simply being an asshole, but that is a different subject for another time. Asshole-y people on the other hand are more of the creepy, complain-y or angry variant. The people that discovered too late that they finished last and / or never (wanted to) get their shit together. The result is a special breed that seems to drain all the fun and happiness of the people they come in contact with. They don’t do this on purpose, but do it by being in the vicinity of happy people and starting to talk. You know who they are. You have met them before. Something else that characterizes these particular specimens is their innate inability to handle accountability and responsibility. Which is the cause of the other is unclear. It is a bit of the chicken and the egg story.

They often have a hard time and their creed is "life sucks the sweat of a dead man’s balls". People, often in their pre-asshole-y stadium, give them what they want ‘because it’s easier and be done with it’. This reinforces their beliefs that they get things done their way and they tend to feel less helpless and more confident in their ability to make the most of their lives. The people given them their way will in turn become slowly but steady asshole-y as well: it spreads.

The epitome of this behavior was a known politician calling us to resolve a problem he was having. This problem of his was a serious threat to his career. The dicey part was that he was having this problem as a direct result of his inability to handle his own responsibilities. Or lack of accountability in this case. Resolving the situation quickly was of the upmost importance to him. This, however, would involve breaking the law. He had neglected to ask explicitly if we would help anyone undertaking any illegal activities. We informed him of this. Without surprise, he switched to his standard modus operandi: being angry and threatening us just to try to get us to doing things his way. Why? That is what he is conditioned, programmed to do due to his ‘life experience’. We asked him what he wanted us to do and why, put it in writing and send it to us. He complied. We sent it over to the police and the rest is history.

We could have made quite a lot of money for almost no effort. So why didn’t we do it? The chances of being caught were zero. It wouldn’t be a big infraction either. A speeding ticket would be seen as a bigger misdemeanor. ‘So, why didn’t you?’, you’re probably thinking. The answer is simple: because we have our shit together: we know what we want, how we want it and how we want to do it. We thought about ourselves and our futures. Sure, we could have been nice to him, but that would mean that we would be going against our principles. We have a compass, a spine.

The point we want to make here is as follows: don’t be nice and there is no need to be asshole-y to anyone either. Be kind instead. Be kind to yourself and to others. Treat yourself how you want to be treated and others will treat you the same. Having a life you love is not easy to come by, but being able
to share that joy and love is a very big perk. Or is that just a nice way of saying
that you can have fun with asshole-y people? We leave that one up to you to
decide.

Kindness. We know it is easier said than done as it will go against everything
you have been ‘trained’ to do, but it goes a long way towards your ascension
to your individuality. Give it a shot and quickly you will see that it does
wonders for your self-respect and the respect you get from others. Do find
your bottom-line before you act: congruency is key here as you will need it to
own what you say and do. Without it you will cave and you will be off worse
than when you were just a nice person as it did never came from your heart.

"When you talk to people, I can see them instantly becoming happier."
-“I don’t know about that. What makes you say that?”
"It’s obvious. Ask around."
-“Nah, thanks. I’m good. Not important.”
"But it’s true. How do you do it?"
-“Do what?”
"You open your mouth and you make people laugh, smile and feel good.
They WANT to talk to you."
-“Buh...Dunno.”

This transpired a couple of days ago. A couple of minutes later I had people
telling me, in pretty much the same way, the same thing. That was weird. Was
there something different about me? No, not really. I’m just being my happy
self, entertaining myself, having fun. What’s the best way to find something
out? You guessed it: by asking.

It turned out that from day one I got in, people liked me because I was
relaxed, having fun and whenever a problem popped up, I got to it. Part of
the job: solving problems. Why didn’t it bother me while others seemed to be
getting angrier with each and every request? The answer was simple: I
choose this path. I wanted it. I loved it and still love it. Each and every day. Is it
perfect? Nope...far from it. BUT...Capital but...that goes for everything in the
world. Accept that life isn’t perfect, nothing ever is. That doesn’t mean that it
helps if you are angry about things that don’t go your way or things you can’t
change. Focus on what you can fix or change.

What is on the inside comes out on the outside. Like food. You put in junk,
what comes out smells worse than when you eat healthy things. If you feel like
shit, people can tell that you feel like shit. No way to hide it. People in general
don’t want to be around others that drag them down, mood-wise or
otherwise. You do something you love, people can tell. Fake it ‘till you make it
is an often heard expression in order for others to stick with something, to keep
them going. We don’t agree with that at all.

Some of you might be wondering why we put all these philosophical utterings
in here. We have a very good reason for doing so, if it wasn't obvious yet: it shapes your core, your heart. Figuring out what you want and how to get it, adds a layer of conviction to what you do, a sense of meaning. That alone can make you very happy about what you do or try to accomplish. A big plus is that people will give you less to no shit about it because you own it thoroughly. These positive vibes will fuel everything you do, will radiate outwards and will flow over to all the other things you do, from hobbies to work to your social- and love-life. People will pick up on that. Not only that, it will also make them share your happiness. Happiness is contagious. It will have an enormous snowball effect that should not ever be underestimated.

We can’t tell you how to do what you want to accomplish. We can’t tell you what you need. We can’t tell what you want and we can’t tell you what you want to hear. We don’t want to. We want to share our happiness, our findings. We want people we help, directly or indirectly, to be as happy as they can be. We learned that we can only show you the door. YOU are the one that has to step through it. We have no idea what’s behind that door. You do though. The catch? You are only willing or able to step through that door if you know what you can expect and what is needed to keep walking.

Endgame it is called. What do you want in the end? What do you hope to accomplish? How do you want to do that? We ask you to find an answer to these questions for a reason: YOUR reason(s) for wanting these things. Is this a quick fix? No. It is anything but. See it as a long term solution for a structural societal problem: a lack of meaning and direction while settling for mediocrity. A quick fix, as much as we would like there to be one, there’s none: habits don’t change overnight and adapting to a new way of doing things takes time. Learning new skills takes time. Perfecting said skills takes time. Everything takes time. The only things that COST you your precious time are excuses.

Like you need money to make more, you need to spend time to save time. That is the heart. That is the core. It needs to be solid to be durable. You can’t solidify what’s not there, what’s clouded and hidden in the dark. Turn on the lights and let it shine a happy radiant glow over your environment and the people in it. Creating a snowball is easy, giving it momentum takes time. Remember that time well spent never costs you anything because it comes from a good place.

It comes from your heart.

Now, what do we mean by saying happiness will flow over to other things you do? We handle a specific process for discerning important factors when it comes to dissecting someone else’s or our own lives.

Whatever you do, it needs to serve a purpose. Pretty straight forward. Most of the time, it’s quite easy to determine if something serves a (useful) purpose or
not. What is slightly harder to uphold, is balance. Balance is the key to keeping yourself in check and on track. You work better if you have slept well and you are not as easily fazed when the proverbial shit hits the fan. To have a better understanding of that balance, we have another look at our tracked activities from the previous section(s). First, however, we will need a category to place those activities in.

Life is made up of a couple of different aspects. One is work or better yet, your professional activities. Another, you guessed it, is time to gather your thoughts and relax. Then there is a social part like hanging out with friends and family. Last of the bunch is your body and soul. That will sound a bit too esoteric for most, but we will explain what we mean by that in a bit and in more detail.

Your professional time.

This part of your life constitutes everything you do to earn money in one way or another. Your job is the most obvious one as are meetings or trips you make for your boss or yourself if you have your own company. Professional education to increase your skill level also falls into this category as are network meetings. Does it increase your income in the not-so-distant future or over the course of your career? It belongs here. A big chunk of your investment activities that are more geared to your future endeavors are also part of this (unless you want to do the job you do now until you stop working because you love it). Your dreams, most of the time, have at least a small part of your professional life incorporated. For example traveling the world is great, but you need the money to do so. Be it from a passive income source or by saving up a heap of cash. It’s all tied to each and every aspect.

Your happy-time.

Your hobbies, hopefully, provide you with something you love to do and it also clears your mind, eases stress and makes you happy. If you love hugging puppies in a dog shelter, this charitable work falls into this category. Playing tennis or getting beaten up doing martial arts are all good examples of making you feel good. Yes, it sounds paradoxical, but we will get to that later. Hobbies and charitable work all belong here. Now, you will notice that there will be some overlap between different aspects like social and happy-time activities when you’re having a drink with friends. That’s okay and actually recommended to ‘save’ time. It also fits the rule that you shouldn’t be dependent on one activity to fulfill the balancing act. Work is trickier to keep up in regard of this rule. When you have tenure or a job where you’re convinced they will never ever fire you, you can make an exception to the rule, but only then.

Your social-time.
We are pack animals. We CAN live a solitary life, but from time to time you need some kind of social interaction in THE REAL WORLD. Instafap doesn’t count, nor chatting over Facebook. Have a conversation with someone, a drink with friends. Drop by your parents, sister, and nephews, whatever. Do note however that having a chat by the water cooler at work is WORK. It’s the social part of working with other people, but it remains a part of your job. Sounds complicated, but to keep things simple, see it as work.

Your body-and-mind-time.

This is practically put, everything you do to remain healthy. Eating healthy and yummy things. Working out, seeing a doctor or shrink. It is in this department, that you will encounter the most false beliefs. If you decide that hell is not on your list of best long-stay vacation spots, by all means, go to church. Just know that that is the reason you’re going: to escape a guilt trip or pressure from your relatives or community. Meditation, recommended to do, also has its place here. Taking care of your body and soul covers this category pretty neatly. Your body and mind are your temples. Treat them as such, but know that even in church, they will drink an occasional sacramental wine.

Like we’ve said before, it’s all about balance. When you have too much happy time or socializing in your life, you have less time to work on your dreams or take care of your body. Logical. The same goes for working too much; you’ll not have enough time to relax or have fun and that will lead to all manner of nasty things like a depression or a burn-out. What that balance exactly is, is different for everybody and only you can determine that for yourself. Just take a look at your week, or weeks for greater effect, and ask yourself how you would ideally use your time and with what you’d fill it (and with whom). Just don’t use bad weeks where a thundercloud was following you 24/7 to find positive habits. You can use them to find things that will trigger you, but that is not the idea behind them. Look for happy places with unicorns and meadows with rainbows.

Now you know what purpose your activities serve, it’s time to get to have a look at different sources and uses for energy. A small disclaimer: whatever you will read below, this is not science and purely based on our own experiences as well as those of people we have been working with and wanted to answer our questions. Just so you know.

It’s perfectly normal to feel a bit depleted every now and then. However, if that feeling is persistent for more than two days, something is wrong. I’m not talking about having a depression or a vitamin deficit. I’m talking about feeling empty, drained and no energy left or the will to do the things you want or need to do. Before we get to that, we go back to basics.

There are all kinds of energy and these types of energy are used up depending on the activities you have been involved in. For example, let’s say
that you have been working in an office and your job is mentally taxing and requires you to solve a lot of challenging problems. By the end of the day, you have been drained completely of your energy reserves. At least, that is what it feels like. After work, you muster all the courage you can and you drag your ass to the gym. The first exercise feels like you are descending into hell, but after 15 minutes it becomes easier and less of a burden. You actually start to enjoy it. By the end of your work-out, you’ll feel drained, again, yet fresh. Reborn. Filled with new energy. How is that possible?

The answer is simple: different kinds of energy are used for different kinds of activities.

My theory, so far, is that there are 4 different kinds of energy. The first one is physical energy. This is one of the two which are most commonly known. You use your body, thus you use energy. Quite simple. Restoring it is almost just as easy: you eat and you sleep. But, like we’ve seen in the example above, there is an additional way to do it: engage in a different type of activity that uses a different kind of energy.

Now, before you do something stupid, let us specify that in order for you to restore this energy, you need all three ways: eating, sleeping and engaging in another type of activity. Not eating = death. Keep it simple, not simpler. Capice?

The other common type of energy is mental exertion. Same things apply here; eating and sleeping plus doing something else restores this energy. This type of energy allows you to think outside of your auto-pilot-mode, solve (complex) problems, make decisions and prioritize. Simply put, you can say that this allows you to shape your life. As you can see it’s quite important for any living being.

The other two types of energy might be less known, but when we explain what they are, you might recognize them. We call them the social energy and the accomplish energy. Yes, again, we know. Not the fanciest of names.

What do they do? Well...They kind of speak for themselves, no? So, the social one is used by any type of activity that involves you and someone else. It could be talking, kissing, hugging, having a drink or unleashing the bunnies inside of each other.

Accomplish energy is all about doing things you want to do and love to do. Do note that the things you’re working on but find really hard to learn, like some skills you need to master for your goals, than it falls in the second category of energy types: it takes mental gymnastics to pull it off. This one is one of the, if not the, most powerful kinds of energy anyone can have. It’s also the one that takes the most time before you can profit from it. You need goals and aspirations. Without those it’s kind of hard to get a feeling of
accomplishment.

Sometimes you experience a day where nothing seems to go according to plan and no matter what you do; it’ll feel like you’re banging your head against a wall. It doesn’t mean that your drawing skills are rusty or your poetry sucks. We call this a lack of inspiration. It’s not. Guess what? You’re out of energy. Empty. Some days you won’t feel like talking or the things you do say seem to come out wrong...Yup...Out of energy.

How to get your mojo back? Do something completely different. Not just a different type of activity, but something completely different you haven’t done before or haven’t done in a long time. Break out of your system, or your comfort zone, for a bit. Change how you say ‘Hi’ to people, talk to strangers, try skydiving or riding a bike to work instead of taking a car. New experiences are the key here. Do know that these two types of energy regenerate the slowest of all. Writers block is not something that lasts a day or two.

Something else that works in most cases is finding a new exhaust. A new way to channel your energy. Last, and in most cases a serious reset button, is Mother Nature. Go hiking, visit the woods or go to the beach. Nature has a way of cleansing the spirit especially at dusk and dawn.

Great! But that was not the reason we wanted to add this part. The reason we wanted to write about this unusual and quite spiritual topic, was because a lot of people have this persistent lack of inspiration, energy or generally don’t feel well even when they do the right things. The worst part is that they have no idea where it comes from or what causes it.

Having some kind of structure in your life, a system is important in order for you to get where you want to be going. When your system isn’t working correctly, it’ll slowly grind you into a depression or a mid-life crisis, no matter what your psychologist says.

We. Need. Balance.

Everyone is different and so is your balance. How you cycle your activities and which activities you involve yourself in are all different. After finding out what you want to be doing, it’s time to find out how you want to use the time FOR those activities. It’s a balancing act. We are fully aware that it takes time, like most things in the world. And like any balance, it takes a small difference to tip the scale upside down.

If you think that these are all separate categories, you are partly right. On the other hand, like most things, there’s also overlap. If you talk a lot for a living, that also takes up quite a bit of energy from your social account. And if you are a person who has not a whole lot of social energy to begin with, work is hard. You’re probably not perfect for the job because it’s so taxing on your
reserves. The problem, and the primary reason we are writing about this, is that it takes a long time to figure out that something is grinding you down. Most of the time it’s only after you have been comfortable enough to work on auto-pilot and have gotten used to the safety a fresh paycheck provides that you realize something is amiss. That is the problem: making a change then is hard to do because it will require you to turn things upside down and, maybe, start all over again.

Shape your life not only around what you want, but also around you, your essence as a human being, as a true individual. Not only time is limited, also our energy and what to spend it on according to how you are built.

This is a lot to take in. We know because we wrote it and did it ourselves. This is all based on what we have seen around us, we have experienced firsthand and what we know works. Yes, we test and implement, improve, the whole nine yards. But this only half the story as this is, mostly, just about people. Companies and organizations are much more than just the people doing their thing. They are also more complex due to various different factors that all exert a certain influence. Those influences are the other side of the story. They too form an integral part of our philosophical foundation for ICE.

Luckily they are intertwined with a lot of the things we have described in this chapter, so we can keep this part a lot shorter.
Let's talk money today. Money and how it's corrupting the world. We are not talking about money earned by working hard or smart and being paid for your services. No, we will be addressing the idea of money. To be more precise, we would like to talk about the dream of having it, lots of it.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with money or having it and spending it, if you can afford to do so. There is, however, a very serious problem with spending it while you don't have it. The entire credit card industry is built on that premise. Now, more so than ever before, entire lives are built around having things you can't afford (yet). Hello monthly payments! Phones, TV’s, computers, cars, houses, a new couch or a kitchen, hell even mattresses...We all want a new one and we want it now. Not tomorrow, but NOW. We are too impatient to save up the money or buy a cheaper version so we accept, en masse, a monthly payment with a ton of interest and go on with our merry lives.

That this will mess you up in the long run, we all know it, but we just don't care: we live in the moment, the now. Now is not tomorrow or in a few hours. Now is now. Instant-gratification. To summarize, it's about yelling to microwaves that they need to hurry up. When things turn sour, we are more than happy to blame it on the banks and their greed, like we did during the financial crisis of 2008. However, we should not ignore the fact that it was caused because of us and OUR collective greed coupled with instant gratification that created a situation that would undermine our own financial security, for there ever was one.

What is much, much worse is that after things stabilized, we didn't, nor anything else for that matter, changed. We wanted to go back to our previous high: our financial level pre-crisis. And so we did. Anybody with at least one functioning brain cell left can see that this will not end well, but we simply don’t care: that moment that the world will come crashing down, is not now.

'Stupid people', is what most will think after reading the above. Spending money you don't have is indeed stupid, but there are two reasons you should not entertain this thought. The first is because going back to zero, or what feels like zero, is hard and a lot of habits have been hard-wired throughout the time you could actually afford to buy things on a down payment. The second reason is because we have our status linked to the way others see us, or we THINK they see us. Not us, but the stuff we have or spend money on is what defines our image, our self. How much we have and what we spend it on is what matters most.
'Stupid people', you might still be thinking. Guess what? It's you too. You're not exempt from any of this. Sure, maybe you can afford it, but the fact that nothing has changed is not only on you, or the others; it is on all of us. Why? Did you sit down and ask yourself what you really need to be happy? Walk around your own place and ask yourself how many things you actually need that contribute to your well-being. If you should give it all away, would you get new ones? Why?

What does all of this have to do with money and making it? You, the same people also run businesses. To run them, they, you, we, all use the same paradigms. Change and long term vision might, with the emphasis on the word might, be there, but usually if it's there at all, it's aimed in the wrong direction.

‘Systems in place are no more than risk-reward calculations. If we would lose money or clients there, would we, financially still gain more?’ If the answer is ‘Yes’, they won't care: they stand to gain more money so they won't care about any other consequences. The short term dictates our thinking. Gaining more money but losing clients. Metrics they call these numbers. Money made versus lost in the now. When they ask if they can afford it, they mean financially. That is the wrong direction. The fact that PR-companies exist, this is the reason why.

How does the world see me? Are you seeing parallels? We do.

If there is something fundamentally wrong with someone, would you go out with them? Schizophrenia, drug addiction, bi-polar, lying all the time, necrophilia, or worse. We wouldn't. You shouldn't but you do so anyway. 'But it's all I have.' No you don’t. Ask yourself: 'Do I really need it?' The answer, most likely, is no, but ... status.

We see the money, we want it. The fact is that we are so focused on that, that we neglect the most important factor in the process of earning it: a good product which people are more than happy to buy because it actually contributes to their well-being and happiness. No PR-stunt or money can help a company that has ignored the wishes of the people it was supposed to help with it. If the foundation is solid and the product does what it promised to do, the money will come as a result, but should never be the goal or the defining factor in any decision. The same goes for dating and finding a mate, if that's what you want. We forget about the product.

Companies going bankrupt out of the blue have neglected this rule for too long. Banks that are too big to fail don’t exist. We only hope they can’t fail so we can feel good now. Hope will help you now, but only for so long. When reality comes knocking on your door, you had better made some changes to be able to adapt. Hope will get you through a rough patch as a last resort.
hail Mary, but hope has never kept any dinosaur alive during the Ice Age.

We want money. We need it to sustain our way of living. Do we want to work for it? No, not really, but we have accepted it as a part of our everyday lives. Necessary evil. That being said, we are always looking for an easier way out. Say hello to the national lotteries, everybody.

Wanting is not enough. Don’t get me wrong: you need to want it before you can get it, but there is one thing more you’ll need. What that is? A spine, principles and patience. Without a moral backbone and an answer to the questions ‘Why?’ and ‘How much?’ we’ll start chasing our own tails, we are no better than the dodos from the movie ‘Ice Age’.

Ideas are great because they improve the lives of everyone. Ideas without a proper frame will do the exact opposite: they become the frame and the reference for any future ideas we might come up with. Our ideas become corrupted without us ever realizing it until we lay down broken on the bottom of a ravine. CEOs of charitable foundations that make millions of dollars, for example. You hating your job, but you do not want to change it because you would stand to lose a part of your monthly income. You won’t earn enough. What’s enough? When is it enough?

Put a new frame around your life. It will make it look a whole lot brighter and better when money is no longer the center of your attention. The same goes for most companies, but that is why we have ICE now. Finally you get to enjoy the painting again that you call life.

It is the processes that are in place that not only protect the System or the economy, but those two are closely linked to one another. Why that is, is because we want results and the processes are conceived from wanting certain results. This is not only a dangerous way of short term thinking, as we have seen from the above examples, but is also counter-productive in the long run. Positive results are happy consequences of what should be the heart of the matter: the processes being used.

That will lead inevitably to two schools of thinking when it comes to businesses and personal lives getting back on track. These are goal-centric and process-centric thinking. But what is the difference exactly?
Results vs. processes

“If you can’t describe what you are doing as a process, you don’t know what you are doing.”
W. Edwards Demming

We, as a company, are process-orientated. The focus rests on the process, because when the process functions as it should, any goal is attainable. Granted, some take a while longer than others, but that goes without saying. Recently, at a party, someone asked one of us a great question. “What is the difference? Goal-orientated or process-orientated, it is practically the same thing. When you set small goals, goals that you know you can attain, it will be much easier to see results. It also keeps things simple and organized. Setting small goals seems like a smarter thing to do.” So without further ado: goal-centric versus process-centric thinking.

First, let us start by saying that it is a waste of time to start setting goals for things that are easy to do, one week or so, and/or for doing things that you do anyway. It only serves a purpose if it takes time and effort that are not accomplished by following your everyday schedule. “I want to do groceries every day”, is not a goal. I want pay more attention to health benefits of the things I eat and buy. That takes more effort than simply buying stuff to put in your mouth. Right? Let’s continue.

Besides the aforementioned exceptions, it doesn’t really matter what goal you pick. You want to increase your monthly income by a certain amount? Great. You want to lift more in the gym? Cool. You want to improve your social life? Awesome. This is applicable to all those things. The bigger your aspirations, the better and more pertinent it will be. So in our example, we will want to increase our income. I'm a teacher and I want to increases my income by teaching kids in the weekend. First the goal-centric approach. You set small goals to get to your end goal: having increased your income by 2000 dollars a month. To make it not all too complicated, you will want to increase it by 100 every two months. Not too hard and in two years you will have attained your goal. Along the way, you can easily see if you have succeeded: you check your bank account. Every step will be a victory in and of itself. You make a starting plan on how to do it and you go for it. Every time you hit your milestone, you feel great and all you need to do is check the numbers behind the dollar sign.

Sounds easy enough. The problem with this mindset is only clear after things go wrong. There are always thresholds. Always. Some small steps take way more time to cross than others, even if these steps are just as big or small as all the previous ones. Going from 1500 extra a month to 1600 might be a problem because it would take too much time away from you regular job, or you don’t have the time because you also have to bring the kids to soccer practice. It could be anything. It could be that you might need a different
approach to get to the next step. Or you will need to take a whole new job to increase your cash flow.

That sounds reasonable enough, right? Sure, but people do and will do the things that have always worked out for them. So if someone has increased his or her income by 1500 a month in 15 separate steps of two months, what do you think they will do the 16th time around? Yup, exactly the same thing. And if that doesn’t work, they try again. You can’t explain them either that their process doesn’t work: it did work and for quite some time too. Obtaining the results was their success. So they never looked at why it resulted in positive results: they simply worked more. They only saw their successes.

So progress was made, but now they are banging their heads against a concrete wall in hopes of reducing it to rubble. That is kind of depressing and will inevitably lead to insecurity, fear or simply giving up. Why? They were focused on the goal and getting there. They neglect the process behind it of how and why to get there in the first place. That is bad news no matter how you look at things.

Imagine adding depth and meaning to your goals by making the goals part of a dream about what you want to get out of your company or your life. That’s elaborate and will lead to living life to the fullest. However, when you are concentrating on your goals and keep hammering away at a wall with your skull, that headache might last you a lifetime. That is not a pretty picture. While it is imperative to see the bigger picture to be able to push through the rough parts, it is not about doing the same thing over and over and expecting it to work out eventually. Small steps might start to look like mountains if you go down this road. So keep the goal in mind, but focus on the getting there part. It’s about the journey and learning when to change gears and plans. You need to be able to enjoy the trip.

While enjoying your progress and victories is great and you really do need to celebrate these things, it won’t last. At least not indefinitely. You do A and after a while you get B. So in that sense, results always come last. By looking at results, we tend to forget about A. Pretty silly because if we do C, we get D. In order to get B, we need A. And sometimes the world goes topsy-turvy and we expect to get B before doing A. Asking for a raise or a favor comes to mind. Anyway, we look at B and think, well…then we need A to get it. We are process-orientated. We think a little and come up with our starting plan.

To keep things equal, I will use our previous example to look at things our way: making 2k a month more. That is our B. Check your environment first. So let’s say I work in a school as a teacher. Why? I like to. With quite a nice salary of 2k a month as a starting point, we want, eventually, make 4k. By the way, I’m not even going to get into what might be the incentive, the bigger picture or if that money is before or after taxes. In this case being a teacher, it will mean that if we look at the goal-centric side, we couldn’t work harder or more
because we wouldn’t make anything extra by doing our job differently. It is a fixed income for a full-time job. So we would need to come up with something to do in the weekends to increase our income by 100 bucks in the first two months. Extra lessons or study help it is. But making 2k in the weekends alone by extra lessons is not going to happen anytime soon...eurhm ... as in ... never.

