



The Bear Essentials of Business

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Author's Bio: Maxine Clark is the founder, Chairman and Chief Executive Bear of Build-a-Bear Workshop. A veteran of the retail industry, she has been widely recognized for her innovative work and is regularly featured in the media. Clark spent twenty years with The May Department Stores Company and