So you work in education and we know B: 4k a month. Just by looking at the numbers, you would need to become the principal or you will need to have your own company or other side-business. How to become a principal or building your own company is not something we will go into, that is outside the scope of this post. By trusting the process, which we will be talking about in a later chapter, and doing something meaningful, you will get where you want to go. You won’t need a helmet. You won’t be banging your head against a wall. Instead you will feel good because you know that you will get there by learning as you go and being focused on why things work and some don’t.

The journey might be bumpy from time to time, but it is more like turbulence while you are flying towards your holiday destination. Have you ever seen anyone on a plane with a helmet on? Thought so.

You need to know how things work and if they are at all feasible. The difference is, as it should be clear by now, found in seeing the bigger picture and looking at how instead of what.

When you put all these pages together and think about these things and try to sum it up in a couple of words or a phrase, you will come up with something else than we did. And that is cool as we all think differently. If you come to the same conclusion, you think like us and that is a freaky accident or you did not think for yourself. Why? Because you reality is not ours and vice versa. So, what did we come up with?
“Your life, your rules.”

“My fake plants died because I did not pretend to water them.”
Mitch Hedberg

“That which is, should never be.” Ooh, sounds mysterious. Ominous even. What does it mean? It means that something exists, yet shouldn’t. How is that possible? It’s the base principle behind quantum-based computer chips a couple of people are working on. In computers, calculations are nothing more than 1’s or 0’s being read by the processor. Quantum chips are different as its data is not a 1 or a 0, but it is both at the same time. Pretty neat, but not of much use right now. There is, however, a more common use. As a matter of fact, it’s used a lot by 99 percent of the population.

When?
Always.
In what way?
In the way people perceive reality.
What?!?
Do not worry about it as we will explain it as clearly as possible.

There are 3 different realities for each and every single person on this planet.
The first is The Truth™. The second is the Paradox and the third is the objective, factual world we call – surprise- reality.

You have read about those a couple of pages back, but if it is still unclear, re-read them as you will not get the point we are about to make here, so I’ll assume you know what we mean by those terms by now. The Truth™ is about how you interpret the world around you through your own filters. Those are your feelings, emotions, opinions and experiences. In short, you could state that this is how you THINK the world works.

The Paradox is of a more tricky nature. “Life is a paradox.” We’ve said so a lot of times. This is the reason. It’s about how we think reality SHOULD be. No, we do not mean not in a utopian manner. It’s more geared toward how we think things will work out, what we need to do now to get a desired outcome later. Our assumptions and knowledge of how the world functions make up our paradox. Clinical evidence or what you have been taught how things work – or trained to think is a better explanation for it.

Last of our holy trinity is good ol’ reality itself. This is about facts and empirical evidence of the things that have, time and time again, been proven to be. Not much else to say about this one except that it’s the least used of all three to look at the world and observe it without judgment. The ‘without judgment’ is the tricky part, because we do not ‘just observe’ what we see around us. Why that is, we will explain in a bit.

For the visual inclined readers, we try to paint a visual picture of the above. Reality is a black and white screenshot of a movie you’re watching. Any movie works. The Truth™ is used to add color and music to the picture. Great. Now it’s more pleasant to look at, but it isn’t moving. Not much of a movie with just one frame. That’s why we add the Paradox: how things will or, better yet, should pan out based on what we see now, or think to know. It gets things rolling and we have a movie instead of a frame.

So, as I’ve said before, the real reality is the least used of them all. The reason being that we see the movie of our life all the time in 4k ultra HD with Dolby digital surround sound in unprecedented quality. We see all three worlds at the same time. Everything seems to be in perfect sync and so we think there is only one reality. That is because the differences between all three are very, very subtle. If there is a major discrepancy, we will notice it and that leads to being called ‘Crazy’ if we address the differences out loud. Fighting windmills, hearing angels, stuff like that. In most cases though, it leads to a reality check or cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance leads to a variety of different harmful behaviors like hypocrisy or not being able to reconcile what you see with what you think you should be seeing. We try to ignore it and go on our merry way, but in some cases, that is not possible. Because we are so bad at distinguishing
these three different realities, we live in a constant state of cognitive dissonance. We fight that which should not be or assume things will work out by doing A, hoping to get B while time and time again we get C. We don’t understand why things are working against us.

That’s the reason you need to accept reality. You can’t change it; only use it to your advantage. People tell you that they know how things work, but do they really? That’s hardly the case in pretty much all cases. We know the Truth™, but are ignorant that the truth and the Truth™ are two very different things. Accepting reality is hard and will lead you to having to go through a depression or anger-type phase where you’ll have to come to terms with the real world you live in if the differences are hard to overcome or reconcile.

Things are falling into place now? Good, but there’s more. People who claim to be realists are usually still going through an anger phase or depressions, the last part of it anyway. But they are coming to terms with it. People tell them often that they are not a realist but a cynic or a pessimist. Hell, we bet that you’ve said the same damn thing to them. We hope you slowly start to realize why you were wrong.

True realists, free of any burden and judgment, will love life and embrace it. Sure, we all have bad days. We’re all human after all. Loving life means accepting life for what it is and simply enjoying the ride and knowing what to expect and to learn from mistakes. True realists know that A = A. They know that A leads to C and not B and use that to their advantage. The truth is that life is a cognitive dissonant paradox made up of rules that, in most cases, have no fundament in the real world, in reality. Don’t play by the rules others will try to impose on you and your thinking; they don’t come from your reality and, thus, have no place in your life.

“Your life, your rules.”

Remember that one as it will hit you over the head the moment you forget to pay attention. Now that you are up to speed on our philosophy, we can start to have a look at companies and how they (mal)function, why they do things the way they do them and, handy to know, how they are generally structured. You need to know your company as much as you need to know you if you want to run one, start one and hope to have any chance on success.
The division.

“The heart and soul of a company is creativity and innovation.”
Bob Iger

Now you know about the advantages and disadvantages of living in a (Western) society, as well as its effects on individual development. You are also caught up on ‘la condition humaine’, we can start by taking a look at companies in general. Knowing yourself is only half of the puzzle, no matter your place in the company and the role you fulfill there. First let us have a look at what companies do and how they are run and/or how they are managed.

Within any society companies form a fundamental part of it. They generate revenues and through taxes governments can supply the basics for the population. Organizations also need people to work for them so they get things done and with the creation of jobs, we, the people, have something to do and have some sense of accomplishment and meaning in our lives. The most obvious advantage of doing a job is making money to spend to further bolster the treasure chest of the government. The loop feeds itself as it were.

How this is done, could be in any two ways: a company produces goods people use, eat and drink, or, in one way or another, helps people by making their lives a little bit easier, pleasant or more manageable. The other way, thanks to our prosperity, is supplying people with services or information geared towards making them happier, less unhappy or alleviating fear. This could be pretty much anything, from becoming better at your hobby or job, information about losing weight or what to do to improve the condition of your skin so you look younger. With people having relatively more to spend, it shall come as no surprise that more and more people spend money in this service and information category.

What type of company you run or work for is partially dependent on how they make money. Goods producing enterprises usually are more focused on the numbers. By numbers we mean revenues, costs of production, efficiency, getting things as cheaply as possible to its clients and the machinery needed to be able to produce.

The service providers on the other hand are usually more focused on the people that pay for their services. Words like customer experience and image or reputation are very important to them and also, to a lesser extent, the employees. It is more about the brand and the name. Do note that this is a general division on a spectrum. This is not an arbitrary black-and-white scenario. Often the lines are blurred and hard to distinguish. The reason why these blurred lines are like this is due to the fact that all businesses need a number-part and a people-part.
With profit or if you run a non-profit organization, enough to keep going, you have a company that is in business. No income, or not enough income, means bankruptcy which means no more company. Numbers are as a result of this simple truth an absolute necessity. If you have an accounting department that is populated by badgers, you are done for. Yes, it is like kicking in an open door, we are well-aware of that.

The same principles apply to a sloppy production process; if you waste an enormous amount of resources for the production of teacups, your expenses will become astronomical which will lead to you having to produce tons more to be able to cover those expenses lost. In turn, you will waste even more not to mention that you still need to sell all of those teacups. Pretty obvious.

The people side of the business is not as obvious as its influence is much more subtle and indirect. Let’s take as an example an IT-business that builds apps for big banks. A technician doesn’t pay a lot of attention one day and due to an oversight of one of the testers, a massively flawed app, security-wise, is released. Guess what? Your reputation as a trustworthy partner for the production of banking software is lying on the bottom of a very deep ocean. It will take years of work to try to rebuild the reputation you worked so hard on to earn. This is where the number-side shows up for the party: can the company survive that long?

Another example is when you invest in a product that nobody wants to buy, or at least not enough people to make it solvable. You can only pull a couple of dead rabbits out of your hat before the audience gets up and leaves the building not to return, ever. For the company it will be time to say bye-bye and the curtain falls.

As you can see, each and every organization needs both sides in order to become successful and stay that way. Each company is different in this respect: where do they place the biggest focus on? Is it more towards the numbers camp or do they focus on the people part of the equation? It is very rare that a corporation is leaning over to one side for more than thirty percent in favor one side. PR-agencies are one of the very few types of companies that can get away with leaning over heavily towards the people side. That does not mean that they can ignore their numbers as they too need to make sure that they are paid a reasonable fee for their services. Finding out what part is favored by the company you work for, or the one you run, is quite easy nevertheless.

For instance, let us take a look at Apple. It is a mammoth of a company that invest enormous amounts of money in its image and reputation, the user experience of its clientele and how their products can contribute to the lifestyle of the people that use their products. That makes perfect sense as these things are an integral part of its successes. However, that is not what is generating the astronomical profits you read about in the press. That is a
direct consequence of its production processes and market research coupled with them knowing how much people want to pay for relatively expensive products. We never have had access to all the numbers from Apple, but we would not be mistaken to state that they are heavily favoring the numbers over the people. Yes, that is the Truth™. Part of Apple being number-focused is also because of another factor we will be addressing at a later time.

Due to a stupid amount of variables and factors that will tip the scale towards either numbers or people, almost all companies are unique. To truly separate one from the other and make it easy to see differences, we have added another criterion. We use this one too to find out where a company stands on a different scale. To be more precise, we ask ourselves always if the company is result-driven or is it more focused on processes.

In the previous chapter you have read about the subtle difference between the two approaches. Distinguishing the two is no simple task however. We, as a species, are inclined, inherently, to obtaining (visible) results. This is such a strong force that we are not very interested in how we obtained those results. Whenever the results are hard or impossible to quantify, to put a number on it, we are blind to them. What complicates the matter even more is that there are two very different types of processes: production- and people-processes. Production falls, mostly, in the numbers-category, like improving efficiency, decreasing costs, cheaper supply-chains, et cetera. People processes are more likely to fall in the people category. These processes deal with the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of employees and their work (flow). This ranges from how meetings are organized, to the training of new employees to communication guidelines.

To sum it all up, you could say that any company falls anywhere in the graphic on the net page.
Whenever a company is in trouble, they tend to move down and to the left. They need to get their financial situation in order and the quickest way to do that, is taking a good hard look at the numbers. There where is the problem, is most likely also the solution. Getting those red numbers turning black is a top priority because of obvious reasons. When business is booming though, a focus does not shift from one part of the company to another; it tends to stay where it is at. Even when things do shift, they almost never go towards the process-side of the graph.

Wherever a company finds its place in the above figure, it is all good. A number-company focused on results is not a bad company and the same thing goes for a people-company which is more process-centric in nature. It is simply how the company is organized, how it is managed and where the focus rests (unconsciously). This applies to the situation now and the probable future. Naturally, each department within any business has its own role to play and each one of those has their own inclination and place in the above division. We will discuss these in the next chapter.

Despite this not being all black-and-white as it is about a spectrum, the division is still quite arbitrary, or might feel like this, it is very important to know where you stand or your company anyway. It is fundamental. The bigger the company is, the harder it might seem to do, but generally you can say that within bigger companies, most things are a tad easier to distinguish as roles are more sharply defined than is the case with smaller organizations. Smaller companies, who far outnumber the bigger ones, have a much harder time determining what kind of company it is and how it is run exactly.

Why is that?

Fewer employees means that most have multiple different tasks to perform. The accountant could very well have to take on some responsibilities that normally would be handled by the Human Resources department, for example. Both are each on another end of the axis. One person businesses will be even harder as one person does everything and the perception of one person will color reality much more easily. The upside is that they will have less difficulty implementing other things as there is less, or no, bureaucracy to speak of.

Another big advantage smaller businesses have compared to the bigger ones, is if you would see them as a person, one human being that does provide a service or product to other people, clients, you need to be congruent if you want to be successful. Smaller companies have little to no problem with that while big companies will struggle a lot on this front.
A company that ‘produces’ massages, but only is interested in the numbers will find itself a nice place in the ‘Whoopsie’-corner of a graveyard. If you would be a freelancer that sells massages, you will be out of business faster than you can imagine: you need to look at the people side of the business as you are selling an experience of relaxation and not a mechanical movement to earn a living. You can put your thumbs in sore muscles all day long, but that is not what people are buying, unless you go for the happy ending type. Just don’t put thumbs in places.

The same goes for call girls that put on the musical ‘Sally the starfish’. They will be out of a job in no-time. This is common sense and yes, these are all very simplistic examples, but they illustrate the point elegantly. Then why on earth would we be putting it in while every sane person knows that these types of ‘work ethic’ don’t work whatsoever?

Well…much to our surprise, most companies are doing the exact same thing in a little less obvious manner. Who they are and what they sell, and it does not matter if it is a service or an actual product, the combination lacks congruency, just like the above examples. Schools are being run like they are accountant firms or a law firm that is run like it is a holiday resort. Looking at it from an angle of self-development, it does not come close not shooting yourself in the foot. It is more like holding a bazooka against your tiny toe thinking that you will not miss that tiny part of your body when it accidentally does go off.

This is beyond stooopid. Then why does everybody do it, or at least most do it? The answer was quite a surprise to us. In order for us to understand it, we need to take a look at the pyramid Maslow had built. Specifically we need to take look at the belonging-layer.

Being part of any social group is a big deal, as we have seen. At least if you might want to start developing your individuality at some point in the future. Later on you can always choose to become a hermit or a social outcast. So you need to feel like you belong somewhere. Perfect. The problem is that the herd-mind will take over if you are not being careful. Side-effects include penguin-syndrome and ostrich-syndrome and ceasing to be able to think critically.

When a company succeeds and starts to make money, that is good for them. Go them. Yeah! They even might get some space dedicated to celebrate their success in a local newspaper or on the internet somewhere and then basta. Finito. Some businesses grow over time and start to make waves. Then, and only then, will they start making money, big money. They start quoting numbers about profits, lay-offs and other stuff. Others will hear this and think that it is time for them to start making big money as well as they too want to become rich. They create a start-up of sorts and get to work.
What will they be focusing on? The right answer is: numbers, numbers and more numbers. Will they succeed? Most certainly not. Sally made some money for as long as it lasted, but is now happy as a librarian in a county jail. Beside here, in this book, will you ever read or hear about Sally and why she failed? Nope. Not a chance. People only want to hear the success stories. Because success is measured by numbers, you will hear about the profits, margins, stock prices and all of the other related subjects.

It never is about the ‘being there’ or the ‘staying there’, wherever that might be. It is about the getting there part and that is what people tend to forget or ignore. We see not what is behind the numbers. Where you are now is a perfect starting position, wherever you are now.

ICE is about making the journey better, easier and it makes the ‘there’-part a nicer place. Now that you have a better understanding of yourself and your company, it is time to shed some light on the general organizational structure of companies and how they tend to innovate.
Structure and organization

“The best teamwork comes from men who are working independently towards one goal in unison.”
James Cash Penney

Companies have a plethora of different departments. Each fill a specific role and all are equally important for the company’s success. That does not mean that each department requires an equal amount of resources and/or time to do what must be done. Depending on the way things are run and managed within the company, some sections get more attention than the others.

How projects are handled also has an impact on the day-to-day activities. One organization might opt to have project managers, regular managers or even both. The blurring of responsibilities which we have talked about earlier is influenced by the decision on how to handle the organization and distribution of the company’s projects. In the second part of this chapter we will have a look at the management structure, but we will start off with the wide variety of (possible) departments. What is important to take into account is that not all companies have need of all of these departments. Then there is also the possibility to out-source some specific responsibilities to external parties with a specific specialization like a law firm or IT framework building enterprise.

To help explain some activities, we will be using a company that is doing something truly extraordinary: they produce glass. Very exciting.

First up is production. People working in and for the production department, all have something to do with making something out of a particular resource with or without the help of machines. Keeping these machines in a good condition so they do not blow up your factory is also part of their daily to-do list. Having a clean work environment is also implied: cleaning the floor, the offices so everybody can do their jobs in a clean and functioning place.

People that will want to purchase windows from this company do not want to pay too much. The price must be right or they will go shopping at your competitor and that is bad for business. Production will have to determine what this ‘right price’ is so you get the most bang for your buck as well as your customers. Most production departments have a section called Purchasing and they have to take care of the pricing of the products. What is also important, is that the quality of the product is on par with what people expect and governments and other agencies have decided are criteria for baseline glass quality. That last part is handled by the quality assurance department. They check to see if the glass is not too flimsy and that you can actually see through it.

To make sure that the company is running on top of its game and to stay ahead of the competition, the company invests a part of their revenues and
time in the development of new products or to improve existing one. This is the territory of the research and development department. When you, as a company, succeed at making a cheaper, stronger and lighter glass by adding in a specific plastic to your sand mixture, there is a good chance that you will blow you competition out of the water and you stand to make a boat load of money. People that come up with these revolutionary ideas are indeed very valuable to any company as they can provide the business with (another) leg up against the rest. It is only logical that these people have close ties with their colleagues from the quality assurance department. Of course they will also have to talk to the employees at the production floor as they eventually will have to be able to make what they have come up with.

When you have made your first batch of fancy new glass type windows, you will need people to know about that. If nobody knows about your new revolutionary product, you are stuck with it and you have lost a lot of time, resources and money. Marketing is the department that has to devise ways of letting people know what you have been up to. They also conduct the necessary research to find the perfect candidates to pay you for your work in making these new glass types. With all of that combined, they create strategies to sell in a way that will appeal to the majority of their potential customers. When a strategy is picked, they can start to make the materials the sales people will have need of like flyers, posters, online advertising stuff like banners and pretty pictures.

Next up is the sales department to do the actual selling of the product. This can be one of two ways, or both in some cases: they can sell to people or to other businesses like a construction contractor for the housing market. With the dawn of the tech revolution, it is not unheard of to have people themselves praise your company for the fruits of their labor. In this case you could have some bloggers promote your brand new feather-light windows in exchange for you sending them a couple of copies. That is, if the marketing department has decided that it would a good course of action.

With anything but glass, this can be a very valuable and cheap way to promote your company and its products. This can also be done in another way: make such a stunningly brilliant product that people will fall in love with it so you have your own army of brand advocates: people that love you so much that they will start advertising for you and it does not cost you anything at all. Not only do they campaign for you, they are also loyal and buy pretty much anything you throw at them.

The good news is that you do not necessarily need a perfect product to have brand advocates doing the work for you. Sometimes they have an issue with your product or it killed their cat as it has slit its wrists on your glass which was used to make an aquarium for their goldfish. Sending people a new cat through the customer services department can win people over just as easily.
as a perfect product. That is the reason almost all companies have one. They will be charged with handling all incoming calls and e-mails, answer questions and making angry people happy.

Making unhappy people happy is also a very important task: brand advocates do not grow on trees and it takes quite a bit of time and energy for you to be able to end up with a big pay-out. Unhappy people on the other hand are quite easy to come by if customer services are not doing its job correctly and will you’re your reputation in no-time.

What is a little less known task of customer services is that can also set up sales opportunities for the sales department, or even sell products themselves, be it through up-selling or cross-selling. This is done by gathering data and other possible useful information from the people that reach out to them with questions or a problem. This information can then be condensed and passed on to either, but preferably, the sales- and marketing department as well as the communication department.

Communication is, you guessed it, all the different ways a message is brought to the attention of the right people at, hopefully, the right time. With the intel gathered by the customer services-, sales- and marketing departments, they can, if so desired, suggest changes to the promotional activities of the company or launch a campaign to improve public relations and how the company is perceived by the public and its business associates, if applicable.

When journalists have found out that you have been supplying bullet-proof windows to the regime of North Korea for their government cars through a very lucrative deal, you will have a crisis on your hands. This is handled by the communication department. The spokespersons you have, have been given media-training, which is best described as a form of verbal ninja training to improve their capacity to escape responsibility and accountability as well as dodging questions without moving a limb. At the same time they will try to improve the company’s standing in the eyes of all the spectators.

At the same time the PR-department, most often this is a subsection of the communication department, will donate some windows to an orphanage in Chernobyl to show that they do care about people in the world, while at the same time they have other friendlier journalists report it and write about it.

Communication also has a job in making sure that everybody in the company, or everybody else who works with and for them, is kept in the loop as to what is going on within the company. This could be a small e-mail about an upcoming merger, take-over or the acquisition of a piece of desert so they can have cheaper sand to work with or even re-organizations and lay-offs. Happier things will also be communicated of course.
When people are fired for some reason, they will have to visit the human resources department. There they will hear about why they are so very much appreciated but will not have to come back on Monday. This usually happens on a Friday to avoid people ruining the mood for the rest of the week.

A couple of tasks the human resources department has in its portfolio is writing recruitment profiles, organizing the training of the employees, evaluating how each individual is performing based on a list of criteria they have made and generally managing all things people related. People related affairs are very important as it handles conflicts between employees among themselves or employees having issues with the management. They should make sure that people kiss and make up with each other so people can work together in harmony. You could say that they focus on how people (should) behave at work and on the job. They do so by protecting the rights and duties of the employees and employers.

Sometimes these guidelines will be written by another department that has a role to play in all things policy-related. That is the operations department. They write policies on everything you can think of. The board, to which we will get later, writes general guidelines, but the details are filled out by the people in operations. So let us say for the sake of an example, that an employee is going all Weinstein on a co-worker, which is not in accordance with the regulations written by operations, obviously, human resources steps in to solve the issue.

Operations also keeps an eye on the internal processes and procedures within the company. This is a very diverse set of responsibilities ranging between resource allocations to supply chain management and increasing consistency throughout the company in any way, shape or form. So you could say that they are charged with keeping things as they are, upholding the System, and at the same time they have to come up with ways to improve upon anything deemed necessary or preferable.

Often, operations works closely together with the department of information technology. This is a relative new addition to the business structure as they concentrate on improving efficiency, speed and consistency within the company through the use of (new) technology. This is quite important as almost all departments use technology. Production uses machines that melt sand and make glass out of it. Customer services use phones and computers as well as databases to store data and make it comprehensible and easy to find. Without these guys, businesses would still be using Microsoft DOS as their go-to operating system and bored employees would pass their time playing Tetris.

All departments have two things in common. The first is that they must follow the law of the country where they have their office(s) and do business in.
International regulations and agreements also form a big chunk of this. When one of your scientists comes up with the idea to put a semtex coating on the glass to prevent it from getting humid, the people working in the legal department will have to come down to explain your scientists that it is not a very good idea as it will inevitably violate some, if not all, safety regulations that exist in the world. Legal has a large responsibility to keep the company, its employees and products safe and in accordance with the rules that apply in each case. And in case of lawsuits, they have another role to play: prevention and, if push comes to shove, avoid sentencing.

The other thing all departments have in common is that the people working there need to be paid at the end of the week or month. This is the responsibility of the finance department. They also keep track of the amount of hours people have worked and how many sick hours and holidays people have left. Especially important for people that run a business with a lot of part-time employees or people that get paid on an hourly basis.

Financial control is a subsection that governs the state of the company in the general sense of things. Think about how much money is coming in, how much is spend on what things and how much of the budget each part of the company has left. They keep track of all of these matters in their books: the administration so they can pay the taxes that apply. With the help of some legal specialists they can try to find some ways to keep the taxes as low as possible and thus increase profits at the end of the year. These people are also in charge of the ‘numbers’ the company publishes in the media, to the public or shareholders if they have public funds or stocks or serve a public interest in some way.

The balance sheets are, strangely enough, kept tidy by the specialists in the accounting department. The people they need to pay for the sand that is used to make glass, the transport companies they use to transport the stuff to the factory as well as outstanding bills that still need to be paid to the company. North Korea still has some outstanding debts that need to be paid for the bullet-proof glass, for example.

The least common section of any department is the treasury. Usually only companies that have invested a part of their profits outside of the company have need of one. Multi-nationals also fall in this category as they operate in multiple countries and all have different branches all over the globe. The Sherlock Holmes’ of this section investigate possible investments by analyzing the risks and rewards to offset the risk. The oracles try to scry the future to be able to make the most accurate predictions for the future so the company knows what to expect in the (near) future. Last, but not the least, is that from time to time, money needs to be moved from one place to another, or in case of multi-nationals, from one country to another country. When money needs to cross borders or some investments need to be liquidated to free up the necessary cash, you would do well to know what you are doing.
Sometimes legal can step in to lend a helping hand so the money can go safely where it is needed most.

To answer the question which department is more oriented towards numbers and which is more focused on the people-part is a no-brainer. You can see at the same time that each part of the company has to deal with all four parts of the division: people, numbers, goals and processes. Some departments can be found throughout any organizational structure as their job has them deal with a variety of responsibilities at the same time. These parts of the organization are most notably legal, finance and operations.

What makes a bigger difference than the simple allocation of time and resources to each department, is the answer to the question ‘who does what and where?’ We are not talking about the employees in general or the ‘work force’. No. We are talking specifically about the people who make the plans and those that have to make sure they are executed properly. These are the people carrying the responsibility and those who can be held accountable for the successes and failures of the enterprise. They come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, but to keep things as simple and comprehensible as possible, we will focus on the main players as these people have a very distinct influence over the successes each department.
Management

“The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.”
Warren Bennis

There are, generally speaking, three types of managers when you look at the way they operate. For smaller companies it most likely will be two or one, again because of the blurring of the lines between the roles they have to fulfill. The lowest in the hierarchy is the people-manager for lack of a better description. They oversee how people work: they assign tasks and make sure everybody is focused on what everybody needs to be doing for the greater good. Managers like this are the direct responsible to go to if there is ever a problem and/ or, hopefully, a solution to that very same problem.

How they do their job is highly dependent on the type of person they are at their core. We will not be writing about all those different types here as that will require a book on its own, possibly multiple books. Needless to say is that they do their jobs a lot better if they can do it in a way that comes natural to them. They do not need professionalization courses or anything, but they do need to be in the right place, according to our findings and experiences.

What is also an important part of their activities is that they have to help the employees below them on the food chain on occasion as their experience is a lot more profound due to the tried-and-true knowledge they have gathered over time.

The second type of manager is one that often runs a (small) part of a department and has most of the time some kind of help in the form of the people-managers who answer to this person. These mid-level managers manage the managers as it were. Do you manage to follow that?

The mid-levels need to have a very clear understanding as to what is going on under their umbrella. The reason being that they need to make sure that things run smoothly so his boss, another manager usually or the board in some cases, can get the numbers on the state of affairs to be able to do their job in return. These people need to make sure that things are running as they always have been running or that certain aspects are improved upon to obtain the desired results or clear the targets that have been set. Where people-managers are seen every day by their subordinates, this variety is a slightly rarer one to find roaming the halls of the office.

The rarest breed to encounter in the wilds of any office jungle, and generally speaking only exist in big corporations, is the so-called managers-manager. This is the person that leads the entirety of a department. This person is the link between a part of an organization and the board of directors. When the board wants to see a specific result, they will communicate their desires to this manager and it will be up to him or her to deliver. These jungle stalkers collect
data with or without the help of their minions and sometimes with the heads of the other company tribes to form a plan of attack. Who oversees and executes the plan is most likely the person that is best suited for the task at hand. Often it is a manager that is answers to this person directly. Progress will be communicated to the board through meetings and sometimes through reports as things need to be quantifiable: numbers.

While the first type of manager is more strongly inclined to focus on people and less on numbers as their everyday job has them dealing with people and how they do what they do. The higher up you go, the more you will notice patterns and come to the conclusion that the people-aspect matters less and less while the importance of numbers goes through the roof. Why that is the case, we will get to in a minute as we have to address another type of creature first that profits from a soaring popularity: the project manager.

Project managers are tasked to oversee one or more projects at the same time where they, themselves, also work on. They plan, execute and evaluate these projects. They will have to do and know a bit about every aspect that is a part of their project(s). This lies in the fact that the composition of their team(s), as it is the team, mostly comprised of multi-disciplinarians, that has to complete the project from start to finish, that the project manager has to keep track of all progress made and everything that is going on at the same time. They have to manage the people, budgets, margins, production. All this falls within their responsibilities as well as communication with the clients.

Project managers can be divided in two groups, bluntly speaking: client-orientated and business-orientated. It is quite simple as the first group works under assignment of the clients and their list of specifications and wishes: they make custom orders basically. Clients pay the team, or the company, for a job well done and the company makes money. Pretty basic stuff.

Business-focused project managers work in a very different way. These people are assigned a project, or have to come up with one of their own, according to the demands of their bosses or the board as some work directly for the top-level management. These projects have a different angle as their goal is not to make money directly, but their focus lies more on saving money for the company in any way they can. The scope of the projects could be process or production optimization or it might even be an attempt to reduce the time people are sick. As long as it could potentially save money, it is all fair game.

As you can see, the biggest difference between the two types of projects and their respective managers is how they do their work and where their focus lies. Project managers with more client contact are more concentrated on people and processes, while the other group might seem like they are more process-focused, but in reality are more concerned about the numbers. Both usually answer to the board or a mid- to high-level managers-manager.
The reason is that both ways of accomplishing their goals is more successful in a flatter business structure as there is less bureaucracy and more autonomy.

This leaves us with the top of the hierarchy in an organization: the board of directors, or just ‘the board’. The boss or owner of the company, most of the time, is the Chief Executive Officer or CEO. CEO’s head the board and are quite often also the face of the company. Exceptions are very successful marketing campaigns where certain characters or symbols are the face of the enterprise. Or if the CEO has some serious autism, then it is preferable to appoint someone else as the face of the company. They receive help and council in the form of advisors, internal or external, and through the information the heads of the different departments have gathered, but that is not always the case.

There is also a CFO who fills the position of financial expert of the bunch as well as a vice-president who can cover in case of a CEO who is not available at the moment because of an illness or a CEO being fired for some reason.

Where managers get down and dirty with the details of guidelines and policies, the board is the place where these things are conceived in the broadest sense of the word. The board has a general idea and it is practically up to the rest to make it happen and fill in the gaps. Those are the goals of the company for the (near) future.

They also concern themselves with handling compensation for the upper echelon of the company like bonuses and pay-checks, approving budget allocations and, when needed, restructuring of the company. You could state that the board is about the broad, long term management of a company or an organization. They set goals and expect them to be achieved as long as it does not harm the company in any way, hopefully. For example, making money off of North Korea by selling tons of bullet-proof windows might get you a large amount of money, which is good for the short term, but it will cramp your style in the long run. Sponsoring the excavation of blood diamonds in Zimbabwe will only cost you money as the damage to your reputation will take a while to fix if it is repairable at all.

Anyway, these are the main players most people will think of when they think about a company’s structure, but we cannot neglect the one that has by far the most influence in some cases. This is a weird one as this group has no interest in the well-being of the company they are part off and produces or contributes nothing at all to it: the shareholders.

Shareholders form an interesting part of any company structure, also because they are not an internal part of it in any way. The company needs to be publicly listed to able to have publicly purchasable shares. As private shareholders are the owners of a company and outsiders cannot obtain a part of the company through stock exchanges. In this case we do omit
outside investors that actually do have an interest in a healthy organization as they cash in on a part of the profits. So shareholders are the people that speculate on the available stocks. Keep that in mind.

Legally, the board of directors has to answer to its shareholders for actions taken or decisions made when it comes to the company’s course. It does not matter if it is about the plans for the future, acquisitions or pretty much everything else when money is concerned. Why? They invested in or worked hard to get those shares and they stand to gain profits from those shares. Through the so-called dividends, people get a portion of the profits at the end of each fiscal year equal to the amount of shares or stocks they have in their portfolio.

Even when you started the company, you own it as it were, or even if you are not, but you are the CEO, when the majority of the shareholders is dissatisfied with the way you handle things, they can and will kick you out and appoint someone else to do what they want to see happen and replace you. That is a bit weird to say the least, no? People who have nothing, or not much to do with the company you have founded and built from the ground up can sack you and kick you to the curb… It is no wonder that the board listens closely to what their ‘investors’ have to say, even if these investors have no idea what they are talking about. Fortunately, this almost never happens.

Now, with all of this said and done, we think you have a pretty basic understanding of how things work in Corporate World and how companies are structured and managed. Like any social system, as a company is and stays just that: a social system, there are quite a few common problems that plague most if not all organizations.
Troubles in paradise

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”
George Bernhard Shaw

Things go wrong. Problems arise. Shit happens. There is no way around it. That is just the way it is. Your production line might suffer from an unexpected lightning strike or your fresh batch of glass windows has an unfortunate encounter with gravity. It happens and there is nothing else to do but to find a solution as quickly as possible and hope that there is a back-up plan lying around somewhere.

In this chapter we will take a look at common recurring problems within all kinds of enterprises instead as dealing with coincidences cannot be foretold and need to be dealt with on the fly in some urgent cases.

The first major problem we have seen way too often is a complete lack of vision from the higher-ups. What we mean by this, is the fact that the board is focused on making as much money as possible, even long term in some cases, but they have not given a single thought to where they want the company to go or end up exactly. All they do is set targets they think will motivate people working for them and that is about it. They can try to make it look better, but the bottom-line is that it all comes down to making more money. Increasing profits, reducing costs, process optimization is all that is on their minds. They hand out their orders at the top and they are passed down. In the end it is the middle-management that will have to work out the details or have to come up with a plan to obtain the passed down goals.

What the board would like to see the company contribute to, and what other role to play in the lives of its employees or society itself, besides providing income, is left out of the equation completely. This might not seem like a big deal to most as this is such a wide spread phenomenon, but it does have far reaching consequences that are not apparent at first sight. Absence of vision is not only a missed opportunity to differentiate your organization from its competition; it also affects the ignorance of your employees in the way they contribute to company’s successes. Eloquently put, you could state that the staff is nothing more than an army of worker ants feeding the queen. They do come to work and do whatever it is they do as they might like their job or have a mortgage that needs to be paid off, as most have one these days, but that is about it. Still, when you take a look at all the different vacancies that need to be filled up, all companies are looking for people that do not operate according to a 9 to 5 mantra. Quite the conundrum.

Another consequence is that this focus on numbers trickles down to the other layers of the company and will take prevalence over the people-side of the business. This leads to some very strange occurrences like giving the customer
services department numerical guidelines on how to talk to people and treat them in the form of a limited amount of time to get to the problem and put data in the database. This will inevitably lead to rushing things as the people working there need to be on the phone as much as possible. This will go at the expense of an equally important part of their job. Rushing has in the end only one outcome: car crashes.

This mentality will also lead to another unforeseen and unwanted structural problem. This is the sentiment among your people that feel like they are not appreciated, to put it mildly. When you combine this with the already present nine to five mentality, you get a very clear picture of what a vicious circle looks like. The good news is that it is all brought upon the company by the company and its organization self. That is also where the solution lies, but we will get back at tackling that part.

It is true that quite a few companies have a motto or a mission or at least something they say they want to accomplish. Reality is that it often is nothing more than a hollow phrase that looks good on paper but is not acted upon in any way. Saying something is easy, doing it also but that takes more time and energy. Words are nothing more than words. The only time you will see companies act upon their ideals is when they are throwing a fundraiser so they can donate more windows to a completely destroyed orphanage somewhere in Africa. But let us be honest about it: they only do it when their company has a serious reputation problem that is not solved with a simple mea culpa.

By throwing a party with overpriced meals it often is only done to be able to call for a press conference saying that they had not foreseen that selling rocket launchers to kids in the favelas was only meant to add some zing to New Year’s Eve. Thanks to the fundraiser they can now ship ten thousands of boxes to the people without homes so they can sleep under the remains of the bridges without someone invading their personal space.

We are not saying that it is a bad thing to donate money, on the contrary. And yes, while it can be a good idea to spend money on charity, although it does not have to be a charitable goal per se, doing so is not structural and contributes to absolutely nothing in the end. It is polishing a turd and taking a picture of it wearing earrings.

What we are trying to say here is that consistent dedication to what you can do for others should be just as important as making a consistent profit. An additional benefit is that this dedication, as you will see during the chapter about the implementation of ICE, and differentiation of the company can easily rack up your profit numbers and there is no need to be doing that in the spotlights; it is about what you do when nobody is watching. Cough – self-esteem – Cough.
By now you must have guessed that Maslow’s pyramid does not apply solely to employers and employees, but to the company as a whole entity in its own right. You might be wondering why that is. The answer is quite simple, but does need a little explanation.

A society without people is no society. A company without people is no company. This is also true for governments and any other entity that either supplies work to people or stands to make money or spend it like schools and swimming pools. Now, a society without either people or companies is not a society. It will be nothing more than a couple of different tribes that are smashing each other’s skulls in with clubs made of elephant bones. Enterprises are an integral part of any society just like people.

A company without vision is a person without a sense of self, without identity and is nothing more than a glorified calculator. The heart and soul of a company is made up of the people that are an essential part of it. In times such as these, where wealth is vast and the possibilities are seemingly endless, it is a shame that the heart is running on survival-mode and the soul took a sabbatical.

What follows below are problems both companies with and without vision suffer from. Though generally speaking, the companies with a lack of identity have more fallout as a result of these recurring nightmares. Exceptions, when applicable will have some words consecrated to them for you reading pleasure as not all is doom and gloom.

With all the different departments that make up a company, they will have to work together to turn it into a success. Internal communication forms a grand factor in making things happen. This is, again, stating the obvious, we are all aware of that and so are you, dear reader, but stick with us for a bit as this has blown our minds time and time again. Each department has its own focus, their own goals and objectives. They are all cogs in a giant machine and each spins in their own way to achieve the one desired result together. What is baffling is that they are all doing their ‘own thing’ as best as possible, but there are so many clashes and conflicts of interest that they are not at all on the same page and, more often than not, not even in the same book.

Number-based departments and people-based departments have the most disagreements as they both have a completely opposite angle on how problems come to their attention. Employees that have a lot of contact with customers might see a structural problem emerge due to it being brought to their attention by these same clients on more than one occasion. As a result, they will contact the production and maybe even the financial department so they can solve it as soon as possible. Where things turn south is when the specialists balance the risk versus the possible reward to decide if they can risk not doing anything to solve it. This is their modus operandi as this is the only
quantifiable way they can look at an issue because all other things are impossible to put a number on.

Let’s say that your company has developed a fancy new type of glass. It turns out that this glass is not safe as it explodes due to vibrations within the glass when a cat taps against it with its claws. It is simple math to see if you can risk it. You take a look at how many people have a cat that jumps against glass windows (all of them, for your information) and then you add in the price of a new normal window and the price of an average cat. You offset this against the money you stand to make or lose if you take it off the market. If the possible losses do not outweigh the profits the company stands to make, they will not give a shit and nothing will change. You can imagine that customer services are not going to have a field day with a decision like this. Worse even for the people installing these windows the moment they notice that the owner of the house has a cat. Pre-traumatic stress syndrome is a killer as it will lead to PTSS afterwards.

What is baffling to us is that these problems, when looking at the numbers, have zero impact on the nearby future. In the long run though, ‘solutions’ such as these will leave nothing in their wake but doom and destruction for the company as it will tarnish a reputation immensely.

Damage to a reputation rarely comes in one fell swoop, like a crisis. No. It is much more likely that, when an organization is ruined, it has happened over time, like a sliding scale. The moment you actually start to notice that you are in deep trouble, you are too late as the damage is done and you have a crisis on your hands. The crisis itself did not come falling out of the blue sky as it started a long time ago with nothing more than a phone call and a calculator. The cause being nothing more than a conflict of interest coupled with short-term vision, or the absence of long-term thinking.

There is half of an exception to this problem: project-based teams. Because of its multi-disciplinarian composition, naturally, these teams have no or at the very least little conflicting interests. Their focus rests solely on getting the job done to the best of their abilities. Another advantage of this way of working is that there is more and easier communication between the different ‘departments’. This does not rule out the problem with the long term, but as that is usually not a problem as projects are often only for the short term.

What can cause a major problem for project-based working is when the team is not in the same place. Literally in this case. Multi-nationals who use this form of project management can have teams where its team members are all in different offices around the country or, worse, different time zones. Not even considering that cultural differences can side track projects in more ways than you can imagine as that is not within the scope of this book. The biggest problem is that people use sub-optimal (digital) communication; nothing is more effective than a chat face-to-face.
We are not even taking into account when there are multiple time zones with people all having a different ‘rhythm’. Unexpected problems that need to be solved on the fly have a tendency to crash whereas handled by a one-time-zone-one-office-team, it would be nothing more than a hiccup or a little nuisance. Think calling people out of bed in the middle of the night for a conference call, getting to work after the call to solve someone else’s problem. That is not a way to keep your staff in the happiest of places.

Speaking of conflicts, there are also two varieties that are both well-known, but marginally addressed if addressed at all. These are the personal conflicts between employees and between employees and the employer. The other variant is called ‘office politics’. Both are two very different creatures, not only in how they come about but also in their ulterior motives, both can and will have a crippling impact on the work floor.

Personal conflicts between employees are a serious problem due to the fact that it will lead to a division when others get dragged in the dispute as is often the case. That is why it must be nipped in the butt before it spirals out of control. The longer these situations go on, the more likely it will get out of hand and the longer the recovery period will take. This is a tough one to tackle as it is a bit of a taboo to talk about for the people in question and even more so for the bystanders that see or know about it.

Being seen as weak or sensitive is a big no-no if you want to climb higher up the ladder. We keep these negativities inside to let it fester and rot until we are burned out, stressed-out or just become unhappy or depressed. Sometimes people skip a couple of steps and go straight to portraying asshole-y behavior or explode and the bullied becomes the bully.

Office politics are different, as we have said, but what do we mean by that term exactly? To us it is about the games people play, schemes they plot consciously or unconsciously and pretty much everything else people do to get to a higher pay grade. We do leave out the work they do excellently, but that usually takes time and hard work and we are lazy as a species by default.

Where this behavior originates? It all starts with the goals the department in question has to achieve. Targets are being set and communicated so people are, for lack of a better word, motivated to perform at their peak, pushed to their limits. When you are okay at the job you are tasked with, you have two choices if you want to rise to the top. The first is simple: you work harder and smarter than everybody else. The other is dodging responsibility and accountability while making it look like you did a better job than the rest of your colleagues.
For some people, the first option, while it is preferable to get karma points on your rep-sheet, is too much effort. The second option, screwing people over and taking the credit for their efforts, is more in line with their talents. It is true that some sectors are worse than others as are some departments. Where it applies is usually in the form of commonly known descriptions of the job. A couple of examples are “This is a cutthroat business”, “It is a jungle out here”, or, Darwin’s worst nightmare, “It is about the survival of the strongest”. Lovely people to work with. Truly inspiring specimens.

Before we continue, we will have to explain a common trend we have seen emerging more and more often, wherein lies the root cause of this type of behavior: responsibility and accountability, or lack thereof. The name is funny though... 'Office politics'. You can guess where people came up with these disgusting practices. You have to be a Yoda or Obi-Wan Kenobi at the art of dodging accountability and responsibility to be able to make it there, but we digress. Most people will think that both responsibility and accountability are the same thing so we will eliminate this misconception first as it is important.

Accountability is an obligation for a person to accept responsibility and the results of their activities. Basically it is about what someone did, does, why and what the results of all that is. There is a catch though: while working you have to make choices now and then. These all shape the way you do your job and how well you do it. Now, what if you can get others to make those choices for you?

If you can find a poor sucker to make that choice for you, all the ensuing consequences will be no longer your responsibility as you did not make that choice so you cannot be held accountable for doing your job less than spectacular or anything else you did or did not do. Brilliant! You can blame-shift, you do not have to work your ass off plus, if you can pull this off consistently, you get paid even more to top it all off.

It does not take a genius to see that this is easy to do and very profitable. Not before long, others will start to apply the same tactics. At the end of the day, only the truly cunning, merciless and shrewd will be able to make it to the top. The nasty side-effects of these practices are legion, but the most detrimental of all is that choices are no longer made or postponed up until the point of the very last minute. Changes or at least efforts to making things better all come to a screeching halt. That is a slow and painful way to perish.

Making choices leads to making mistakes. When mistakes are punished severely by the use and misuse of these practices, mistakes are avoided like a leper. The thing is that learning and improving requires people to make mistakes to learn from in the first place. Trying something new. All that is no longer happening as learning is not measured by numbers and numbers are the tools of accountability. Accountability is based on making choices, but when none are ever made, the system bites itself in the ass.
Responsibility is often confused with accountability. While the latter is about others being able to form an opinion about what someone did or did not do through the use of so-called ‘proof’. Responsibility is about what you actually do or did: cause and effect. To stick with the above example, not choosing paralyzes a company on the inside and that was the responsibility of all and by that logic they are to be held accountable for the demise of the company.

Office politics, as you can see, is the act of not feeling responsible or not being held accountable for your own behavior. That is very bad, as you know by now, so organizations came up with an idea: make it so that everybody is held accountable for their own results and, for good measure, it needs to be measurable so they can compare numbers at the end-of-the-year-talks.

This decision, or invention, did two things. Initially it blew up the lit of all covert shenanigans. Later people started manipulating numbers with new tricks so they could show a pretty picture to their bosses. The situation went from silent assassinations to a live broadcast of an all-out civil war under the guise of professionalism and good manners. The atmosphere in some departments was making the Gaza Strip seem like an ideal vacation spot. If a company was an actual person, this would be something like indigestion and cancer had a HIV-positive baby. Finding a cure is not an easy task, but there is one: ICE. Eventually it will root out any outbursts of this harmful behavior, but we are talking about problems here, so let us go on for a bit.

Closely tied in with the above issues is the loss of capital. We talk specifically about people with experience walking out the door and possibly going to work for the competition. No matter what you do for a living, but if you are good at your job, you leaving IS a massive headache for any type of enterprise. Retention rates are also useful for a company if applied to these cases, not only to customers coming back to buy stuff from the company. It is a bit tricky to put a number on it, but it adds up by a lot.

Hiring new people and training those new recruits costs a lot of time and money. And then it is still a matter of hoping and praying that the rookies stay long enough, as job-hopping is the standard these days, to eventually become just as good as the ones they were meant to replace.

That is just the beginning, because the veterans are also the ones that train the new guys and are the go-to people for answers to difficult or complex problems and they know what to do in infrequent occurrences. When people with experience leave a company or a department, it is comparable to having temporary amnesia that, depending on the size of the company, might become permanent. That is a lot of capital you take with you when you do decide to seek your fortune elsewhere. It is logical that competitors will welcome veterans from the other companies with open arms. We are not
talking here about key figures or managers in the organization, just the people that are on the front lines doing their jobs. The higher up the hierarchy, the greater the damages are. Although we do have to state that this is not always the case; some managers are more easily replaced than others. The reason is that most are nothing more than a 'pass it down' middleman.

There is also another exception and that is paradoxically a member of the board. Yes, you read that right. Due to board meetings and tight communication as to what is going on in the company, all members are well-informed on the state of departments and what the top-priorities are. Covering to find a suitable replacement should not pose any problems. Even CEOs that put on their walking shoes can easily be replaced by a vice-president. Exceptions are CEOs who are the face of the company like a Steve Jobs or a Elon Musk.

Part of the reason that people leave a company is, most of the time, a better salary. That has its limits however. Other reasons are a toxic work environment or not feeling like they are able to do the job the way they want to be doing it. Especially the latter is a more and more common occurrence with the advent of new and ‘better’ optimization processes and the increasing focus on measurable efficiency. In theory, optimization has no limits: you can always find something to improve, number-wise. Practically speaking, though, that is not the case, far from it.

Numbers are good and all and, if used correctly with a healthy dose of common sense, can give helpful insights in how things are running, who is slacking, et cetera. Numbers are applicable in reality in all kinds of situations, most of the time. When someone is obsessed with getting all the numbers, it is easy to forget about practical reality. There is always a point where the numbers, if they go up even more, they will inversely proportional affect how people experience their job and their work activities. Stress levels will start rising until you have an unhealthy work situation for the people affected by these ‘improvements’.

Sure, your numbers will go up a little bit and yes, on the short term, that will lead to a tiny increase in revenues. Great? Not so much as individual productivity, well-being of the staff and general happiness will flat line quickly. Eventually, your employees will be running for the hills (or go on strike like…Ryan Air). Telling nurses that they have seven minutes to wash and dress their patients so money can be saved on hiring an additional nurse, is that bazooka pointed at your tiny toe we have talked about a while back.

A company is as good as the people working there and dictating the rules. An organization is much like most people: we think about the now and think about the future tomorrow. The problem with this way of thinking is that the only influence you have on the future is right now through what you do right now. Tomorrow is useless in this regard.
While numbers might be infinite, people do have their limits. That is the simple reality and if you cannot see that \( A = A \) and not \( \infty \), it is time to put down the calculator and talk to as many people with different functions as possible who adhere to the rules you create to increase efficiency.

The above brings us to a weird situation: at the top, the people there have no idea what is going on inside their own company. Being disconnected from reality does nothing to solve issues or problems the people working for them might suffer from. If anything, it will only make things worse. Seeing the bigger picture is important: you need to know what the puzzle looks like if you want to be able to solve it. That being said, if you have no idea what the individual pieces look like, you will have no idea on how they fit; you have to make do with a theoretical idea of how it should be.

The Truth™ does not mesh well with actual reality. The fact that you have watched a couple of episodes of ER, does not qualify you to perform brain surgery as that will surely end in a lobotomy. You need training, lots of it, to even have a chance at succeeding, practical training to be precise. The same goes for each and every new person to the company. Thinking you know how it works is not the same as experiencing how things really work.

You are good at something or you are not. You get a month or two, sometimes three, to show whether you are capable to do the job according to the standard. That is the creed we see everywhere: can or cannot. Wrong. Again, an underappreciated facet: training new employees. Being explained the plain basics of the job and when you have questions, you go to your supervisor or a veteran buddy that was appointed to answer questions you might have. That is it. Swim or sink.

Why is it so hard to show newbies the ropes? Within a month or two, with proper training, you have saved everyone a lot of time and the company a ton of money while it only costs one week of good, proper training. How often do you see swim instructors throw a four year old kid in the pool and watch to see if they drown or swim? Same thing. We know it, you know it, but it is so damn hard to put a number on the costs and the potential amount of money saved. A risk-reward function is impossible to calculate so it is not done.

Before we get to the biggest detractor of all, we feel like we have to address the elephant in the room as you probably have seen a pattern emerging: our love-hate relationship with numbers. At least, that is what it probably looks like.

Between costs of any kind and income generated, a company must, at the very least, break even to continue its existence. Making a nice profit is preferable so you can create buffers if things get rough and possibly invest some of the profits in expansions, recruitment or even buying another company to strengthen your position vis-à-vis your competition. A healthy
business is a growing one and that is a direct result of profits being made. Money is important and the numbers depicting them are also important as a result.

When you take a look at Maslow’s pyramid, producing something, having reliable staff that makes it so that the enterprise is functioning, you have your primary, physical needs satisfied and the company can sustain itself. This is required before you can take a look at the next layer: financial and emotional security.

The financial security part is quite simple: making money, increasing buffers, investing, growing. The usual suspects. This is the territory of process optimization and general streamlining of everything money-related that makes up the business. On the other side of the second layer, you have the emotional security of the company. All the previously described problems in the chapter, and the ones still to come, are all originating here.

Numbers rule supreme, but that is unfortunately only half of what you have to deal with if you want your company to climb up the pyramid. We are so focused on numbers because that is the way we measure how the business flourishes. That is the same as a doctor looking at patients’ exterior to determine if they are sick or healthy, ignoring what is going on on the inside. Would you want to be treated by a doctor like this? We would not, you would not and nobody else for that matter. Yet, when it comes to determining the condition of a company, we are all behaving like this doctor. Yes, you need to look for symptoms to be able to come up with a diagnosis, but that is not all there is to it.

The third layer, belonging, is a bit of a paradox. All companies try to be different or differentiate themselves from the others in their sector. They praise their own unique selling points, the slogan they use or their logo or even how their site is designed. In reality, they are like the penguins: look the same, do the same and behave in the same way. Despite having a different organizational structure, they are all still run in the exact same way.

Whenever you want to do something better, you will need a different approach or a smarter approach. Otherwise you will end up doing the same thing for only a marginal increase in whatever field you focus on. This is common sense at its finest. Good advice too, but unfortunately nobody is listening as the numbers are impossible to put in a forecast, in the case of success (or failure). To add insult to injury, it requires people to make a choice and …well…we have seen how that ends.

We want to belong to the successful, so we do what they do because it worked for them. We become copies of the thing we want to become or surpass and there are barely any differences. Besides being successful, there are more different ‘images’ a company can belong to. For instance there are
the environment-friendly institutions, the socially aware ones and a couple more. There are also the different sectors like the technology sector as one of the biggest ones. What you see is that the little ones copy what the bigger ones are doing, as we have said. An example would be Google creating relax spaces for the staff with sofas and Ping-Pong tables. All of a sudden all tech companies were trying to cram in Ping-Pong tables and foosball tables wherever they could fit one. Absolutely bonkers of course. “But hey, if these guys do it, we should too” is the mantra.

Security with two opposites on both ends of the spectrum make it a balancing act which is not easy to pull off. However, it is an absolute requirement before any company can start thinking about going up another level. Because the third layer is the only one that is pretty much a given in the entire pyramid as it can be kept at the bare basic minimum without any real development or attention, it is easy to overlook the fact that layer two is needed before you go from level three to four in one day. There is no need to go around and copy what the big boys are doing: keep it simple.

The fourth layer is where things get dicey: self-esteem and self-respect. Simply put: layer three is where a company belongs, or tries to belong and this one is about what values they hold dear. How do they want to achieve their goals? These two tie in nicely as they, when combined, form a company’s ideals as it were.

This is how the business is perceived: its status among the population. Image, reputation, it all comes together in this place. Remember the doctor with the flawed diagnosis? This is going to that doctor all dressed up, looking pretty, smiling just to hear him say that you are in perfect health so you can tell others that the doc has declared you healthy as can be. At the same time people from the human resources department are chasing each other around the office with staplers. ‘Fake it ‘til you make it.’, is quite appropriate in this case. Let this one sink in as it is a bit more complex of an analogy than it might seem.

The last step is self-actualization: knowing what you want and how to get there. A company that is living up to its full potential and doing something useful with that potential, besides generating increasingly higher profits.

Continuously crunching numbers will keep anyone and any company from reaching this stage. You are occupied with your reputation, where you belong or want to belong to and failing at both because in the security department of the pyramid there is no balance whatsoever. It is not all bad though; now that you know how it all works, you can make a change provided that you have the guts to make a choice.

There is more to life than numbers. Fine. This still begs the question why everybody is so hung up on them. That, ladies and gentlemen, brings us to the
biggest detractor of them all: the stock exchange. We realize that only a fraction of all businesses in the world have public shares, but you will see why also the private enterprises are under the influence of this global insanity. Like most stories, this one begins with a good idea.

Once upon a time, there was a peaceful company running around in a rainbow-filled country, with unicorns and very happy squirrels. One day a company needed some extra money to grow a bit bigger and become a little bit stronger. One person who worked at the company came up with the idea of selling a little bit of the company to people who were interested and in exchange, they would receive a part of the profits the company had made each year. They called it respectively shares and dividends.

Over time, not only could the good people who bought those shares get their money back, but with patience, they could even make a profit off of that initial investment. It was an absolute brilliant idea. The people of this rainbow-filled country sang songs about the smart man with the great idea and the shares were all sold. It was a big success and the company could grow a little bigger and grow a little bit stronger. The company was very happy indeed. What a marvelous idea.

Other companies were a bit envious of the slightly bigger company, so they too sold shares to the people. The other companies also grew a little bit and also became a little bit stronger. Peace and prosperity enveloped the green meadows and the stars seemed to be shining brighter and the sun was giving off more warmth. The squirrels and the unicorns drank, sang and danced every night for many years to come. Life was good and pleasant.

One day, another smart man thought that it would be the smart thing to do to buy shares from other people because the companies kept growing steadily. He thought that, in time, when the companies keep growing, they will also pay more dividends and so he could make more money. Based on his calculations, he came up with a price that would be a very fair offer. Some people thought that it was very fair indeed and accepted his offer with a big smile on their happy faces. The smart man called this the first exchange of stock.

In order to commemorate this joyous event, the people gathered around a campfire to celebrate the occasion. The summer sun had disappeared in the evening, but its glorious warmth was still wrapping the animals and the citizens in a warm blanket. They ate roasted wild boars that were caught that day in the forests by a small blond guy with a big moustache and a very big red-haired man that had fallen in a cauldron filled with a magical potion to increase the strength of whoever drank it, when he was just a child.

A couple of years later, one company grew too much and as a result developed type two diabetes. It eventually died because of it. The people
who possessed the shares of this company were all a bit sad, but one week later they lived their lives as if nothing had happened. Not long after that another company got sick and it seemed to be quite bad. The people who had shares of this company tried to sell them at a lower prices as they would be worthless if the company would go belly-up. That way, they could at least make a little money extra. Some of them found others willing to pay for the shares at a lower price. Unfortunately, this company also kicked the bucket and went on to the afterlife. The people who sold their stock were very happy while the ones that had bought them were sad that all their golden coins were spent in vain.

When the third company had a bad case of indigestion, the same thing happened as before. This time though, the company recovered miraculously. While it recovered from the indigestion, dark clouds began forming over the once magnificent valley. As time went on, each time a company got sick, people started to bet on either the recovery or demise of the company. Companies and people used to be such dear friends, but the relationship was now nothing more than an excuse to start gambling on their health for monetary gains.

Soon people started to bet not only on the premise that a company might get better, but also when companies might get sick and how bad their condition would be so they could earn more money more quickly. The companies realized way too late that their great rational and sound idea had turned their friends into money-hungry vampires that would do anything to make another gold coin extra. Some even worked in a company and would bet on how their company would do, having knowledge of the secret company information they could gain even more money. The companies realized that the people they once loved and trusted no longer cared about their health. It did not take long before the rainbows disappeared and the unicorns vanished into oblivion and the squirrels turned into raging alcoholics.

And they lived unhappily ever after.

You are probably thinking ‘Damn, that went downhill fast!’. Truth is that this is not just a fairytale, it is common practice. Rationality is only found in what people think about the situation a company finds itself in and how it stands to do where its stock rates are concerned. It has nothing to do with the actual health of an organization.

Let’s say that the shares of Microsoft evaporate. Their worth is zero. Nothing. Nada. Zip. Zilch. People start panicking, screaming, crying and praying. These emotions will spread like wildfire and it will not be long until the entire stock exchange flat lines. The world economy comes to a complete stand still and we are set back to the Middle Ages. Financial crises are occurring more frequently and they become more severe each time.
When you put your money in a fund and that fund goes, within a day, from a million to zero, you are fucked basically. But let us have a look at the matter through an objective, realistic eye. First we have a peak at the stock exchange. Yes, Microsoft would be bankrupt or at least easy to take over, hostile or not as shares are cheap as dirt. So exit Microsoft. Finito. Is that the case in reality? Not so much: they will still continue producing stuff and research things. Even if that stops, they possess a ton of real-estate, machines, inventory, everything. Nothing has changed. Nothing at all. The money they have collected when the public could buy their shares when they first went public is still in their pockets in a way. They have used it to grow stronger so technically it is spent, but the point is that they have nothing to gain or lose from the trade of their shares. The only exception is when someone has 51 percent of them all, but that is a story for another time.

It is true that if people all over the world, in the case of a multi-national, lose money on the stock exchange, then yes, you will earn less money as people will have less to spend. That does not stop the world from turning and the sun will still come up in the East. We are afraid that the numbers go down and the companies too fear these numbers. They tell us something in an objective way about the state of things in the world. Numbers, when used in an emotional way, become theoretical and thus useless. We are occupied by numbers and all possible doomed scenarios created by them, but that is only because we have forgotten what they stand for or stood for and how they are supposed to be perceived and used correctly.

That a board member is concerned with these numbers is more easily explained: part of their bonuses is in the form of stocks, shares that can only be sold after a certain amount of time. It is purely in their own self-interest that they come up with better and better numbers so they can sell their shares against the best possible prices they can fetch. Seeing that the board passes down targets and goals, it is no wonder that they only focus on the middle and short term. They are the doctors who examine themselves from the outside as long term health is not even a blimp on their radar. So the head of a company works in the same way as the head of most individuals: we care about now and do tomorrow.

For corporations that have a public listing, this is a very serious problem, but it does not explain why it also affects other non-public companies. Or does it? Monkey see, monkey do. Copying what others do and thinking like they do in the hope of becoming the next big thing. Herd mentality. That is one.

Raising extra money usually involves making a trip to the bank to ask for a loan and having to explain for what you will want to be using that money exactly. You need to present to them numbers and projections and then they pull out their calculators to determine the risk of your company starving of famine or your chances for developing diabetes type two. Why? They are
publicly listed. Their numbers need to go up. They do have shareholders they have to answer to.

Did you ever wonder why Kickstarter campaigns are so popular these days? You get the funds without the accountability to do what you want to do and the way you want to get it done. People backing a Kickstarter do not get any guarantees so they will have to be careful, but for the companies using this system, it is a breath of fresh air.

Now that you have an idea on the different problems organizations have to deal with, we will have to explain value to you. Value is expressed with numbers. This is an additional layer of why these numbers are not the ‘end all, be all’ people believe them to be, just so we are on the same page.
The paradoxical Truth™ about numbers and value.

“A good decision is based on knowledge and not numbers.”
Plato

People and companies are all quite similar in more than one way, as you know by now. As people run businesses in the same way as they run their lives, it should come as no surprise that the way people look at numbers, so do companies. From the previous chapter, it should be clear that, if you want to succeed at ascending, as a company or as a person, it pays off to be critical and actually engage in thinking for yourself.

Where that is hardest, is when numbers are involved, or value as that is what it hopes to represent in most cases. To understand the underlying problem, you need to know that what the three different types of value are and why they sow so much confusion and chaos wherever they are not used correctly.

The first type of value is the actual, realistic value. When you want to buy one Harley Davidson chopper because you are a Hell’s Angel and you want to be seen as a bad ass or because the rules dictate you need one, you go get one. You want to spend 50,000 dollars on the bike. You get to the store and you see three big choppers and, what do you know, all three carry 50,000 dollar price tags.

One is a black motorcycle with a skull on the side and the text saying ‘KILL!!!’. Awesome. The other is a bit less flashy without the art and letters, but is has a nice set of rims. Turns out this bike is a limited edition. O.M.G. Awesome. The third is pink with a ‘Hello Kitty’ design on the side. It is PINK. Erm…whatever.

Objectively, all three are equal as they all cost 50,000 and for the sake of argument, they all have cost the same amount of money to build. Resources, production time, design, et cetera are all equal. The objective value in case of these three bikes is the same: 50,000 dollar.

When you take at the Truth™-value of these bikes, they are anything but equal. You, as a Hells Angel, do not want to be seen with a pink ‘Hello Kitty’-bike. That is a death sentence at the very least. Your opinion on the value of this fine Harley is based around your emotions, feelings, opinion and your experience. When you add all those things up, you come to the conclusion that the bike is worth zero. The value of the two other bikes is somewhat similar as they are practically identical. When you actually value both motor cycles at around 50,000 you have a choice to make. If you value them still at a lot less, you go shopping somewhere else.

Now that you have narrowed down the choice from three different bikes to two, the Paradox comes into play; your choice will boil down to which of the two do you think should be more valuable to you personally. This is all based
on assumptions of what you think should be the best choice. In the end, you pick the one with the KILL!! skull. You think that the rest of your buddies do not give a shit about a bike being a limited edition or not. Congratulations! You are now the proud owner of a new Harley Davidson.

That is the difference between objective, subjective and relative value. The first is nothing more than knowing what something is. Subjective is about what you think on an emotional level about something while relative is about what something is compared to other things. Like in the way people perceive reality, as we have explained in the part why our motto is what it is, there are also cognitive dissonances between how people see things of value and consequently look at numbers as value is expressed with the help of those numbers. This is where things get messy and things do not seem to work as intended, as some would say.

As more and more companies, people and other systems become more and more digitalized; they make more and more use of automated systems and models that represent how things should work out. They rarely do. Why is that? Models and automated systems require input from people as they cannot ‘think’ for themselves. They simply do what they should be doing according to variables that have been put in the system. Some even react to what happens in the outside world like algorithms used by stock exchange systems from the big banks. Flash trading, that sort of things. When we use these systems, they take a lot of work out of the hands of people and are very efficient.

They work correctly if they use objective data. A good example is the weather forecast: input things that are happening, add a bit of math and you have a pretty accurate prediction of the weather to come. It is a whole other story if we use data of how we think things should work or if they are based on human behavior. If you use non-rational behavior as a variable in a rational system, you will always be off. The other problem these systems have, is that they require input from people and people use what they think should be or happen as their standard. They use the Truth™ and the Paradox to fill in the blanks (un)knowingly. Even the most rational scientist cannot escape from it as the moment something unexpected happens, we do not react rationally.

When we use numbers to evaluate a process or a possible improvement to an organization, it is logical that you base it on numbers as they are objective and hard to refute. The numbers represent a rational, objective reality which is easy to read and understand. The question you should ask yourself, though, is if the numbers you read, are read as an objective-, a subjective- or a relative representation.

We have a so-called number-bias: we see them as objective, we treat them as such and we ask no further questions and accept it as factual reality. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. Improving a supply chain by one percent
might seem like a good thing, but if that only leads to a one percent increase in profits, should you? What is the relative value and, more importantly, what is the subjective value? Setting a time limit on how long people have to do a task might be relatively valuable, but if it is blowing up the subjective value your employees experience or your clients, you are in deep shit. Shit you cannot see as you only look at the numbers as an objective representation of reality while it is clearly anything but.

Stock prices suffer from that same bias: we treat them as an objective representation of a company and its worth, but it is nothing more than an average compounded sentiment towards the health of a company or its activities: it tells nothing about the actual value of a company.

Emotionalization of numbers is also part of the system now. Without it the system can no longer function the way it is supposed to be. Numbers need to go up, higher and higher as the moment it dips slightly, you risk an avalanche of tumbling shares, options and futures and when enough people start to short your company, you can wave goodbye to your company’s future.

Economic crises and even personal crises, like a mid-life crisis, a depression, and the like, are all a result of a cognitive dissonance. In the case of the former, it is the cognitive dissonance between the actual value of something and the value the buyers think it has. Mortgages that are worth nothing, but people think that everyone pays them off so that makes them valuable, until it turns out that that is not what is actually happening in the real world. Think how things should be or how things are without knowledge or proper understanding how things actually are working and affecting each other is a surefire way to get into deep trouble.

So when you do use numbers, use them the way they are meant to be used: as an objective instrument to measure something you want to know more about. Then ask yourself ‘What is the objective-, subjective- and the relative value?’ Choosing to deny your impartiality will only make things worse and cloud the bigger picture. You will nuke the growth and wealth of a company if you do not or cannot look beyond that. Speaking of which, what does make a company grow reliably?
Innovation.

“The history of innovation is the story of ideas that seemed dumb at the time.”
Andy Dunn

Innovation is nothing more than the creation of a new product or service to sell to people who are more than happy to pay for it. This could be a completely different product or service or an upgrade to an existing one. With these new products you either get more money from your existing clientele or you get new customers by diversifying your income streams. Pretty simple. Innovation is the entire process from conceptualization to selling something and getting it to the clients that bought it.

That is not all there is to it though. It can also be the creation of new processes or the use of new equipment or software for example. These types of innovation are, relatively speaking, the slowest and overall add the smallest improvements to the whole. They are however very interesting for any company as these will compound over time.

The advantage is that there is also little to no risk involved for the organization as nothing changes fundamentally, most of the time. That is because these incremental changes are usually number-centric and more about refining how people do what they are already doing.

There is also another form of innovation that is more or less in line with the first one, which is, to most people, the actual meaning of the word: creating a revolutionary new product or service that has not been made before. This is the risky part of the trade; you never know how people will react to something they have never seen before. Something else that an organization will have to keep in mind is that if the product or service is a success, like for example the iPad, other companies will come up with their own version of your idea: all the penguins dive in the water looking for the same type of fish as the first one that dove in the water, provided that the first penguin survived.

Companies are part of a sector and within that field, they focus on products and services. Innovation usually occurs within their supply chain in a way. This is called vertical innovation. The opposite is horizontal innovation and it is about stepping out of your ‘comfort zone’ for the development of something new that is related to what a company normally does, but is not really part of its expertise, yet.

An example would be a company building cars. Improving production would count as innovation, vertical in this case. But what could they do if they would want more control over the way the cars are sold and get some grip on the ‘how’ for other reasons. They can create their own brand of dealers instead of using the usual franchises or ‘freelance’ dealerships. Obviously, this is a whole different ball game. Risky? We would say so. Radically different?
Check. Greater possible reward? Most definitely. Worth it? That is up to the finance department.

There are quite a few companies that sell a wide range of products and service to only a single company and business is good. They still need to innovate whenever they can. When their client finds a better deal, they will be better off and those types of companies are in deep trouble; they will need to find a new client and they will need to do so fast. Preferably they find, or start looking for more than one if they want to sell their supply. Business is business and despite having a good work relationship, if a company can save money, they will go to the competition.

More of the same, but different are companies that sell one product to a lot of different clients. When a product is released that is much cheaper or with a brand new addition to make a vast improvement to the lives of its users, you can kiss your revenues goodbye. After you said your goodbyes, you will have to make a choice: you copy the competition their product to the best of your abilities, or you will have to come up with a brand new product yourself. All of which takes a lot of time and resources, although option one is the cheaper of the two and a lot safer as you know that there is a market for the product, you will still lose quite a bit of money during the transition period. It stands to reason that you continue to improve whatever you can and it would be better to do so in multiple ways. Without innovating, you are dead in the water and it will be only a matter of time before sharks start circling.

You never buy shares, stock or futures from one company when you want to invest money: when they drop, you lose everything. You diversify your portfolio to spread the risk of that happening and you are left standing empty-handed saying ‘Oopsy’. What you can do as well is not buying anything stock exchange related because of our previously described reasons. Anyway, back to innovating. All organizations will have to diversify their activities as much as possible to spread the risk so they increase their chance of survival. “It is neither the strongest of species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most receptive to change.” Darwin would have been a terrific CEO.

Now that we know why continual improvement is so important and that we know that the most common ways to improve a company’s position is to do so vertically, at least according to the status quo, it is time to have a look at some popular frameworks that are used a lot to improve how things are done and done successfully.

We start off with LEAN. LEAN is probably the most disruptive framework to implement as it changes the way products see the light of day in a very radical way. LEAN heavily focuses on the problems clients have and the needs that come with. However, unlike regular production, businesses using LEAN do not deliver a clean, polished and finished product initially. Instead, they create a co-called MVP which is best described as a working bare-bone
prototype that does on basic simple thing. Later on, they will improve upon it through the feedback they have gathered from the clients.

As a result of this way of working, production costs are kept to a bare-minimum and overhead is very, very low, if done right. This is ideal to see how potential customers react to a new product. Due to the use of gathered feedback, they will come up with something that not only is a product with an incredible value for money but it will surely appeal to the target audience.

Like the product creation, the production process and supply chain are both kept at a bare-bone minimum. So throughout the production process costs are as low as possible making it a less risky way of coming up with new products and services as potential losses are negligible. Toyota was the first company to use this way of working and producing and has become famous for its efficiency. Largely due to a book that was written about their vision on production. Another advantage of using LEAN is that teams and the company as a whole maintain a high degree of flexibility and adaptability.

For most start-ups, this is the go-to framework to come up with a sellable product with the lowest costs and as little risk as possible. As they usually do not have a large pool of employees, and LEAN naturally works best when teams are small and composed of members with multiple affinities, it further increases flexibility of the framework as a whole.

There are also a couple of disadvantages to implementing and using LEAN as a base. First and foremost is the cost of implementation for already existing non-LEAN companies. For when they do decide that they want to go LEAN, it will require a complete and massive overhaul of how things are done company-wide. At the same time, the companies that have made this choice still have to keep up production for the services and products they already have developed and are selling or providing to their customer base. Phased transitions are not practical or recommended when making the switch to LEAN. The solution is, often, the creation of a start-up within the already existing structure of the company which functions similar to an autonomous company.

Due to trying to keep things to a bare minimum, when one part of the production process is not functioning, the problem will snowball out of control quickly as everything that comes after the step wherever a problem is found, come to a halt as the problem might be replicated through the entire production line. A good example is the production of pre-ordered Teslas that is delayed for years due to a problem somewhere in the production line.

Another cause of the delay of these pre-ordered Teslas was the massive amount of pre-orders which exposes another flaw of the system: scalability. The bare-minimum approach also makes it harder to keep up with demand when it suddenly goes up by much more than anticipated. Scalability is even
more precarious when you sell a whole range of different products. Because of the above listed disadvantages, LEAN is not useful for each and every company and should be considered thoroughly before taking the leap. There is something to say for doing certain things the LEAN way and implement parts of the philosophy to improve little bits of production, but do not expect miracles when you do that as it is a range of actions and motions that make up the entirety of the success of the process.

LEAN, no surprise there, is a number-centric way of handling the way a company operates despite the fact that it is heavily focused on the wishes, desires and problems its customers might be having. Furthermore it is a product-focused way of working.

Another LEAN-inspired way of thinking that is running rampant through the world of business innovation is called Six Sigma, or shorter: 6Σ. There are two different uses for Six Sigma, but first we will have a look at what it entails exactly.

Where LEAN is based around the needs and problems of (potential) customers, this methodology is centered on customer expectations, meeting them and, if possible, exceeding them. By improving processes and quality of each production step, they aim to accomplish this feat. The most important tool in the arsenal of Six Sigma is gathering feedback with the use of data. This is very different than LEAN as with LEAN they use data a lot less often, and instead ask the customers what they think in one way or another. Six Sigma makes it a key point to gather as much feedback as possible on a constant basis so they can continuously apply improvements.

Just like LEAN-based thinking and working, they also employ multi-disciplinarian teams. How they organize these teams is very different however. They use a very strict hierarchy and communication flows are as a result of working like this more top down and less cyclical.

Members of a Six Sigma team each have a bad ass name, depending on the role they fulfill. The big daddy of the bunch is called a Grandmaster Black Belt. He is the boss, the capo of the team. His left and right hand are called Black Belts. Not that bad ass, but it still impressive. Then there are the green belts and in some companies they even have orange, yellow and white belts. We would have opted for a name change as it is a bit dorky, but whatever. Whenever a team comes up with an idea that can be applied company-wide, they appoint Champions to oversee the complete implementation of the specific improvements and they are held accountable by the board. As you must have guessed by now, Six Sigma is a project-based way of working.

The two types of projects these teams handle can be divided between improvements for the clients or improvements for the company they work for in which case the company is the client as it were. If they do a project for the
company, it is geared towards saving time and/or money. Another way they can do a project is to add value to the company in any way possible. These are usually the company-wide adjustments we talked about. This is to justify hiring them in the first place, if they are external resources, or paying for their martial arts training if they are in-house employees.

While Six Sigma is nowhere the level of disruptiveness as LEAN, it does cost a lot of money to pay these ‘specialists’ and their training is also ridiculously pricey and time-consuming. It should come as no surprise that here is a ridiculous amount of companies offering Six Sigma training to obtain the required certificates. While they do save a company time and money if they are any good, you should have a very clear picture as to what they can bring to the table before hiring them or training certain employees.

While they might seem process-minded in their approach to tackling certain problems, these number ninjas are all about the numbers because of the nature of their line of work and the fact they are held accountable for their yield by the board. Whatever they improve or add in the sense of value, it needs to be quantifiable.

Another issue is the extreme bureaucratic and hierarchical team structure they use. Flexibility is not on the menu and office politics are very common among members of these teams as their managers or Black Belt are usually more concerned with the results than each individual team member. What is also problematic is that each member of these teams also has his or her own non-Six Sigma activities and responsibilities in the company. They are in perpetual multi-task mode and as that is proven to be a big no-no in each and every reliable published research paper, it is baffling to us. These people swear by it, so there is that.

The last framework we would like to clarify is a bit of a strange one because it is only used in one very particular area: software development. It is called Agile. Scrum, by the way, is almost the same thing with some (minor) differences, but it is practically the same, despite what people will say. Why we put it in the list between general frameworks is because more and more companies have internal software development teams, or organizations are reliant on partners that will use this framework in a way or at least parts of it. To describe it as simple as possible, you could state that Agile is the LEAN equivalent for software developers, but it does do a couple of things differently.

Like LEAN, it is based around user functionality and they add functions to a piece of software over time to make it better in any way they can, or however the client would like to see it done. So, just like it is the case with LEAN, the end product can turn out to be something completely different when the project is finished. This is a possibility when you use LEAN, but LEAN tends to be less extreme than when using Agile. Mostly this is due to the fact
that a client contacts the company with a request to have something built according to certain specifications and exigencies on what it is supposed to be doing. LEAN is different as the company itself takes the initiative and with Agile it is the client that makes the first move.

In practice, it will go a bit like this. A client comes up with some sort of wish list or a list with specifications the product needs to abide by. The head of the team then makes a planning when the team creates a certain function. Planning is very rudimental and a bit like freestyling in a rap battle. After each implementation, they launch an update of the software and they send it over to the client who gets to play with it. After having experienced the new version they gather feedback and pass it on to the development team.

What is very good with this way of working, and one of its redeeming qualities, is that a lot of testing is done. Much more than normally would be the case. This way the team can ensure that the client can see firsthand how the product is coming along. It is also a very time-efficient way of working plus you can make absolutely sure that the product is turning out exactly how the client wants it to be. As a company, that is a big win as you are never spending too many resources on the production process.

Because of the methodology behind this way of working, this approach is very goal-centric and organized as it is easy to keep track of what is done and what is still to be done.

The exception to these advantages is in the way team communication is handled. It is a weird way to work like this as you essentially create some kind of organized chaos which the team captain, or scrum master, then tries to give a semblance of order. Yes, these words might sound a bit harsh and unfounded given that a lot of companies use this method with great success, but bear with us as we will show you why.

With a simple to-do list, you keep things simple and it makes it easier for everyone to see who is where and what remains to be done. It is all about making and keeping things simple for everybody. The downside of making things easier instead of simplifying, which is a no-no—see a couple of pages back—there is a massive risk that a complex product will never ever see the light of day, if it gets off the ground at all. Some products are not possible to cut into smaller pieces so you can work with Agile as most teams stick with it vigorously and even when the project is not suited to be made using Agile, without thinking they still stick with it as it has worked in the past.

But what really messes up Agile-based work, is that you are dependent on your clients, or more specifically, what they say they think they want a product to do. A massive majority of the people has a general idea of what they want or think they need and the same goes for companies. Software
development stands or falls with the details. This results in clients that change their minds and they come up with more things they want to see added. When your base architecture is not suited for these new functions, you are in deep shit as you will have to start over.

The thing is; we rather keep the old system working and update it accordingly. The clients will be in agreement as costs will rise as will the time needed before completion. As a team, in this case, you can count yourself lucky as you are still in the production phase, but just as often it happens that a product is finished and they come back with their new list of ‘to-add-functionality’ and you are stuck with the same problem.

Not knowing where you want to go, the final product in this case, complicates everything needlessly and that makes the costs of production impossible to predict. Whenever there is a vacancy in an IT-company that works with Scrum or Agile, look at the qualities people must have in order to be considered for the job. You will start to notice a pattern there.

Due to the sunken-cost fallacy, not wanting to pull the plug because of having invested a lot/ too much time and/ or money in something, a lot of complex products are eternally ‘under development’ and will never be finished. A lot of governments that need to revamp their digital infrastructure suffer from these issues with all the ensuing security issues you hear about on the news.

When we sum this list up, the only conclusion is that Agile should only ever be used for the creation of simple functional programs and nothing else.

There are tons more of other frameworks that try to do the same thing slightly different, but these three are the big boys and the rest is derived from one or the other. There is no need to discuss more of them because of this reason.

When used wisely, these methods can contribute tremendously to any company, but they are nowhere near the perfect solution we would like them to be. A business is such a complex organism that there is simply no miracle cure. Unwise use of these methodologies and philosophies, as we have seen a lot, is usually the result of hoping that it is in fact the miracle cure the company needs to get matters back on track. Just like you need to know yourself, you also need to know the company and which tools are more suitable to certain tasks. While carving marble with a fishing rod is far from hazardous, fishing with dynamite is.

All approaches do have a common denominator: changing the numbers in the favor of the company and the customer, to a lesser extent. Financial security. Making the most out of the skills people possess that work for the company is missed completely. There is no balance and you know by now why that is bad news.
Innovation is making small changes to improve the position of the company, but is all so one-sided. ICE on the other hand is about bringing balance to an organization so a company can grow and, eventually, ascend. To understand how we do that, you are finally ready to see how ICE works. Do keep all the previously mentioned things in the back of your mind.
The two pillars of ICE

“What a miracle life is and how alike are all souls when they send their roots down deep and meet and are one.”
Nikos Kazantzakis

ICE aims to do a couple of things, among others reducing, and eventually eliminating, the aforementioned problems companies frequently face. The first thing on top of the to-do list is balancing out the numbers versus the people part of the company’s security layer. By giving people a new rule set to play with, employees will have a greater degree of liberty on how they do their job as this will increase their efficiency and responsibility. When the staff increases their knowledge, they can grow in a professional way, but that goes without saying.

That is only half of the proposed solution. Personal growth is equally important and can serve a plethora of purposes. When people are given the time and possibility to invest in themselves, it will create an evolving community within the company. Ideas will be exchanged and those will not only lead to personal innovation, but also company-wide innovation will receive a massive boost in ways that were previously deemed impossible. In turn, the business will grow naturally and healthily where the company as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In order for this to succeed, there are prerequisites that need to be honored. First and foremost is it an absolute necessity for the board to know the state of the company internally. They will also have some homework to do in figuring out where they want to go: what identity do they want the company to have, i.e. how do they want to ascend. You could state that the company needs to know itself.

The same goes for all the people working in and with the company, not external parties though. The employees and freelancers need to know the company and its heading. Not having everybody on the same page will lead to some of them negating the work others are doing whether they do so knowingly or not. ‘One team, one task’ should be the general theme of all employees instead of ‘free for all’ as it is nowadays.

In order to achieve this, there needs to be communication from the top to the bottom and the other way around. Communication is the exchange of ideas. Exchange implies information going from A to B and from B to A. Given that most companies do not communicate internally and instead merely pass down orders or directives, this will require new processes to be put in place. A couple of minor changes will be needed, but we go over those in Part II and Part III.
Like we have said from the get-go, ICE does not need a radical overhaul of the organizational structure. This is where it shines: complementary small and meaningful changes with big and positive consequences, if done right. There is however one slightly larger change to implement, but it will not in any way change how things are done or impact employee responsibilities. The results that ICE yields are hard to put in numbers and, like most things, they will come only when most of the work is done, at least the visible results.

All of the above is what makes up the first pillar ICE’s framework.

The second pillar of ICE is the most important one as it will not only benefit its employees, but also the company itself on a much bigger scale than the first pillar. But to get to the second, you do need to have the first one in place and running properly. This is the part where people, staff, whatever you want to call them, have invested in themselves, professionally speaking, they get the opportunity to invest in themselves personally and get to work on that. It will be quite some time before the company can really start picking the fruits of their labor, but it will undoubtedly pay off big time. With a broader horizon, you see more possibilities and options. This means more choices and more choices equal more freedom. More freedom means more happiness all around.

This sounds nice and all and, above all, deceivingly simple, but there is a lot more to it than a nice slogan to pitch this idea. We will have to explore this for a little bit so you know where it is all coming from.

Life, for most adults and some kids, is nothing more than ‘eat, sleep, work, repeat’ during the week and during the weekend they can do something for themselves like hobbies, social activities, cleaning the house, whatever comes to mind. Pretty much all the things they have no time for during the week as they have to work, take care of the kids, taking them to hockey practice, etcetera. Free time is scarce is the understatement of the year. People are alive, but they are anything but living as everybody is following their patterns and structures and do it all on auto-pilot. There is simply no time to think outside of that box that is filled with routines, responsibilities and obligations. It makes no difference if you are the general manager or that you work in a call center; this applies to everyone without hardly any exceptions.

Coming up with new ideas or a different way of looking at things we do or do not do is out of the question: we all do the same thing. We are all concerned about the same things and we all look forward to the same things. It should come as no surprise that we, due to this, all come up with the same ideas and we all share the same vision of how things should be as well as the same solutions for all our problems given that they too are the same.

Striving for our individuality and self-development has lead us to losing that very thing which forms our self: knowing what we want, what we truly want
deep down inside, and how to proceed in order to obtain it. For any business that is crippling to its development as the company cannot possibly differentiate itself to gain an edge and/or come up with new revolutionary ideas. A company is much than what it tries to sell to or provide for its customers: it is the reason they buy it from you and not someone else that tries to sell or provide the same thing. Sure pricing plays a role, but that is only a minor one in most cases.

Having the time to liberate our thinking is the key here. Like it costs money to make money, it takes time to free it up. That is why it is imperative for a successful implementation of ICE, that after you have found out where you are and know in what direction to take the company. Take your time and focus on freeing up time for all employees. If you are still worried about the costs for doing that, you do not have to worry about a thing. Yes, it will cost a little as an upfront time-investment which might lead to a small increase in expenses for a limited time, it is nothing to keep you up all night. The most extreme we have seen is the hiring and training of a couple of employees who can fill a couple of different roles within the enterprise. In this case it was a very large company, relatively the costs are negligible.

The moment you do have some spare time lying around the office, although an hour a week for a full time job should suffice in the beginning, you can get started with the process of gathering internal feedback through the newly created feedback loops. Only when that is running smoothly can you turn a part of your attention to the people-part of the company: their development, growth and ascension. So for now, we can start with introducing you to the first pillar in detail.
Part II

-The first pillar: company structure and organization-
The System

“I have an existential map. It has “You are here” written all over.”
Steven Wright

With the help of the division, you should know by know what kind of company you run, own or work for. Now it is time to have look at how the company works.

While we have given a general overview of companies, there will always be smaller or bigger differences. Some might be simple, some might have a little complexity to them, but most, If not all, should have little to no influence over the implementation or processes behind ICE. It does pay off to have things mapped out though, just in case you get lost or confused on how to proceed when you hit an unexpected roadblock. Making an organizational chart will be the start of your journey, plus it will keeps things tidy and makes it easier to see how the hierarchy works as well as communication flows. Also when you run a small business, make one too even though it might seem pointless. We will be adding a couple of things to this chart over the course of this and the next chapter that might come in handy.

Where to start? You should start with the board and from there you work your way down to the different departments and their respective managers. If you run a bigger business with a couple of members on the board, have them join so everybody can work together and earn their paycheck for a change and have everybody bring tea and biscuits. The lines you connect the different parts of the company with, are the communication lines. These are the objective ones, not the theoretical ones as those will only serve to confuse and make it a mess comparable to a child’s drawing. You can either use two different colors: one for the communication that goes down and one for the communication that goes up, or use arrows.

We will repeat this again, but only use factual communication and not how you think it is or should work. To be able to do this, you have to actually get to know the company you are running as well as each department: we said that it would be more fun with all the board members present, which is true, but it also has them walk around the company and talk to people so the distance between the board and the staff is decreased. There is no need to rush this: it takes time to do it right and it will take a lot more if you rush it and have to do it over again. Another benefit is that you will be able to quickly identify areas that have need of a shakeup, or a wake up if you prefer.

Now, pay attention if you are running a project-based company, or if a part of the company is working according to some form of project-based framework. Due to the complexity of team composition and the flow of communication throughout each sector of the business, you will need a BIG sheet of paper as these things usually require a bit more paper than you
would expect. You will also have to put in the roles of the different people, instead of the departments you would otherwise write on the paper. Six Sigma, as most companies use it, requires a little less room as they are all answering to the board directly, so they can take up some space on the side of the paper.

Why not do it digitally? Because with the use of paper it is a lot more fun as you can use crayons, pastel chalk or something else and it makes it a lot more tangible as you can hang it up against a wall in the boardroom as a constant reminder of what you are trying to accomplish together.

As much as we like to keep things simple, you must have realized by now that it is not even remotely possible to keep things simple when you have to deal with big companies and/or already established systems as they have been polluted over time with additions and other complexity increasing trivialities. Would it be preferable to build a new system from the ground up which you then can phase in over time? Definitely. That is not the focus of ICE though, so feasible, it would not be, as Yoda would have put it. The good news is that we have a build-in workaround within ICE. The organizational chart is not yet finished though, so we do that first so we can obtain some helpful information.

This information is focused on how employees experience their work and responsibilities, their private lives, internal communication, the use of the employees’ time and if the staff knows the company and vice versa.

You could have all your managers get the required information without any problem and have them send it to the board members. The problem with this approach is not that people lie to their boss, but more that they will not be telling the whole truth due to fear, office politics and status/ego. At least, that is our experience. Half-truths can be even more damaging to a company’s efforts to improve how things are run as they are usually discovered when it is too late and it will hamper the entire process.

Some companies will opt for contracting an external impartial party to conduct interviews or have people fill out questionnaires. Not only is this costly and time-intensive, sooner or later you will have to do option two anyway as it is part of ICE and the only thing that could be considered a big change. So what is behind door number two? This entails the creation of a communication department.

‘What?’
‘All companies already have one.’
‘This is nuts!’
‘Why make another one?’
This department is special as it will be purely about internal communication while the original communication department still handles external communication and the like. In order to avoid confusion, give this new department a bad ass name like ‘The shadow council’ or something inspirational. These people are important for your company so don’t fuck with them by giving them a goofy sounding name. Cough... –orange belts- ... Cough.

So what kind of people do you need to occupy seats at the council’s table? It is no rocket science, but we will give you a general idea of what you might be looking for. The most obvious one is that they know their communication and do not have need of emojis to express themselves properly. These people must know the company through and through, or are making that a priority. Also they need to be able to talk to people and build rapport easily, and, part of that package is, that they need to be impartial at all times. Lastly, they need not fear the board and must be able express themselves as liberal as possible vis-à-vis the board as they will be reporting directly to them: they say what they have to say the way they want to say it, pretty much. No beating around the bush here or political correctness.

The shadow council will not only be your headquarters for everything ICE related, they will be doing the gathering of information continuously and consistently as this is your company’s lifeline, they will also serve as the board’s direct line to the work floor. That last one is important so the board knows what the actual fuck is going on ‘down below’ in the real world. With that out of the way we can go back to our cute drawing exercise.

By now you have mapped out the company and its internal communication streams, where it flows, where it stagnates, with the help of the questionnaire we have provided in the back of this book, or your own. The council should have made some sense of the data so you can get out your crayons and the sheet of paper you have lying around the boardroom. This should paint a reasonably clear picture of which departments are doing well and which ones need a little help. We are not talking numbers here, but it can be helpful to have some numbers so you can compare notes on recent ‘improvements’ and how it actually helped when you set them against the data you have gathered.

When it comes to your (project) managers of all kinds, it is usually a good idea to know if they are people- or number-orientated and which (part of a) department falls under their responsibilities. People-people running a number-orientated section can create friction or deliver lackluster results and the same goes for number-orientated managers in a people-department, or a section thereof. Congruency is not only a word that can net you a lot of points when playing Scrabble or a general principle; it can solve a lot of problems that seem to make no, or very little, sense. Consistent congruency
on all levels makes life a lot easier for loads of people and companies, but we
digress.

One thing that will jump out when looking at your (board’s) handiwork, is that
communication passes down the hierarchy without any hassle.
Communication flows that go up and eventually reaches the ears of the
people in charge or that would in any way benefit from hearing the message
is not without its fair share of problems. Reasons are, among other things, not
wanting to bother the higher-ups, it might reflect badly on someone, or not
caring to pass something on are the usual culprits in a message not going up
the food chain. Another very common cause is not admitting that there is a
problem or not liking how things are done within a certain department.
People keep their lips sealed as complaining is a big taboo. We cling to our
status for the same reason we answer ‘Fine’ when someone asks us how we
doing while we are anything but fine.

Two things of note here; the first is the creation of a disconnection between
the top and the bottom of an organization. Not very important while you are
doing nothing but crushing numbers like a professional wrecking ball, but
quite disastrous if you intend to make changes based on your knowledge of
the state in which the company finds itself at any given the moment.

Another issue is that if you do want to grow and do things better, you will
need to learn. Learning through the mistakes others have made before you is
one way to do it and making mistakes yourself is the other. When problems
are blocked by egos, they cannot surface and thus you will never know you
have made a mistake and consequently cannot learn.

Over time, the costs of these festering problems will add up significantly. This
will push you further to grow, streamline and innovate to stay ahead of an
invisible snowball that is coming down the mountain. That is a shame as all
you had to do was listen to be able to solve an issue.

That direct line we spoke of to the work floor gives the board an opportunity
to actually listen to what others have to say. That is in and of itself a big win:
you are given an opportunity to learn. The council has a pivotal role in this,
and it also explains why impartiality is so important for members of the
council: they need to weed out clutter, interference and filters. They are just
one bridge between staff and board whereas most of the time, there is a
whole bureaucracy standing between the two parties and all apply their own
opinions and filters on the matter.

To this end, it is very important that employees can easily find the council
members, that they know what these people do and why. When someone
has need of a safe place, they can come to them as well, but not if they
have been metoo’d by co-workers or managers or similar situations. That is
more the expertise of the human resources department; they handle sensitive
information that cannot be passed on liberally to everybody. The council is more for people so they can speak their minds freely with the goal of accumulating information which is then handled discretely, without requiring specialized knowledge or psychology degrees.

We are aware that his is a thin line, but with great power comes great responsibility and all other applicable clichés. Of course, everybody is free to draw their own line, but that is up to the company and how each person chooses how to handle certain situations. Still, we recommend a strict separation of these two very different types of situations. Why we recommend this is when lines start to blur or when it is unclear where the lines are, emotions will provoke a chain reaction through all of your carefully gathered objective information streams which renders them useless in the process.

You could state that this is the people side of the organization, but to keep things handled properly, both the numbers and the people need to be considered as a whole and not as two separate entities. The paradox is that they both have to be checked, accounted for and organized individually so they do not pollute or interfere with one another. Anything not related to results or numbers passes through the council and goes directly to the board who will take appropriate action. Numbers are kept as far away from the council as possible and are presented to the board as they always have been whatever and however that may be.

Both make up a functioning company and should be treated as such. This can only be done when they are used as objective values and not as subjective or relative values. Impartiality and bluntness are important for that to succeed.
Where are you (going to) now?

“The only thing worse than being blind, is having sight but no vision.”
Helen Keller

To summarize, you now have divided your communication streams in two separated streams: one for anything people-related and one for the numbers, which remains unchanged. You also have a way to get feedback about the state of the company, or at the very least you, or the members of the council are busy gathering it. The other ingredient is your ‘as-is’ organizational chart with your communication flows and a basic understanding where what type of manager(s) is/ are running shop and how they are doing according to staff and the results you have so far.

Adding all of these variables together will give you a pretty good idea of what kind of company you are dealing with, the hierarchy, the level of internal bureaucracy, information bottlenecks that might still exist despite the creation of the council and, lastly, the crew’s general morale thanks to the questionnaire and other gathered data. More information never hurts anyone, but turning that information into knowledge can only be done after some homework assignments.

It is good to know where you are now, but only if you know where you want to go and when you have figured out how you want to get there eventually. We are not talking about you personally: this is purely from a business perspective. Whether you like it or not, every enterprise has an image or reputation. If you, the board, could choose one, anything really, what would that reputation be? The trick here is leaving out the success-story; becoming the best in the sector, making the most profits as possible, et cetera.

Drop the money- and status-descriptions and try to see how the company can contribute to people in general or the planet as a whole. Protect the rainforests? Building orphanages? Donating software to third World countries? All very charitable to be sure, but do any of these activities have anything to do with your company? Organic growth is what we are after here; make a goal a logical path to follow based on what you do or contribute by selling what you are already selling.

Besides the contribution to the lives of others and the other obvious uses for your marketing department, you give your company an additional layer of differentiation to set it apart from others. For instance, you can, assuming you run a printing company, invest some money in the protection of Indonesian rainforests. That is a bloody great idea and a very good cause. But when the paper you use comes from trees which are chopped down in a Brazilian rainforest, you have defeated your own purpose. Not to mention the hypocrisy and public outrage when the public, or a journal gets wind of it. The
fallout would nuke your organization despite your best intentions. Again, congruency is important here.

Make no mistake as this is not quite as simple as it might seem at first glance. By the way, just so you know, there is no need to invest in charitable causes. When you invest in research with positive changes to reduce pollution or poverty, these kinds of things are all very good ways of setting yourself apart. You could see it like a form of external innovation for a possible good general cause.

Next to the obvious goal of making money, you now also have an extra goal to work towards. Just to keep you busy and change things up a little. Now it is time to have a look as to how you want to accomplish whatever it is you have set your mind on. As the board usually sets out broad objectives, we are going off script for a bit and get down and dirty with the details.

Whatever the goals are you have set, it is important to know how the board wants to meet the targets they have set for the company. Since this is not about numbers, but about behavior of the company, for lack of a better word, the company will need some basic set of rules. Important with this is that there need to be rules, but these need to be as few as possible but all of them need to be clear and known to all to avoid liberal interpretations and confusion. To crank up the difficulty level of this assignment, these rules need to be about what the board wants to see, or see done and not about what they do not want to see or do not want to happen.

To give you an idea of what we aim for here, these examples might give you a good idea of what you are, or are not, looking for when making these rules.

“Lunch break is not more than one hour long.” This is not a good rule as it is vague and open for interpretation. “The lunch break is one hour.” This is much better: simple and impossible to interpret differently.

“Do not come to work dressed like a pirate.” This is not good as people can still come to work as a Furry, R2D2, Napoleon (which could be good if they work in an appropriate museum, but we are getting off-topic here), Flipper, Pac Man, etc. You get the picture why this might not be a suitable rule. “Wear a jeans and a white T-shirt.” Is a good rule: simple and clear.

“We will behave like professional civilized people.” We have seen this one on posters in offices like national statements. People will all agree that this is a good rule. We, however, do not share that sentiment as it is open for interpretation. What is civilized? What is professional? It all depends on a lot of things that are not so very straightforward and it depends on the sector as well. Horrible rule. We do not even understand why you would need a rule for this in the first place as on day one, one can explain to a rookie how to talk to clients and basta.
“In case of a disagreement or a fight, cool down and talk it over together with a member of the human resources department present.” This would qualify as unnecessary use of ink and paper. This goes for most rules though. With even just a little of common sense, most rules can be scrapped or thrown out. When you have maybe a couple of rules that are deemed important and not very obvious, is that it will make life a lot easier and simpler for everybody and it is a lot easier to get everybody on the same page: ‘one team, one task.’

‘Normal behavior’ is one of those terms that everybody will take for granted, but no one ever asks what defines normal behavior. All you really need is a baseline to hold people accountable and responsible for more than the numbers they produce and the targets they reach or not. Who you give this responsibility to is up to the board: either human resources or the council of the wise. How you do that depends on the values the company tries to uphold.

To stick with the theme of having people all going in the same direction together, it pays off to have them work together. So when employees have some time to kill, they can and should help their colleagues. This is quite logical and happens a lot already, but it should not only be limited to the same (subsection of a) department. Have them see other people and pick up some knowledge how things are handled in other parts of the business. This is for the managers to…ehm…manage. Improving social cohesion and understanding who does what goes a long way to the improvement and creation of a happier and healthier work environment. Consequences of this way of working is that teams can get more done in less time after a re-adjustment period and they also learn who does what as well as who they can and cannot help.

When you combine the above two ways of handling how departments are run and, to a lesser extent, work together, you will greatly reduce office politics because it will be more about accomplishing a goal together in more than one way. Employees that are slacking, backstabbing or both, will be easily exposed as such. This will become even more pronounced when employees know what the company aims to do besides making money. When people know how and to what they can contribute, it will also add recognition and another layer of depth and meaning to their daily activities.

“Why? That is already the case, no?”

In theory, yes, that should indeed be the case. Unfortunately, we take the commitment for granted and that is where the problems lie. We will go deeper into this subject as it will have other implications down the line. For now it is important that employees know about that direction taken by the company, or what course is laid out by the board.
When people feel and know they are part of something bigger and have been given the possibility to contribute outside of their job descriptions, they experience more meaning in their work routines. Give them a way to voice their ideas so the company can explore these. Why? People who are on the same level in the hierarchy, all have a very similar way of thinking. The differences between the levels in the way people handle problems, come up with solutions and what they value, make it so that ideas that are generated from below the board, all fall in a category the people at the top could never have come up with and vice versa. All employees need to know that they are heard and watch the magic happen.

Now, the company should have functioning rules and, after a little while, a cohesive society where people work for a little more than only money. To really make this concept lift off, most employees will need a tad bigger incentive. Nevertheless, it is a great start for employee-engagement. We still have a lot of unused resources lying around the office. These resources are the skills people possess, but are not or barely used during work.

When staff is helping each other out when they have not much to do, they will quickly realize that they are better at certain activities than others. Nothing out of the ordinary as each person has a unique skillset. From all the skills that make up a skillset, only a part of those skills is used to complete the tasks for which they receive payment. Skills like these might have been honed throughout the years with the help of hobbies or previously by having been working for another company in another capacity.

When a company is not taking advantage of these (un)honed skills, or at the very least very valuable skills, it is wasting a deep pool of very nutritional water in a drought. Give employees the possibility to come up with ideas of their own on how they can use these skills and put them to good use for the company. Allocate an hour, maybe two, per week and let them have at it.

This will have a couple of benefits that might not be apparent at first. The first is obvious: you let your employees diversify their work activities through having them do something they themselves have come up with from which not only the employee, but also the company can profit or take advantage of (later on), it will also greatly increase their motivation which will result in a positive effect on the normal daily routines. In this way, the company can profit in a myriad of ways by stepping out of the status quo that a work relation between a company and an employee is solely based on hours worked and the activities performed during those hours. The biggest plus though, is that the company’s employees will no longer, or at least a whole lot less, are operating on auto-pilot-mode as the monotony is broken.

‘But…but…but…?’
Worst case scenario? Your whole IT department likes to do woodworking and starts to make stuff the last two hours on a Friday together. After a while you might have some sawdust on the floor, but you will have custom made furniture for everybody. What is not to like? Seriously... do not freak out and give it a shot. It is comparable to a Friday afternoon drink as most offices have, but know it is a bit different and people do not get drunk at work. Big win in our book.

We know. We know. Time. It is always time. Everybody is always busy, no time to dick around. Yadda yadda yadda. Deadlines coming closer. Stress levels rising to insane heights. It is all a part of what people consider to be normal. True. It is a part of our life, unfortunately. Sometimes you are indeed buried beneath a ton of work. Sometimes stress does get a hold on you. True. Why are they true for pretty much all employees and businesses? Because the way you handle things the same way you have always handled things, but over time, a lot has been added to this equation while we are still doing things the way we have always been doing them. It is no wonder people are burned out, stressed out or tapped out. So, things have to be done differently if you want to have any hope of getting anywhere at all.

To be able to get anywhere, we need to free up some time. With a couple of small changes, we will free up a lot of it. That is coming up now.
Time

“Any man, who can drive safely while kissing a pretty girl, is simply not giving the kiss the attention it deserves.”
Albert Einstein

ICE stands or falls with your ability to manage your time. The boss’ time, the time employees have for their ‘extracurricular activities’ and the time used for each and every person’s work related activities all need to be managed properly. This requires a little bit of knowledge on time management on the part of each individual. That should pose no problem whatsoever or, in case it turns out to be an issue, it can be solved with a course of an hour of what time management is and how it can be used. Use practical common sense and most should be fine.

The other part is more about how the company uses or fills up the available time its employees have during the work week. For a regular full-time job it can be between 32 and 40 hours a week to do what must be done. Most people will not need 40 hours to get things done for except maybe peak times as all companies have some, depending on the sector they are part of. The use of this time, or better said, the proper use of this time requires some minor adjustments to the organization of various work-related time-sinks that have a tendency to gobble up precious time without any benefit whatsoever.

First and foremost is it important to know who does what and who is responsible for certain things in each (subsection of a) department. We are not talking about people within the departments you work with from time to time; we are talking about everything and everyone company-wide. A lot of sections of departments have to work closely together like, for example, marketing and sales, or legal and production. The bigger the company, the truer this will ring. Walking over to legal when it is on the other side of the building might seem like a nice walk, but time-efficient it is not by a long shot.

You do, however, need to know who you need to talk with or call before you have an entire department trying to figure out who they need to talk with you about a specific subject. Not only are you wasting your time, but also the time of about half a dozen people. Even if it is only for one minute that is almost a quarter of an hour gone for no reason whatsoever. Not to mention that all these people will be distracted from whatever they were doing before your call or take a trip to the other side of the building.


Everybody needs to know who does what and where. Put up a cheat sheet on one of the office walls, in each and every department, of the company’s structure and each department can fill out the details and staff, et cetera.
Make copies and voilà, done. Remember the organizational chart the board had to make with communication lines? Most of the work is already done. What a coincidence!

How many times we have witnessed companies of which the organization was nothing more than a bunch of headless chickens running around trying to find one person to answer a question was disturbing to say the least. It gets worse when an organization has not only just one office building in one place, but multiple in more than one country and someone needed to talk someone else in another time zone. Baffling. Know the company and the people working there, no matter where they work.

When you think that this is no big deal, you can go ahead and keep doing what you are doing the way you are doing it now. For each and every suggestion we have listed in this chapter, you will undoubtedly think the same thing: “This does not make any difference.” You would be right, of course. But you would be missing the point: when you keep things the same, just slightly different, but when you pull out your fancy calculator and you start compounding all these small differences, you will be surprised how much it will add up when you bunch it all together. An added benefit is that people will not be interrupted all the time for non-issues and random bullshit. That brings us to reducing interruptions and why that is so important.

You have heard plenty of times that man, as a species, is not able to multitask. Taking a shit while playing on your phone does not count. Still, a lot of those phones end up miraculously in the toilet more often than people would like to admit. Why do you think companies try to make them as waterproof as possible? Hint: it is not because we go showering with them. Either way, we are talking specifically about activities that require a bit more focus than flexing butt-muscles. The reason we are no multitask champions has to do with flow, work flow.

Flow is a state in which you enter some kind of super focus to bring the task at hand to a satisfying conclusion. During this time, this super focus, you will feel like time loses its meaning and you are really ‘getting into it’. When you want to get something done, this will help tremendously and will magnify your competence and production. Colleagues asking how your weekend was or someone else calling you with some question or reminder will take you right out of the ‘zone’.

This might seem like it is not a huge deal. You can simply answer the question or answer the call and get back to your work. That is true, but you will no longer be in your flow and your concentration is broken. It will take at least 15 minutes to get back into it. However, when you are dealing with a complex situation, problem or task, this recuperation time will increase greatly depending on the complexity. If you look at the time lost over a week or a
month, even a day, you will come to the conclusion that a lot of energy is lost or wasted.

Multitasking will only add insult to injury. When you have a lot of things on your plate, you will be forced to switch between lots of different activities all the time. When those activities are all of another nature, say calculus and talking with clients which is a social activity, your brain activity will be all over the place, all the time. Getting into flow is not going to happen. Ever. You will be able to do your job, sure. However, you will do it more sloppily and more slowly. Your phone keeps falling in the toilet and you will never be able to catch it in time.

There are a lot more ways on how to improve your flow or getting into it easier and more quickly. The problem is that it is impossible to make a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach as what works and what does not; it is highly dependent on personal preferences and intelligence. By the last one we mean if you someone has a clear disposition towards one of the seven, or eight by now, different types of intelligence as well as the way they learn best. The best thing to do is try a couple of methods out and pick one that suits you best. What you can do as well is create your own way based on what you experienced as helpful from the run of the mill methodologies. You will wonder when you have been using one method consistently, how it is possible you get so much done in such little time.

To streamline the reduction of disruptions, it pays off to have a company-wide implementation so people know what they are getting into, how things are handled not only in their department and they also know how things function in a general sense. To give you some inspiration, we will list two very successful tricks that have helped a lot of people and organizations to get things done properly.

The first is the introduction of a so-called ‘Question hour’ twice a day. Plan the first in at the start of the day and one right after lunch. During these periods personnel can ask all their questions to anybody they need an answer from about whatever it is that is bothering them. This could be a question one might have for a colleague at the same department, someone at another department or office, and, when needed, clients or people outside of the company like suppliers. If communicated properly and everybody is in the loop on the new question hour system, and we mean EVERYBODY, situations can be solved quickly and easily as everybody is available at the same time, unless they are calling with someone else at the time, but you have an hour to get things straightened out. This might take a little bit of a transition period for most people and certainly for people outside of the company, but it will be well worth it.

Whenever you encounter something that needs fixing or clarification, write it down on a piece of paper and save it for the question hour that is nearest.
Only do so if you yourself cannot find a proper solution to the problem after give or take 10 minutes. With experience, these questions will decrease rapidly and will increase your staff’s professionalism and independence. If done correctly, your employees will not only increase their knowledge of how to proceed to deal with certain situations as they will be learning from their previous questions, answers and solutions, everybody will also get a better understanding of who does what and how others like to tackle things through their proposed solutions. Self-esteem will reflect all of that learning which, hopefully, will transform slowly in knowledge and finally wisdom.

A lot of people have tried to lynch us, or hang, drown and quart us during board meetings and general staff meetings for our next proposal. That proposal is simple and elegant, yet effective: shut off mobile phones, tablets, smart watches and any other type of digital communication device. Yes, you read that correctly: all of them need to be turned off. The main reason people have a hard time focusing on any kind of activity or job at hand, from work to driving, are these infernal machines filled to the brim with delightful distractions.

“But…but…but, what if something happens when I am working.”
“But when my kids are at school…”
“Emergency…”
“Blablabla.”

When you are on a break, be our guest and check your phone. If something happens at school with your kids, how often is that truly an emergency? Never. Besides, if it really is bad, the school has the number of the company and if they do not have it, you can give it to them tomorrow. Problem solved. You can probably imagine what went down when we announced this to the employees at any type of company. Simple solution: the rule is no phones turned on during work hours. Done. Need to call? Using a landline works just fine. As a company, it might also be a good idea to block all types of social media, for obvious reasons. YouTube can also be blocked and for a as well. You get the picture. Just our two cents. When people are complaining that they are bored, you know it is working and they can go on ahead and help their not-bored colleagues. If there is a fine example of a win-win-win situation, you just found it right here.

Surprises can be fun, but in the context of work, it tends to be less of a fun thing as it will mess up your flow whenever an emergency pops up. Yep, shit happens, but not all the time as people like to say. In our experience, it is rarely the case that something is an actual emergency. Why that is? We have a different view on what constitute and emergency and what is a problem.

To us, emergencies are best described as ‘This needs to be fixed right now, or we had better get started on building an ark.’ How often does this really happen? Yeah, almost never. Problems are less serious than an emergency:
‘We will have to handle this by the end of the day or tomorrow, otherwise it will turn into an emergency.’ All the rest is most likely a minor issue that will either solve itself or it is a structural problem.

Most things that pop up and cause things to go haywire can be dealt with by sticking heads together and then come up with a solution, implement it, test it if there is time and you are done. The root causes of most issues that occur are structural issues that, generally speaking, have no real solution that can be implemented by a team to mitigate it. Usually its origin is found within the company structure as it will be replicated in some way throughout the entire production process from its point de départ. That is due to the System the company uses. Whenever something like this comes to the attention of the people who get to deal with it, it must be flagged and communicated to the responsible managers and the shadow council as it most likely has to do with people-related business as well as a number-component to the cause and consequences. Solving structural problems, as a result, will require a two-pronged solution. So yes, another reason why a lot of organizations have trouble eradicating structural problems as they only look at them from a cost and consequence perspective focused on numbers.

We told you that it is important to know who does what. We have explained why we have a good reason for that, but there is also another reason we hold this concept in such a high esteem as we do. When you know what someone else is doing, you can also ask yourself when you would place yourself in someone else's position, if you would want to be bothered with whatever question you have or answer you need. If the answer is ‘No, I would not be want to be bothered with this.’, you can go on and look for somebody who can actually help you or provide you with the answer you seek.

People, when given the chance, can and will behave very responsible and can and will come up with adequate, creative and cost-effective solutions, all on their own. Trust the people you hire and give them the liberty to make their own choices and decisions. When every little thing has to pass through management and their calculators, doing things by the book, if you will, leads eventually to an authoritarian work environment where management is pelleted constantly with a mountain of pebbles and not a single person will get the chance to do what they were hired to do: their jobs.

Have your staff ask if they can go to the toilet because the number of calls answered was lower than a month before will only lead to a vicious circle where no sane person with any degree of self-respect will want to be found dead. Unfortunately, these companies exist, no joke. The thing is that most are not as bad as these ones, but most do it in one way or another. Even very basic things we take for granted like clocking in every day is basically the same thing. It is just a different way of implying that you hire someone, but you do not trust them to work the hours you and them have agreed upon, so you check it through such a system. Distrust and trust are both a different side of
the same self-prophesizing coin. The difference between trust and respect is that the first is given and the second should be earned, never extorted or enforced upon someone for it to be genuine. Strictness decreases flexibility and freedom. Neither is helping production in the right direction, it simply says something about management and the business. It is unhealthy to be sure.

The last simple but highly effective trick we employ to free up some additional time is the use of the company’s communication tools it has at its disposal. Let us take e-mail for example. E-mail keeps pouring in throughout the day and, frankly, 99 percent belongs to the garbage category as it does not help anyone do their job better or is in anyway informative to most employees. Yet we put half the company in copy and sometime sneaky devils put someone higher up in blind copy to let them know how hard they are working. It is spam. Nothing more to it than that.

We suggest that mail is preserved for client communication if you cannot reach them by phone or for addressing structural problems and flagging them. Calls are to be made during ‘happy hour’ or in case of an emergency to check if the person you need for the job is available for a face-to-face chat. Use a phone primarily to reach clients, as we have already said.

Meetings have a tendency to take up a lot of time as well. We advocate using them only when there is a decision to be made by the people that attend the meeting. No discussion necessary as the problem and all the sides to the story should be known beforehand, so all there is to it is voting and maybe a round of explaining why attendees want to vote against or in favor of a motion.

There you go; more time to spend on important things. That being said, you have probably realized by now that getting used to a new way of doing things will require time before people can actually notice a positive difference. Building momentum does not happen overnight or with the snap of a finger. Patience is the key as the results will follow way later than you might like. The good thing is that when you have picked up enough momentum for it to be noticeable, you will look back in hindsight thinking ‘Gee, that was fast’. A last piece of common sense to help you keep your hopes realistic: the transition period grows with the size of the company. Bigger company means more time needed for everyone to get used to the new ways.
Feedback loops

“The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism.”
Norman Vincent Peale

Now that we have an hour or two, three to tinker around with, we should put it to good use.

The first order of business is the creation of feedback loops throughout the company. What they should be gathering feedback on is dependent on what ideas come up, but initially it should focused on how people experience the jobs their do and what they think can be improved. A small note though; employees need to know what the council does and why, but they also need to know that they are very important to making improvements and that they will be heard. If a company fails to involve their employees in this, they will not take any of it seriously and you will be wasting your time and theirs.

Anyway, the gathering of feedback is one of the main responsibilities of the shadow council and this should be done on a regular basis. It can be done by talking to other employees or have staff answer questions on what they think can be done better and how others would think certain changes would impact their activities. Active contribution is important but do not harass your employees daily with all of this to avoid being seen as the company’s Gestapo. That would be quite counter-productive.

When you add steps to a process or do things differently, it is necessary that the other parties involved, from other departments for example, know what is up and that they can see or judge for themselves how things have changed, if at all. The reason is that when things change for the better for one department or sub-section, it might have a negative consequence for others and that is something that should be avoided. It is vital that people that might be affected by changes in the system agree to try to doing things in another way. We seek unison and not friction between colleagues. Meetings are to be held and each sub-section should have an appointed spokesperson, or manager according to preferences, who is well-informed on the general sentiment and opinion who can vote for or against trying out another idea.

To be able to actually see and measure the effects and consequences of possible improvements, you can only make one change at the time. This is a no-brainer of course, but we feel that we have to emphasize this because most people forget that when you are implementing more than one change, it is impossible to come up with pure and untainted data in any way, shape or form. Why? Often, organizations implement change after change but when things go sideways, they have no idea what went wrong or why. Changes in one department can and will have consequences for others that work with that department or are dependent on it. You will never know with certainty if
changes will conflict with previous implementations or if they amplify small problems. Often people will opt for more changes to combat these issues, but all they do is make them more profound. It is like building a house without a roof and to fix it you built another story on top, also without a roof, ad infinitum. All the while the foundation is only suited for two stories, let alone more.

Coming up with a good idea is one thing. Implementation and checking what the actual consequences are and if this idea does what it is supposed to be doing, that is a whole other ballgame. People will have to execute these ideas and they will take time to get used to new procedures and changes. Doing things differently will always have unforeseen consequences and, often, these will only come to light after a little while. The way you choose to do things might eventually follow the same way as rules in general: too many and you will surely create conflicting changes and that will only serve to complicate matters, something we are so good at as the human race. Patience is key.

“Do new ideas have any criteria of any kind? “
- 'They sure do.'

First is that they should make work simpler and better for the people it will affect directly. Another is that changes should have no negative consequences for anybody else in any other department, whatsoever. That is all to it. Simple isn’t it?

So you need to be patient, but how patient is hard to tell as it is heavily influenced by a couple of different factors. To be able to actually see the results of any change, it is highly dependent on the swiftness of the production line from start to finish. Results, the visible or quantifiable part at least, comes last at the end of the chain. Only then can you start evaluating or, if you want, measuring. You will need data from each and every part of the company that could possibly have been influenced. Do not take just one production cycle though: it takes time to get used to things so you should have a hiccup here and there as that is to be expected. It would be wise to take the take from at least two, but better yet, three production cycles.

This might seem quite straightforward to most people, but in reality, we all want to get things done as quickly as possible, even if it is just for the sake of getting things done. This right here is the reason life tends to be so overly complicated while it does not need to be so. You can start screaming to your microwave to hurry up because you are hungry, but does it make a difference? Nope.

Speaking of patience and time, there is also something else that benefits greatly from both: training of employees.
Whenever a company hires new employees, they better make sure that they are trained properly and that the necessary time is invested in that training schedule. It does not matter if you hire a veteran or a rookie as both will have to get used to their new environment and the organization’s culture. Sure, a veteran will have need of less time to ‘get’ the job part than someone who got fresh out of college. Both, however, do need to learn how things are done, who does what, guidelines, et cetera. That is a lot to take in no matter how you look at it, but the sooner your new recruits get the hang of things, the less time it will cost in the long term.

Learning the fastest way possible can be done by failing a couple of time. No matter how, why or what; you cannot just throw people in the water if you do not know if they can swim. When you hire them, no matter how well you screen people, you assume that the people you hire can swim a little bit a short distance, but you never know for sure. We do not know why, but most companies make this mistake and the same applies to most rookies; thinking you can swim is not the same as actually swimming.

Something else that is also highly underestimated is the value newly hired staff brings to the table: a fresh pair of eyes. What might seem logical and obvious to people working longer for a company, might not be very logical or obvious to the new guys. Knowing that is not only very important to improve training, but it can give the company a new angle from which they can take a look at existing processes. What constitutes ‘normal’ is subjective and dependent on what you are used to. When you live in a country where there is a civil war going on for years on end, that state has become normal for you. So normal is not so normal as we would like to think. Do not dismiss new employees from the start as they bring something unique with them. To capitalize on that fresh pair of eyes, all you need to do is take their training seriously and listen to them.

When enough changes have been made and tested, you might notice that people enjoy their job a slightly more, that they become a tad more productive and efficient and usually need less time to get things done. That is pretty awesome, but there is more. People will also be working more closely together with less conflict as they all have a better picture of what is happening inside the company and how things work in different places. Noses start to turn slowly in the same direction but there is one last problem to deal with.

That problem is a luxury one; what to do with all of that spare time employees seem to have on their hands. Even more spare time? Yes. What would be the best way of allocating that time for the company?

Making more money? Nah, the organization should have that domain handled. To us, that time should be used for something completely different; it
should be spent on gaining wealth for the company and its employees so it
and they can finally ascend and become truly rich.
Part III

-The second pillar, Ascension-
The system

“You aren’t wealthy until you have something money can’t buy.”
Garth Brooks

Now that there is more time available throughout the entire organization which can be used in a meaningful way, employees will be happier or hate their jobs a bit less. Things are looking up. Congratulations.

Very welcome side-effects that you must have noticed by now, if you are applying the stuff you read here and not just read this book, is that there are more ideas floating around the different departments than you probably know what to do with. Not to worry as that is a good thing as long as you keep testing things properly and that each and every department gets their turn to tinker. One of the goals of ICE is to keep improving and this is the way you can do just that. These ideas are still pretty logical and make more sense from a theoretical standpoint like this book. Later on, the ideas will become more and more exotic.

A good comparison of this process would be to reading a good book; once you have finished a good book, other books in the same category or books from the same writer will be added to your reading list of books you want to dive in. Do be careful that you do not clutter your system with useless additions that have no real or a small relative value as it will complicate your system unnecessarily. Perfection is achieved not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing more to scratch.

When you are implementing and testing new ideas, you still have freed up time as only one department can be busy with that at the same time. How to proceed then? Use it to carve out your own individuality as a company and as a person.

‘What else could your organization do besides making money?’

Do you remember that question from a couple of pages back? The company is slowly turning into a society within society and in order to set it apart from the competition, it will need a personality to become an ‘individual’. You could set up a pro-bono department for just a couple of hours a week if you are a (respected) law firm, just to name something from the top of our heads. If you run a bounty hunter company, you can organize a pirate hunting party once every six months and sail along the coasts of Somalia. Not sure if that is an actual business or sector, but it should get your creative juices flowing. Possibilities enough.

Whatever the board might have in mind, if the cause is a just one, there will be no issues whatsoever in obtaining the support from the employees. This will
also strengthen the sense of commitment as well as the notion of being one team, dedicated to one or two tasks.

While the company finds its purpose, it might be a good idea that all people working for the company are doing the same. In a way, this is nothing new as people often have to write some kind of plan on how they can improve their skills or knowledge to become ‘better’ employees. This could be anything from following some (seriously overpriced) courses or re-taking ridiculously expensive exams to extend the validity of their certificates. Strengthening strengths and reinforcing weak spots. Overall, most of the professionalization courses and seminars do not add anything of real value and if they do, it will not be used really as people have a tendency to work on auto-pilot after a while. That is why we use a different approach.

Life consists of more than just work. You could say that there are four different domains. We use four and yes, that is arbitrary. We distinguish between your social time like spending time with family or friends. Your professional time is time used on work and work-related activities such as driving to work or home at the end of the day. There is also me-time or time spend on what you like to do such as hobbies and other things you do not need other people present for. Body-and-mind-time is anything related to your physical and mental health. Sports, meditation or walking in the woods if that calms you down all belong here.

There is overlap between some activities as playing basketball in a team is your me-time, it is healthy and a social activity. Some things have less overlap and some a bit more. What every activity you do has in common is that they are all intertwined and that all emotions and feelings caused by something flow over from one domain to the others. When you are constantly bickering with your husband or wife about silly things, you do not just leave it at home when you go to work or do something else. You bring that with you. We have explained this in our philosophy that each thing you do can affect another thing positively or negatively.

You should also understand by now that most people have no idea what they want exactly. It is mostly just vague notions and clichés wrapped in a weak justifications and/ or excuses. People simply have no time to think for themselves as they are constantly bombarded with requests and things they need to do. Or they are just really tired when they do have some time at home. They sit on the couch, turn on the TV and stay there until it is time for bed. A lack of time or procrastination is the big player here.

“What the hell do these things have to do with any of this?”

The focus of this employee engagement as we like to call it is twofold. First it is to get them involved more in the company’s contribution to society besides paying taxes and the employee’s contribution to the company and its goals.
and aspirations as a whole. We have done so by implementing the first pillar and this line will be continued with the implementation of the second pillar. The biggest part of the employee engagement is to get them involved in their own lives and the choices they make and will have to be making at some point during their career. Preferably way before that time, but that is simply never done due to the above reasons.

When the company is helping their staff to gradually take back control of their lives, it will increase the responsibility they will experience towards themselves and everything they do. That is good for them and good for the organization that pays them. What the connection is with the four domains of life, is that all things are connected and flow over from one to the other. The responsibility they will feel and the positive vibes that are the result of the increase in positivity will improve their mentality at work, among other things. “Employees need to know themselves and the company and vice versa.” Now you know the full extent of this statement.

What might seem like a simple plan, this is by far the hardest to execute properly. Setting up a meditation boot camp in an office somewhere in the building is not going to work. This is neither a spiritual journey as some might say nor some kind of hippie crap. We have heard all kinds of ignorant judgments. No, this is all about facilitating the self-actualization because every person is different in what they want and how they learn.

No matter how or what you do to achieve this, in the end it will be the people themselves that will have to put in the work for it to work. Most will be reluctant to participate or plain hostile towards these ideas as they either do not like change, or they think they have already figured it all out. A full barrel cannot be filled. We advise to let these people be as you simply cannot satisfy everybody all the time. The beauty though is that you only need one person to explore themself and to find out what he or she really wants. This will ignite a spark that will not only multiply someone’s inner drive, it will show as well. What happens on the inside is seen on the outside. It will not be long until it will spread like wildfire from top to bottom as skepticism will be eliminated once people have seen what the results can be.

When you have set up your organization where ideas are not only heard, but actually considered, tested, implemented and evaluated, this proverbial spark will not only generate more general ideas for improvements. The ideas that will appear within an ICE-based society, which a company is by now or is becoming, will not only be more diverse, but much more creative. The same goes for the solutions. The energy of a lot of people with these insane drives, as they are often described, can be channeled with the help of the company’s vision and the business can finally ascend as well.
If that does not sound great, we do not know what does. Maybe it could be that it sounds too good to be true. Than you will be happy to learn that the book is not yet finished, we have the theory, but not yet the practical side of things handled.
The road to individual ascension

“Hold fast to your dreams for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.”
Langston Hughes

By now you must have realized that here is a big difference between thinking you know what you want and knowing what it is that you really want. The best way to discern between the two is tricky, but generally speaking you could say that the things you think you want are suffering from a lack of specifics. The things you think you want are often not much more than vague descriptions or filled up with ambiguity. Another way of recognizing them is if, for some miraculous reason, everybody else seems to want the same things as you. This is not always the case though, so if you come across some, ask yourself why you want certain things. Usually there is not a really solid foundation as to why you want something specific. Getting married, buying a house, wanting to climb the corporate ladder are a couple of examples. Most of these things boil down to either an increase of status, income or they have an emotional reasoning behind it. They are nothing more than coatings for a hollow interior and have nothing to do with something you actually want to do. People want a wedding but not a marriage. People want to be richer but not necessarily more responsibility that usually comes with it.

You love somebody, so you get married. Why? Because that is how it works? That is how it works according to whom? You can have a perfectly healthy relationship without ever getting married. So why would you get married? Does it change anything? If anything changes, look at the divorce rates. That should tell you what changes most likely.

You can make as many babies as you like, provided you can afford them, but do you really need to throw an incredibly expensive baby shower? Hardly. Do you even want a baby? Sure, sometimes women more than men in general will have an evolutionary urge to make babies, but is that really a bad things if you do not have this drive? We do not think so.

Everybody seems to want to buy a house eventually. Why? So you can have your own place to call home? What is wrong with an apartment or a condo. What is so bad about renting something? Why would anyone shackles themselves voluntarily to being stuck in one place, a golden cage?

Finding a good reason for doing something is easy, but thinking about what you really want and making a decision upfront and then doing it is a whole lot more sensible. We have a tendency to do something and rationalize a choice after the deed is done and action is taken. That is the world upside down. When you know in advance what you want and you have a very good and specific reason for wanting something, you have something to aim
for. Whenever you are wandering aimlessly, you automatically follow the herd as that is the way we are wired.

The problem is that the herd has no clue whatsoever as to what you want, let alone why you want something. They will not care about any of that either. You see, a herd is nothing more than a collection of people that have forsaken their individuality, their free will. Maybe a ‘group of people’ is the wrong description. A group of sheep walking around for no reason might be more accurate. Herds sometimes have a shepherd and the shepherd has dogs and they have to know what is good for the sheep as they are the ones guiding them. The sheep have relinquished their capacity to think freely. The road to individuality requires self-actualization. That is the pursuit of dreams and goals and both cannot exist without thinking freely, unburdened of what others might think is good for you.

We firmly believe in processes over goals. The only exception is this: setting you own goals in order to achieve and do what you want to be doing. There are however a couple of things that you will need to keep in mind when setting goals for your dreams. Some goals will bump heads with one another and some goals will outright make another impossible. The biggest mistake people make when setting goals is setting (a lot of) small goals. The usual culprit and reasoning behind doing that is the fear to fail. This is due to a dream being very important to somebody, but not important enough.

“What?!?”

When you want something so bad, you give it your absolute best, the last thing on your mind is failing. It does not even register on your radar because you are going for it as it is simply that important and the prospect of the feeling of complete happiness is so overwhelming that it will wash away any feeling of doubt or insecurity. Of course you will need a plan of attack, but we will get to that a little bit later. Going for ‘it’. It does need to be specific as we have said already, otherwise you are just going and that leads to very pretty place called nowhere. That is the theory. Now it is time we have look at practical reality.

On paper, this sounds nice and easy, utopian even, but this will be the simplest lesson in complexity you will ever have to learn. Thinking is something we are not doing enough. We think, do not get us wrong, but it usually stays at a shallow level. Thinking critically is the same, except that we also have to be critical on our own thoughts and dreams. We are not used to doing that, so that will make things a bit tougher to do.

Every single time you think about something you really, really want, you will come up blank. We are no exception here. If there is something we really
want, it is almost always about possessing something in one way or another. What we want to have.

I want to have a Ferrari. Great. You save up the money and you buy one eventually. Then what? You can tell people you own one, you drive around in it and you feel good for a while. Do you really think that that sensation will stick around? Is it really making you happy? Is that state of perpetual happiness really for the rest of your life? Nope. Far from it. A sense of accomplishment is something that is related to feeling happy, but it is not happiness. It can cause those happy feelings to shoot through your body, but it is not an unlimited supply for feeling happy.

What do we want? What do you want? It seems we have a problem on our hands here. We know not really what we want. We do know what we do not want. So how are we to proceed if we have no idea about our own dreams and what could make us happy for a very long period? This is problematic. There is fortunately a simple solution. Before we get to that, you do need to know what we are trying to accomplish here. We aim for consistent long term happiness by spending your time, or even money, on something you can do. It is about the DOING.

Shopping, for reasons that allude us completely, makes a lot of people happy. Going shopping your entire life will not do that. All those little shots of endorphins and other happy chemicals in your brain are all short-lived and will not change anything in a fundamental way. Feeling happy for a little while is not permanent as these feelings will eventually leave your system and you will have to go shopping again. You could say that it is a political correct cultural drug addiction. It is utterly meaningless. This is anything but long term happiness.

‘Do you really need that huge flat screen?’
‘Yeah, look at it. It is awesome.’
‘But why?’
‘So I can see all the details better.’
‘So you have bought a bigger TV to see better?’
‘Yes.’
‘If that is the case, you need glasses and not a bigger TV, man.’

You could say that shopping or any other form of short-lived happiness is detrimental when you are trying to keep up with the ebb and flow of your endocrine system. So,... then what? Look for something more spiritually sound? Find a higher purpose? Become a monk? No. It is, or should be, more about being happy consistently and non-detrimental to your health and wealth from now until they put you in the ground, more or less.

‘Being happy’ as a concept has been warped as its meaning has been changed to mean that we try to buy it in one way or another; it is something
that is happening TO us. All of these temporary happiness inducing things are little shots to keep us going and keep us doing what we have always been doing. There is no consistency to speak of. The only control over our state, our happiness, we think we have is not doing the things we do not like to do, things that are frustrating and/or hard to do. If you are wondering why we never think critically on our own being and choices, it is because it is pretty damn hard as sometimes they tend to lead to very unpleasant conclusions that are hard to deny or run away from. Avoiding being unhappy is easier than being happy.

Back to the topic at hand: what is long term happiness? To us, it is all about doing something that is not dependent on external influences: you have to do it, or you could say that it is something you are doing. When you are able to do something consistently and for a longer period of time, that will require you to do things you might not like doing, in some cases. It is nothing more than a temporary discomfort, a small sacrifice or price to pay.

This is important because doing things that are unpleasant or hard we avoid like the plague, generally speaking. Most of the time though, in order for us to be able to do something that will make us consistently happy, we will have to learn new skills or gather knowledge about things we know nothing about and that is frustrating, so we do not do it. We are a lazy species. The problem is that it will stop our growth because we do not know for what reason we learn new things.

To use an analogy, you could look at it as if you have been living your entire live in a dark cave. After years of total darkness, you, voluntarily, walk out of that dark cave you have known your entire life. The moment you come out, the sunlight will burn a hole through your skull and it will hurt like hell. Will you be the one to wait until the pain subsides or will you be the one to walk back in the safety of the cave, never knowing what is on the outside?

Happiness, as we have established by now, is also not about owning stuff, but it is about what you do with your time (and money). So to come up with a workable definition, you could say that long term happiness is about doing something consistently without it taking over your life, like eternal shopping sprees, or ruining your life in the long run, like drugs. With that in the back of our minds, we go back to that bloody annoying, gnawing question: ‘What do you want?’.

The problem with this question is that is a non-specific question. Dreams and goals need to be specific, as you know by now. That is why, when asked the question, you can only answer with a non-specific answer. ‘How are you?’ is a different question than ‘What do you feel?’ It is only logical that their respective answer will also be very different.
Instead of asking someone what they want, we should apply the same logic here to come up with a better question. To do that, we have to combine it with the definition above and together it will lead to this eloquent result: ‘What do you want to be doing?’ We shall take a little detour so you have the proper tools to respond properly to the question.

Long term happiness is about doing something consistently and regularly. Things we like doing are the things we are (quite) good at in most cases. Your biggest goal or dream, the big Kahuna if you will, will probably involve you doing something you are good at. That is not all however. So we have two criteria: doing something you are good at and/or doing something you are not good at yet but always wanted to do. Note that it can also be something you are not necessarily doing right now or like doing right now: it can also be something you liked doing or something you have done in the past (which you liked).

Another aspect is unfortunately, also the reason why you will not find your life’s purpose on the first try: the answer to the question of ‘What do you want your life to mean?’ Ego and politically correct notions will steer you away from your path as to what is right and just. This is hard because these are ideas and opinions that have been sandblasted in your unconsciousness over and over again. Trust us when we say: forget all this bullshit as it is nothing more than the product of herd mentality and morality.

Morality is subjective and is nothing more than the preservation of the status quo. Do not forget that you are the penguin that will dive in first. The good news is that there are no sharks in the water here. What you want your life to mean is about your life and only you have something to say about that.

Whether it is something purely charitable or purely based around your selfish desires, it makes no difference; your life, your rules. So if people ridicule you for wanting to create your own pyramid scheme to because you thrive on adrenaline rushes while screwing people over, be our guest. We do want to point out that it might be a good idea to respect the law as incarceration will rob you of your freedom and consequently of your happiness, but hey, it is your life after all.

Now, when you have some quiet time, grab some paper and a pen or pencil and take a seat. Write down a couple of items for each of the criteria. So a couple of skills you possess that you like using and are good at, a couple of items that you loved to do or always wanted to do or learn, and finally what you want your life to mean in any way you want to interpret this. If you come up with some unrealistic items on one or more of your lists, do not worry, we will sort out the kinks later on. This is all about letting your creative juices flow freely. At any time you come up with something for one of your lists, feel free to add them. A little later we will add these items together to for a cohesive realistically attainable dream.
If you come up with the idea of starting a penguin shelter in the Gobi desert, do not write it down yet because we are not there yet. You can add it to a separate list for later, so you can have some fun with that. Opening up an ice cream saloon on the North Pole for tourists? Add it to the list. Become the writer for the first edition of ‘Necrophilia for dummies’? Add it in. It does not matter, have some fun with it, that is the most important for now. You will need around ten bad ideas to find one good one.

After some time, you will have three reasonably filled out lists for each criterion. What to do with it? Again, take some quiet time and again you grab something to write with as well as some paper. The first thing you do is pick any one item from your first list that appeals to you the most. Write it down.

Look at the second list of criteria and find one you want to combine with the first item you selected. Close your eyes, or whatever helps you visualize images in your head. Visualize what you see yourself doing, where you see yourself doing it and how you feel about doing that. Make the image or movie in your head as bright and vibrant as possible. What do you see, hear and smell in your head?

When you are satisfied with the image or movie, add something from list three to your already existing canvas. Is it something you are happy with? Good, write down what you have seen, what you felt, what you were doing, the whole shebang. Do not leave out the details as these are important. You could even make a drawing of what you saw, we call these things dreamscape by the way. When you are done, you can store it somewhere safely.

Wait a week or maybe even a little more before you continue. After a week, try to see if you can get back the image you have created a week before by closing your eyes or whatever it is you have done a week prior. The point here is to try to see if the image, if you can get it back vividly, will get you all excited and fired up thinking ‘This is the SHIT!’ Tom Cruise-style on the couch of Oprah-hyped. Less crazy though. If it does not, discard it and pick some other things from your list and combine them, rinse and repeat.

If you were excited by the prospect of your vision, try it again for a month or so and if each time it makes you feel really, really happy, you might just have found your Kahuna. This, like this, might sound easy, but you will most likely not come up with your perfect image, or dreamscape on the first few tries. You will most likely need a couple of tries before you get close to something workable that could be called just about right.

‘Just about right’? Yes, you will need time to polish your dreamscape and make it truly specific as there will be so many details and things that get added later. The when, why and where are most often the last to crystallize properly. That is because if your dreamscape is becoming more and more
detailed, you will start to notice other things in your environment that you never gave a second thought as your goals will be present in the back of your head and subconsciously you will be filling in the blanks over time.

During the part where you are subconsciously filling in the blanks, preferably before but that is not how it works unfortunately, it would be a good time to check and see if your dreams are realistic. Spending 365 days a year on a beach in Vietnam, sipping Mai Thais might seem like a dream come true, but you will kill yourself half way through the year out of boredom and depression. The reason is lying on a beach will be the only ‘doing’ you are doing and that is not going to make you happy in any way as you are not doing anything really. It is about accomplishing things and giving it meaning. You will need to have a clear idea on what you are to be doing from day to day, or if every day is about the same, what you do every day.

We do want to point out something important: dreamscape, if done well, generally do not change and if they do, it will only be slightly and never in any major way. This is due to things you learn over time and new experiences, but the dream stays the same. When your ideas change drastically on what you really want, this is mostly due to radical changes in your professional life or your personal life. In that case it would be wise to start from scratch when you have stabilized.

Another possibility for a radical or big change of your dreamscape is that the items on your list(s) are things you do not like to do a lot, only sporadically, or that you picked them due to lingering influences from the hive-mind and you do these things for the wrong reasons: not for you yourself. Do not fool yourself and be honest to yourself about what you really think and feel. When your reality and the actual reality are not one and the same, it is like going on a quest to find the holy hand grenade and once you have found it, it will blow you to smithereens.

This requires emphasis and we are repeating ourselves here again; this is probably one of the, if not the hardest undertaking you have ever done in your life or ever will. Within the company, when a lot of people do these exercises, you will see a lot of them throw in the towel or, in some cases, not even wanting to participate anymore as they will consider it useless for unfounded reasons. Do not be discouraged and let these people be as they will come around eventually. Only after the first penguins hit the water and they have caught some fish, will the others dive in.

On the flipside, when you finally have found a worthwhile cause, you will experience a drive that is hard to describe without the help of some fiery clichés, as we have said before. This drive is what burns away any doubt or fear of failure. Motivational speeches will be obsolete as well. The people, who have discovered this particular drive, will benefit from it in a myriad of ways but also the people around them and the company, obviously. To put a
number on these benefits for the company is impossible though, no matter what the Six Sigma ninjas and their calculators might have to say.

Now that a workable and definitive dreamscape has been found, it is time to get to work.
Deconstruction and the company’s role

“When you make a commitment to a relationship, you invest your attention and your energy in it more profoundly because you now experience ownership of that relationship.”
Barbara de Angelis

Before we can get started with reverse-engineering dreams and dreamscapes, there are two checks that need to be done. The first is to see if a dream is at all realizable and the second is there to reduce, preferably eliminate completely, the likelihood of failing to accomplish whatever you want due to external influences.

Koalas live in Australia. To sustain themselves, they eat eucalyptus and only eucalyptus. Furthermore they need quite an agreeable climate. Neither can be found on Antarctica. When you have a dream of setting up a koala shelter on the South Pole so you can hug them for the rest of your life and breed them because you love koalas and snow, you will be forced to start over. There is no way around that as the two are impossible to unite. Well, it is possible, but you should ask yourself if it is worth the hassle to start terraforming or change the climate through new technology or just build a dome there. Common sense.

Is the above example exaggerated? Definitely. We hope you do get the point: check to see what you want is at all attainable. Not only where you want to go or where you want to do something, a person cannot be at two places at the same time unless you have a very practical form of schizophrenia the experts do not know anything about. Sometimes we hear about people’s dreams that require technology that is either incredibly expensive or does not exist yet. You have two choices here: you find a work-around or you start over. To achieving anything really, you need to look at what is and not at what might be, should be or can be.

Something that gets overlooked quite often because of ideological thinking or having your head in the clouds instead of resting firmly on your neck is dreams depending on other people or parts of Maslow’s pyramid outside of your control. What we mean by the first is that whatever you aim for, you should be able to pull it off without it depending on your wife, your kids or anybody else as they too have their own ideals and choices to make. Traveling the world with your wife might sound like something that is very achievable and you work your ass off to raise the money needed, and then you see the divorce papers lying on your desk. Guess what? You are screwed and all hope of seeing the world together goes up in smoke.

The same goes for needing to have things done, or the right papers, funds, anything really that you do not want to be doing but need for some reason. You can always out-source specific things like your accounting if you dream
of having your own business, but make sure these kinds of relationships are all purely business and do not rely on them to get done by relatives, friends or family as they have a much larger chance of blowing up in your face, like it or not. Business is business.

Being dependent on social constructs is another big no-no. Retirement and the pension that comes with it for example, or any other form of financial security provided by the government might seem like a sure bet, but how do you know that all these pension funds will have enough liquidity when you finally reach the age of retirement? Who can say for sure that the age that will give you the right to ‘take it easy’ will stay the same? The answer is ‘nobody’. You have a total of zero control on these kinds of decisions but these decisions can stop you dead in your track. The bottom line is that you should not take anything or anyone for granted, but that applies to much more than making dreams come true.

When your dreams have passed these checks, the hardest part is done and you can start with the reverse-engineering of your ambitions. Grab some paper and something to write with and draw a line from one end of the paper to the other.

The start of the line is where you are now and the end is you living your dream: doing what you want to be doing. Start at the end of the line and work your way back to the starting point step by step. Say, for the sake of it that we would like to run a pizza joint one day in Mumbai. That end of the line is running your pizzeria. The previous step is having a menu and the pizzaiolos to make the pizzas and all the other staff we might need. Before that we should have the equipment and suppliers on call. Before that we might want to buy a restaurant or have one constructed or turn a house into a restaurant. We might need a license to serve alcohol and have the proper permits, learn about regulations and laws that might apply and so on.

Now, this example is quite detailed with some obvious things missing, but at first, there is no need to fill it out this in-depth. The most important part is, especially in the beginning, you will want to leave out all the details and stick with the generalities and the big items on your list so you have at least an idea of the chronological order of your to-do list.

When you are done, you will end up with a timeline and a very handy to do list to which you can add details as you go. Leave it alone for a week and when you come back to it, you can add the things you missed earlier as there will be a lot of things that you did not think of at first. When you have a finalized list of things you will need to be doing, acquiring and learning. Whether this is certain specific knowledge or mastery of skills you possess or do not yet possess is irrelevant. Do not forget the skills you already possess either as they might need some more honing over time. When you have a better picture of all of these items and necessities, you can start to make a rough
calculation on what you need in terms of funds and come up with a plan on how to make that sum of money. Remember that for most things, you will need a buffer, as running a pizzeria is fine as it is, but before it will be a successful enterprise it will take a bit of time.

Most of the items on your to do list are general sub-goals and these goals will consist of smaller goals most of the time. When you need to learn a new language that will be your sub-goal and it can consist of learning vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation or maybe even vocabulary specific to the sector in which you will want to be active. Tourism and banking will both require a very different set of words to make it your own. Then there is the question on how you will want to learn the language.

Know yourself: how do you learn the fastest and the most effective? Go to the country where they speak the language? Or are you socially handicapped and do you feel more comfortable studying online? Pick your poison as there are plenty of options to choose from for each budget and learning style you can think of. What you should be keeping in mind is that you use your strengths to maximum effect.

Now that you also know what you will have to learn and what might work best for you, we need to have a look at the money aspect as that will probably worry the most people. In the first and second world countries, a normal salary is often more than enough to achieve dreams as long as you keep your expenses as low as possible without sacrificing living. There are of course always exceptions but for most it is more about saving more and spending less on stuff you do not need. However, if that does not cut it, you will have to come up with a plan to make more. Lottery tickets do not count as they are outside of your sphere of influence.

Depending on the sum you will need, you can make some more on the side or you will have to get higher up in the company you are working for, or you will have to start your own (side-)business. Learning new skills you need to learn anyway to be able to live the dream, can be a good way of making extra money through teaching your newly acquired skills as they will improve yours and your students’ skills. It is a perfect opportunity to monetize things you are already doing. Do work out if it is actually feasible to do within the time you have left after all your other activities and, possibly, your regular job. Just remember to keep things balanced and that the money you stand to make with it is nothing more than the meaning to an end: it is about what you with it.

Sometimes people lose themselves in wanting to make much more than they would ever need for accomplishing their dreamscape and, in the process, lose themselves in making more and more money for the sake of making more money. You need a target to know what you might need to be doing, but you also need to know how much is enough, money-wise.
When you are running a company or you are one of the higher-ups in any one company, you are probably wondering what this is all about and why on Earth this is even remotely important for any organization. Well, you ask and you shall receive.

Every business has busy periods and calm ones throughout the year. Some employers even have had the notion that their employees would pretty much stop working and would only be concerned by chasing dreams thanks to ICE. Semantics aside as they are catching them instead of chasing, but they have been proven wrong slowly but steadily and they all came around. Working and getting things done like it has always been the case and will still be the most important part of any type of job; employees get paid based on the work they do. It is a given.

During peak moments or periods, all of the above will not take any more than one hour a week and a bit more if it is during a calmer period. It will also depend highly on what department someone is a part of and what is going on in the world, at least in rare cases. Nothing out of the ordinary.

So why would a company go on with the program? As not only the employees will benefit greatly, the company stands to gain a lot too. As we have said: the goal of ICE is the creation of wealth for the employees as well as the organizations they work for. So what are these benefits a company can derive from ICE?

People finding their own path will lead to individualization and accelerated self-development next to more self-consciousness. The fact that the company is facilitating it for everyone willing to put in the work and effort required, at no additional costs whatsoever we might add, increases employee engagement vis-à-vis the company they work for as well as overall loyalty. By involving staff members in the processes of the business, the infrastructure will be in a much better shape with happier people who possess a ferocious drive to make the best of any situation and to top it all off a much higher stress resistance.

The biggest profit for an organization is that people within the company all go their own way when it comes to their personal development and self-actualization. This takes them out of their auto-pilot modus operandi, increases responsibility and ownership of what they want to accomplish. At the same time it will be a more cohesive team with improved efficiency and production capabilities due to them having a better understanding of how things work and their own strengths and weaknesses. Not to mention that their skillsets will grow and alters slightly how they think and approach situations that require a little reflection.

Whenever people start to alter the way they think, consciously or not, they will naturally come up with different ideas and solutions. These are from a whole different order than what was proposed previously. This development would
have never seen the light of day if employees would have continued to
operate on auto-pilot. The application, testing and implementation and
evaluation of these ideas can and will change the growth of a company in a
more organic way. The company will evolve, provided the board’s vision
holds up and is sufficiently specific. Keeping people in the same place day in,
day out would have made all of that simply impossible.

The ascension of a company requires it to become an individual, sort of. It
makes it different from all the rest, unique. This is the only way for anyone to
achieve that as far as we know. Any individual with new ideas keeps growing
infinitely and the same goes for any ascended company. Wealth is much
more than a bunch of numbers added and subtracted on a balance sheet.

Being able to facilitate the growth, you will need to have a structure in place
to improve consistency and congruency. If either is not there, growth will not
only be bottlenecked, it will crush the company underneath its own weight
eventually. It is the same for scalability in production on a different level. Like
the question hour we have talked about to free up time and make things run
smoother, the staff will need a growth-hour, or hours if possible. Feel free to
change the name for something a bit flashier, though. What works best
changes from company to company, so try to figure out what works best and
what would be the least disruptive and implement it.

People can do this at home too, if they have seen the light before, but with all
the other obligations that await them when they get home, doing this and
facilitating all this at work is a perfect solution. There is also another reason
why people should be investing in their growth and the growth of others:
there are a lot more people in an organization, in general, than in any other
place and they will all have a different skillset and specific knowledge in
relation to their job and hobbies. At work, if structured correctly, people can
learn a lot from each other and it makes exchanging ideas less of a hassle
which improves intrapersonal relations even more. Those can fuel a
company’s success even further. The skill-pool and knowledge base the
company can turn to and use will grow exponentially.

“So your body is a temple.” You need to take care of it if you want to be able to
enjoy it and use it to its full extent. Organizations are no different in this regard:
improving esthetics is only half of the puzzle, maybe even less. Things on the
inside need to be healthy and for that, you will need to keep things running
smoothly. Eating fast-food every day is a terrible idea, but so is eating broccoli
with steak every day. The same goes for keeping a company in optima forma
works in the exact same way. When you learn how to cook, it will lessen the
times your food gets burned, overcooked or is just uneatable. Practice makes
perfect. Keep the people happy and healthy that work for you and you keep
your company happy and healthy.
And now what?

“The personal ego already has a strong element of dysfunction, but the collective ego is, frequently, even more dysfunctional to the point of absolute insanity.”

Eckhart Tolle

Patience, like with all things is what sets apart the great. Results will come one way or another. They never come when we want them to as patience is not our strong suit as a species. You do the work and when he work is done, you get paid or you get to ask for a raise. ICE is no different: you test, implement, improve and only after all that is done, you can bear witness to the results of your labor. Now, it is true that the results obtained with the help of ICE are very hard and sometimes impossible to measure and put an objective number on it. However, when descending from your white tower you can see the results and feel them but they will be immaterial, untouchable for a long time. The wealth of a rich man can be measured in more than one way.

It is very easy to dismiss new ideas when the final results lag behind the immaterial. Without a doubt, this is the biggest hurdle people have to overcome when they are adopting ICE: numbers will always have much more credibility as we are not used to question the use of said numbers. The paradox is that most problems companies experience do not stem from the number-side of the business, it is people-based in its origin as we already have established.

We fear the unknown, greatly. Horrified would be a proper classification. The European monetary union is buying up state obligations to try to increase interest rates. They do so by pumping billions in European economies. Why would they even consider this? They are afraid of deflation. ‘Deflation is bad.’, they say. Why is that a bad thing? Even the smartest people in Europe have no idea what will happen when inflation, which is bad for most people as the worth of money corrodes, becomes deflation, the opposite. These people only have a theoretical understanding of what might happen or what might be the consequences. The keywords in these sentences are ‘might’.

That is all fine and dandy, but the idea of not having even a semblance of control over the financial markets leads them to keep on doing what they always have done, or to avoid a new situation they have not yet experienced. For the record, they try everything; including throwing the kitchen sink toward it if they think it might change the situation. Not changing leads to the same situation over and over again. Stock exchange crashes are appearing more and more frequent and all we try to do is come out of it as best as we can and then we shift over to doing what we did prior to all the mayhem. Even though it is proven time and time again that what we do is far from adequate, as we base all of this on models which are theoretical in nature, we cannot change our ways due to fearing the unknown. Who is the
guilty party? We are. All of us are. Doing the same thing over and over again expecting different results each time is the definition of insanity according to Einstein.

How is this related to ICE? We have learned that ICE does have a lot going for it in the positive results department. We have also seen that there is no clear end result as it is a continual process aimed towards growth and individuality. Whenever a baby is born, as a parent, you might like to know how they will turn out upfront. You can try to turn them towards the path you would like them to walk, but in each case, it is impossible to know the outcome.

People can change if given the opportunity and the time necessary. Given that, they can adapt and evolve. Organizations are no different. Growth is always a sign of a healthy developing enterprise, but it is also quite hard to grow in a direction that would defy its very nature. You could consider that a weakness of ICE, there is no such thing as absolute control, only influence, as foolish as that may be, but it opens doors you never knew existed.

We know. We know how it all sounds as we have been in a situation where we had to defend our ideas a lot more often than we would like to admit. Try to see it like this. You find yourself in a gargantuan maze, trying to find a way out. For years you are walking around aimlessly. You are lost and you only have one desire; you want to get the hell out of the labyrinth. We make choice after choice and each one is based on where we think we are. Whenever we come to a crossroad that seems a bit too similar for comfort, we try to avoid making the same decisions that got us lost and further in into the maze.

Walls seem impossible to climb, but they are nothing more than rules and (false) securities written on a piece of paper. We cling to these rules and securities as we have been trained to see them as the structure of our lives. What we do not know is that these two things are the only things that give the maze a purpose: without walls, there cannot be a labyrinth.

Whenever someone questions the very existence or use of the maze, public outrage follows, fear to lose the security the maze offers and people lash out at the instigator. We propose that you take our hand and that you bring matches and together we will burn down the maze: paper with nothing but rules that have no use outside of the maze will only serve to keep you prisoner without proper cause to be held prisoner in the first place. We are no more than a group of monkeys that have been trained that something bad happens when we try to take or eat the banana in the middle of the cage, but we have no idea what would actually happen in case we take it or eat it.

Do we know what will happen or how the company will evolve? We have no clue whatsoever. We do know that the creation of a cohesive and functioning society will make sure that solutions will never be in short supply in
case of unforeseen detrimental influences. The advantage is that employees are not only exchanging ideas, they are learning from each other and working together. That is rare as most societies and or businesses lack unison and there is no natural balance as people try to scale the great pyramid.

Bureaucratic regulation of the cognitive dissonant paradox, also known as the maze, is, as a result, no longer necessary. Still, some people prefer the maze and that is perfectly fine as it is their choice in the end. Live and let live, die and let die as the saying goes.

Despite the fact that we live in an incredibly rich age with endless possibilities and very limited impossibilities, we still hold onto archaic ideas and limiting or, worse, self-sabotaging beliefs. We have all our own basic needs taken care of but we keep being distracted by our own self-esteem and ego as if our survival depends on it, at least in first and second world countries. We create holes we can never fill. We created and feed egos that can never be satisfied. We prefer predictable destruction than unforeseeable joy. We hold onto uncertain futures instead of kneading a predictable future in the now, this very moment.

As for companies, there is no difference between them and people as it are those very same irrational people that run the companies the same way they lead their lives. The financial department is their bank account, the shadow council a conscience and the ticket to grow and circumvent the maze. We forget that there is a difference between not going broke and growing wealthy, no matter how you interpret ‘wealthy’. Avoiding bankruptcy is another way of instinctive survival-mode while creating wealth is the path towards ascension.

A trait of any individual among others is being different from others in thinking. Freedom of thought supersedes any and all other forms of freedom. You can be a hardcore supporter of freedom of speech, but how free are you when you use the same adagio everybody else is using? When you state that you are supporting freedom of speech while being intolerant to opinions of others that conflict with yours. Does that count as being free? Having the freedom to practice a religion of your choosing is freedom? Submitting to dogmas imposed by others on your own volition seems to defeat the purpose of choosing and being free. You substitute one maze for one with flowers on the walls instead of razor wire. Voluntary imprisonment in a prison of your choosing does not seem like a good idea. Either way, you are free to relinquish your freedom as long as you do it on your own accord and you know why you might consider it at all.

Freedom of thought is letting go of ideas from a bygone era, dismissing fear because it is no more than a possible change of circumstances and choosing for the sake of it being your choice, unclouded and undistracted. Only when your thinking is liberated, is it possible to see infinite growth, untainted by
numbers on a piece of paper or a computer monitor. This process of liberation is not an easy one. You take it one step at the time. Guarantees can never be given as you will be working with people; people who might know what they are doing and people who or not quite there yet.

However, this is about doing things better, company-wise. Doing things better means that you and the company will have to do things differently if you and the company wish to succeed. Our ideas might not all be revolutionary or very original, but we have seen and experienced the results of our methods firsthand. These results are hard to compartmentalize as they are all over the place. That is a good thing as every tree grows differently, but before you can get there, you will have to ask yourself one thing:

‘Did I bring my matchsticks?’
Objection, your Honor!

“Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of a cancer cell.”
Edward Abby

Before you get to the annexes and the book you are reading is finished, we do like to address some concerns you might have or which have been voiced by others before.

One of the first things people say when we explain what we do, how we do it and why, is that ICE, to them, seems more like an ideology than a way to effectively manage a company and make it run properly. To a certain degree, that is true and understandable. The very core of ICE IS an ideology, a philosophy on how to run a business, organize it and structure it. The notion that accompanies our methodology and vision can be seen throughout all the things we do and work on: spreading happiness. This is our heart and soul and the foundation on which we have built our trade. Stating, based on this premise, that ICE is an ideology would be correct.

Different from an ideology, is that ideologies in general, are all based on thinking how things should be, should be implemented and how things should work. The word of importance here is ‘should’. They all revolve around knowing the Truth™ and working based around that. It is pure theoretical and is held far from a practical application of ideas. This (sub-)system of ideas, as it is a part of managing an organization, is based on experience we have accumulated over the years while working for a lot of different companies in a wide variety of sectors in a large amount of countries. All have been tested and applied in companies that have all different ways of doing, working and getting things done, not to mention all the different cultures with their own quirks and benefits.

Another difference between ICE and an ideology is that we do not tell anyone ever how things must be done. This is more of a general guideline with suggestions on how one could obtain certain results or work towards certain outcomes of decisions. We believe that there is more than one road to Rome and which one to take is dependent on so many variables that it would not only be counter-productive to dictate which one to take, it will also make it impossible to stick with a decision that was never made by your own free choice.

Funny enough, ICE is somewhat of a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach but requires free thinking, a well-informed and considered choice on the what, how and why. The decision making is what will lead it away from the ‘one-size-fits-all’ road as it is about individuality of a company and its employees.

Another common objection or misconception is that numbers should be ignored. At least, that is the conclusion some seem to be making after having
heard us explaining and talking about our ideas. It is true that we oppose the rampant misuse or manipulation of number-based metrics as well as the erroneous interpretations of those same numbers. We would like to add though that we are no fools; a company with its revenues making a nosedive is not going to survive a whole lot longer if they lack a decent buffer and find a way to increase their profits. In most cases there needs to be a positive number below the line. That is how the system works, like it or not. You can exert yourself trying to change the system, but it will be to no avail as it is built to keep itself intact. A company not making a profit is doomed to go down and that is plain and simple reality.

We do like to add one thing here: implementing ICE is not resource intensive and it will not require you to change anything you are already doing, but start with the preparation and implementation after you have your numbers in order (and positive). At some point while optimizing your processes and general efficiency, you will discover that the amount of time and money spent are not worth whatever you will stand to gain from it. That costs compared to the possible yields are no longer balanced. Sure, you can always keep on improving, but sometimes it will simply not be worth it as the relative, absolute or subjective value is no longer big enough. When you reach that point, it would be a time to start with the implementation of ICE and preferably before you even reach that point.

Implementing any of the ways that you can improve your numbers will yield very quickly very impressive results that compound over time. These benefits are long lasting. As time goes on, finding new and worthwhile improvements and changes will diminish. This is the reason why we advocate going this route before even considering ICE: it will result in faster gains and more profit the sooner you get to it. Also, due to the system and its numerical prevalence everywhere, you will have to come up at some point with easily quantifiable results for, say, a loan or any other form of attracting investors if you are shy of some cash. That is the system and there is no other way around it. Do be mindful on conditions possible investors might have as implementing ICE later on when everything will be governed by statistics and number-based metrics, things will be a lot tougher for no reason other than a cash injection. There is always a price to pay, but sometimes the price will be too high.

That brings us to our next point, and our favorite of the bunch: patience, patience and some more patience. Now that your numbers are, hopefully, constantly going up and remain positive, you decide to try your hand with ICE. Great! You put things in place, make adjustments, you notice that things are going a bit smoother, atmosphere at the office is improving and... that is about it.

‘Where are those phenomenal results?’
Do not worry; the results are there, you have seen a glimpse of them. A system that wants to measure anything and everything cannot measure ICE-based results as they are not number-based. Within the system, especially at first, the results are invisible. It is like going to the gym. The first months you will barely notice any difference and it will take a while of going consistently to the gym to work out before you can see any change at all. Unquantifiable is not exactly the same as invisible, but they are hard to perceive nonetheless.

Where most optimization is concerned, they are quick to produce results, relatively. That is due to it being centered around metrics and numbers as that is the domain where they do their thing. If you would put it in a graphic, you would get a line that goes up fast and later on almost becomes flat and slowly but steady will stagnate. Improvements over time will barely be noticeable.

ICE works from an inverted standpoint: people. That is the complete opposite and the graph will show that: it will look like it stagnates at first as results are barely noticeable, but after a while momentum will have to be taken into account and the graph will transform in an exponential curve that only goes up and up and up. Results you are waiting for come last when pretty much all of the work is done; you have freed up time for everybody, implemented ideas to improve things beyond the most obvious ones and finally people and the company have found their direction in life. That is the point where you can slowly start to pick the fruits of your investment.

When we explain this, people have a strong tendency to be skeptical to say the least. There are a couple of reasons as to why they are skeptical as are you, dear reader.

All of your life, you have been, subconsciously, adhering to the rules of the system, society and your ideas on how things should be done which, in turn, have been heavily influenced by everyone and everything around you. In a myriad of ways, ICE is challenging all of them at the same time and it does so profoundly. The biggest hurdle to overcome is the idea of ‘work’. Work is just work. At your job you do the work someone else is paying you to do and that is all there is to it.

Another notion that will trigger people and make them feel very uncomfortable is the lack of a clear start- and finish line. Everything in between is not clearly defined as ICE’s nature disallows doing that due to its flexibility and requiring critical thinking to shape it. ICE has a head, but there is no tail or body. Not being able to see a tail frightens people like a snake’s head while the rest of the beast is submerged in the water. Having to channel all of one’s energy in a company to make it flow through it in a direction of choice is a big responsibility that will leave people vulnerable as the board, initially, will be held accountable for successes or failures in a way they cannot hide behind. Having a long term plan or vision is obligatory and that is
frightening if you are not used to having one or developing one and sticking to it.

You could say that ICE challenges how you see you and everything else you have taken for granted. To some it is horrible and to the point of it being unbearable because it will put people in an unfamiliar state with some real responsibility that simply cannot be avoided. Stress levels will soar and they will burn up if they never learn how to deal with life. For some, it will be a massive relieve as it explains the itch they have been having but never found an explanation for or knew where it came from. It is a classical risk-reward equation but without the clearly defined outcomes.

One last fear we have heard twice, during successful implementations, was actually an admirable compliment for the people and the company itself. When ICE is implemented and executed in the right way, this will become an inevitable side-effect, but very important nevertheless as it will lead to a lot of missed opportunities if handled incorrectly.

There will always be employees or even board members with some humongous big dreams or goals that will require a lot of money to pull off. With this we mean that these dreams will require so much money that they will have no choice but to start their own business down the line as they would never be able to make as much doing the job they are doing at the moment. Most companies will not be able, or simply do not want to pay astronomical salaries for certain jobs just to keep these people in. A logical decision so these people will, for the time being, keep working at the company but they will leave eventually. No company will want to put time and effort in employees that will leave at some point, right? It makes sense, so why should they? Most will not want to, but that is a very big mistake in our eyes.

‘Why?’

A successful business, especially small(er) ones, have some success if they do what they like and they are good at whatever it is they do. It should come as no surprise that when an organization is looking to hire people, they look for people that like their job and that they are good at it. Not investing in someone who eventually will want to start for themselves eventually could prevent a successful, mutual beneficial business relationship from ever getting off the ground.

Given the enormous diversity of skills and personality any company needs, without a lot of hassle, solutions can be easily found. So is it perfectly possible that a company invests in an employee’s project for a small percentage of the profit or receives, in return a discount on services the ex-employee might provide from time to time. The options are legion. A company has need of certain skills and the employees will most likely use the best marketable skills
he or she possesses so in essence it will not make a whole lot of difference, most likely only the contract terms will change a bit.

Sometimes, people will want to do something completely different. For instance, there was a manager who wanted to open his own restaurant. The cafeteria in the company’s building was run by a franchise from a big chain, but the employees never liked the food. Through the help of some other employees, they found some retailers to provide the ingredients he wanted to use at a discount. The franchise was asked to leave and the manager is now running his own lunch-employee restaurant and at night it is an à la carte restaurant. Employees eat better and healthier at a lower price at the corporate restaurant and they are all quite happy about the quality of the food.

As you can see, some solutions are less straightforward and require a bit more creativity, to say the least. Like we have said: there are more ways that lead to Rome as long as you are able to keep an open mind and find a good way of working together and investing in each other and each other’s chances: to keep the hive healthy, you need to disconnect yourself from the hive in order for it to grow organically. More importantly is that you can only grow successful by giving something valuable back to the hive you left.

When ICE leads to the creation of a start-up, it serves only as a sign that things are working out admirably and it should be no source for concern as the possibilities it can provide to the company and its employees are way more diverse than sticking to the status quo of how things should be (done). So should you fear people leaving the company due to ICE? No, far from it. In fact, we encourage you to embrace it.
Final words

“Life is a crusade in the service of God. Whether we wished to or not, we set out as crusaders to free – not the holy sepulcher, but that which God buried in matter and in our souls.”
Nikos Kazantzakis

Congratulations, you have finished our book. What you do now is up to you and only you. Where you go, how you go about it and why you want to go; you are free to choose. Even if you do not want to do anything with what you have been reading, it is all good. Live and let live and all that jazz.

The problem with people is the same with this book or any other book for that matter: it is all words. Words are used to convey ideas, opinions, and plans. Words, as is their nature, do not actually do anything on their own. Sure, they can shed some light on the strangest of ideas, provide information or are no more than the means to pass time with one another. It is only after you start using those same words to do something meaningful with them, that they can truly be used.

“I want to …”
“I do X, Y and then Z”
“One day, I will …”

These are hollow expressions. They are meaningless and utterly useless.

Listening to other people talking about what they want to do or accomplish, you will at some point notice that they all say the same thing. They might phrase it a little bit differently, but it all comes down to the same thing. One day they might actually do what they have told you. One day they might have forgotten what they told you they would do some day. Schrödinger’s plans. They are hollow and meaningless until you start moving in the direction they pointed out, or you pointed out yourself. The people who do not talk are the people that are busy doing; they know the value and truth behind words.

Promises hold no value whatsoever for the same reason; they only have value until they are honored through deliberate actions. The only difference between a lie and a promise is that we know that a lie cannot ever be fulfilled while a promise holds the possibility of it being fulfilled at some point in the future. Neither hold value as both are only used to calm someone’s spirit. We promise ourselves plenty of things and we deceive ourselves almost just as often as a lie is the same as a promise we have made ourselves. We simply forget that we made a ‘promise’ so we did not lie. Words...

This book is neither promise nor lie. Yet, this book, as much as we have put into it, it holds no value as it no more than the means to convey information. What you think of anything you have read in this book is of no importance; you
have not done anything with it, yet. Your opinion about this book or any other matter on your mind is nothing more than a collection of words and thus, not valuable. Your informed opinion is about what you have seen and done with something or someone. That IS valuable. Not only is it valuable for you personally, but also for other people as they can profit from your words on these matters.

We are, as a species, ill-tempered. Words usually are the culprit and the person wielding those words. The pen is mightier than the sword is bullshit: any sane person would rather go up against a person wielding words than one wielding a sword the size of a big dwarf. Still, we all rather choose form over context and content. Why? Because it is much easier to judge and condemn words than actions as doing that will only require words. Condemning what someone did will require an action on our part while the other party does the thing you judge and condemn. Condemning a deed once done is futile: you cannot change the past and you cannot act on that which you cannot see or touch.

You might like this dissertation, you might not. You might act on the words in this book, you might choose not to. Whatever you do or do not do, you have a choice to make. The beauty of it all is that words can create something out of nothing. They can also push you to become more than you thought possible. They can change how you see the world around you. They can clarify your thoughts and create order in chaos. They can confuse you just as easily. Either way, we hope our words did at least one of these things.

May they guide you on your path, whichever path you choose to take, or not wish to take.

- The Dreamcatchers -
Annexes
Hi!

We are happy to see you here. Maybe it was out of curiosity that you ended up here on this same page with us, maybe coincidence, you heard someone talking about ICE or a will to make a change for the best brought you here. Either way, we are happy that we are on the same page. The first page of the annexes, in this case.

ICE, Internal Communication Engineering, is about getting everybody on the same page, business-wise while creating a healthy and, more importantly, a happy company where people like what they do so they can do it good, better and best. Long term happiness in a thriving company is the end-goal. ICE is the road towards that destination.

This will be your first step towards going on that journey. We at Dreamcatchers Inc. have written this introduction to help you prepare for that journey. In order for you to succeed at implementing changes that concern people in general, it’s mandatory to have conducted a meticulous preparation before executing anything with the hope of ‘doing it right the first time’.

ICE on the other hand will not ever be about succeeding the first time: it’s a process of continuous and consistent improvement. Still, you’ll need to be prepared and know what you want and what you can expect when it comes to the people you depend on: the people working for you. If you have a one-man business, that doesn’t mean that you can’t use ICE or implement it, it’s just a lot easier and a lot more straightforward.

Where are you right now and where you want to go are two very important things to know before going on this journey. Yet, if you really know where you want to go, why and how, it is equally important to have it crystal clear in mind: a vague idea will have you ending up in a swamp. That is, among other things, the reason we see so much unhappy or unmotivated people working at companies: they swim not knowing where to and why or how. Businesses lose a lot by having employees that come to work to work and basta. Help them help you. That’s what we aim to do here: we help you to help them help you.

A couple of things are needed for this to succeed: you need to know your company as well as your employees and the other way around: you all depend on each other. It’s a team effort and that is, quite often, an overlooked aspect of any business. That’s a waste because if you work together as one, you can do so much more and that’s without all the added secondary benefits that will come in time when utilizing ICE. But this is only a manual to get you started, we explain more and more in-depth in the book about ICE or you can check out our site at www.dreamcatchers-inc.com.
www.dreamcatchers-inc.com

We wish you all the best and don’t forget that happiness is best shared for maximum profit.

-The Dreamcatchers.-
Questions.

Some questions are hard to ask because we might not like the answers, even when those answers are the ones we seek or need. You’re the boss, owner and/or CEO. Asking questions face to face might be better albeit more time consuming than any other way, but in this case we need honest answers and those are best gotten if the people that we need them from, can give them freely without pressure.

Life is a little bit of a puzzle because everything is connected according to the shape of each piece of the puzzle. Your social life impacts your ‘me-time’ which impacts your other habits and, thus, your work; your professional life. The same goes for your staff. They all have an influence on one or the other. The good news is that you can use this to your advantage: getting things to snowball in a happier direction.

This is the reason you will find different types of questions. We have three in this case: Personal questions, questions that have to do with Work and last are the questions that are both or either, depending on the person answering and the work they do for you.

What kind of company you run depends on you, as the visionary or captain of the ship. Are you a numbers person, or are you a people-person? It also depends on the products and/or services you provide. This is the tricky part because every company needs a numbers part and a people part, but there is always one that’s more prevalent than the other. Both are equal, but it needs to be congruent if it’s success you strive for. To give you two examples: a tour operator needs to have their numbers in order, but at its roots, it needs to be a people-company: they sell happy feelings of relaxation. On the other end of the spectrum we have an IT-company selling software to schools for their administrative needs. They need to be more about the numbers because their product is not about an experience but to help others with their administration.

Problems arise when you run a company like a numbers-company while it’s a people-company at its core. To see if things work as intended, you need to know what you’d like it to be or what it should be. Results might end up being the same, but it’s the way you get to those results that shape the road taken. If you struggle, it might be wise to have a look at the hierarchy in the company. How is feedback gathered? How are orders given? Does communication flow from the top to the bottom or differently?

People-companies usually have a flatter hierarchy with much more internal communication on how the things are going. Orders go from the top to the bottom and come back up in the form of criticism or feedback. It’s more cyclical.
Generally speaking, there are four different types of companies and to get to a general idea of where yours is on the spectrum, you need to answer two questions. The first is: “Are you a numbers- or people-company?”.

The other question is trickier to answer. That question is: ‘Are you process- or goal-orientated?’. We recommend reading our article on our blog if you haven’t done so already; it’ll explain a couple of important differences. Often it’ll boil down to asking yourself if you want ‘more’ or ‘better’. This is where confusion kicks in.

‘More’ (or less) is result-driven thinking, neglecting the process of getting the results. ‘Better’ is often a strong indicator of process-centric thinking. However, that only goes if you add the ‘for whom?’ to that question. Better for the boss, better for the employees or better for the clients? Not to mention the ‘more or less’ question on behalf of the clients: thinking for them. That is not a question of better, or process-centric, but simple a numbers game. An example is making a product cheaper or more expensive.

Simply put: where does your company fall in this spectrum? Where do you, as a person, fall in the diagram? Is there congruency or is there a gaping difference? Why is that?

It becomes even more interesting when you get the answers from your staff and how they see things. Of course you’ll have to take in account where they’ll work; as an accountant will be more about the numbers than people, but sometimes they will surprise you and that’s when things get fun and really interesting for you and the company: you get to start the real challenge of implementing ICE.

With this little questionnaire we are confident that you have the tools you need to see where you stand and that you can find out where you’ll want to be taking things. In short: you’ll be well-prepared to creating a more sustainable and healthier business. Good luck and try to have some fun during the process.
ICE
Questionnaire CEOs
Hi.

Your employees get one, you get one.

The difference being that you, as an owner or CEO, need to know where the ship goes before anyone else: you’re the captain so to speak. Your experience is like a map and this, is more like a blueprint for the interior and exterior of your company. You need to know what is happening on the inside and how people will see your boat.

A boat sans engine might look really cool and be painted neatly, but it’ll not go anywhere. The reverse is also true: a truly sophisticated interior covered by a mossy rust bucket, will not attract anyone willing to shell out their wallets to go on a trip with you.

This is why you are looking at this piece of paper: to get the interior and the exterior running the way you’d like to see it to be able to take where and when you see fit. Try to have fun answering the questions you might have never thought about and, more importantly, take your time.

-The Dreamcatchers.-
How would you describe yourself in a couple of phrases?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

What would qualify as ‘enough’ for you money-wise and on a personal level? Why is that?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

What is the goal of your company besides earning you a living?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

How do you keep track of your dreams if you have one?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

How are you a positive influence in the lives of others?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

What are the things you’d like to accomplish or do in the (near) future?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
Why don’t you do those things right now?

What is your personal big dream?

Are you consistent and how do you know that you are?

How would you describe your company in a couple of phrases?
Do you have people working for you? Would you like that to change or was that part of the plan?

___________________________________________________________________________

How many hours a week do you spend working? A general estimate will suffice…

___________________________________________________________________________

What separates your company from your competition?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

How do you draw attention to this fact?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

What are your professional dreams?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

How will you (want to) attain them?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________
How does your staff see their roles in the grand scheme of things?

Is your company consistent regarding services and or product(s)? How do you know?

On what things do you gather feedback?

How do you gather feedback and how do you use it?
What tools do you use for your internal and external communication?

___________________________________________________________________________

How do you use those tools?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

What would qualify for your business as ‘enough’? Why is that?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

In what way does your business reflect you, as a person?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Is your company a part of your dreams and aspirations, now and in the future? How and in what way?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________
How often do they change?

Do they change a lot and in what way?

Are you happy with the amount of free time you have on your hands? Why is that?

How is your company a positive influence in the lives of others?

What is you’re the big goal you strive for, for your business or you personally?

Do your employees know your aspirations for the company? Why is that?
Do your employees know you as a person? Why is that?
ICE

Questionnaire Employees
Hi,

You might be wondering what it is you’re looking at. The short answer is ‘a questionnaire’.

The next question will probably be ‘why?’.

There is no short answer for this one, unfortunately. The reasons we are asking you to fill this one out is to see how you are doing, personally and professionally, and what we can do to improves things for you and for the company. We have come to realize that with happier people working here, things will improve business-wise as well.

However, before we can get started, we will need to know where we stand as a whole, to see the bigger picture. That means that we need to know who is working for us and what makes you unique so you can flourish here and do what you do best in the best way possible.

To make the necessary changes, we need to know that those changes will actually be helpful and not cause unforeseen distractions or worse. That is why we need to know from you, the people doing the actual work, what you need. Help us help you by helping ourselves. So that is what you are looking at right now.

Before you fill this out, we’d like to say thank you for your time and thank you in general.

[Name]
How would you describe yourself in a couple of words?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Have you ever had a chat with your boss or the CEO of the company? What kind of person is he/ she?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Do you get along with your colleagues?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Do you think your colleagues share the same opinion?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

What could be done to improve this (even further)?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Are you happy here at work?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Are you happy about your life at the moment? Why is that?
___________________________________________________________________________
What do you do for the company?

___________________________________________________________________________

What do you like about your job and what don’t you like about it?

___________________________________________________________________________

How does the company make money (and grow)?

___________________________________________________________________________

What is the end-goal for the company other than making money?

___________________________________________________________________________

How do you contribute to this?

___________________________________________________________________________

What separates this company from its competition?

___________________________________________________________________________
What do you think of the way communication, internal and external, within the company is handled?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Are there guidelines in place on how to do the job you do? Could you give an example?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

How are clients being helped by the company in terms of service or product(s)?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
Do you feel like your work and effort are rewarded sufficiently? Why?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Which skills or competences you possess, aren’t utilized to their full potential?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

How and in what way could you use those skills to your and/ or your companies benefit?

______________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Is there something in general you’d like to see changed around here and why is that? Name three.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
How can the company help you improve things at work or outside of work?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________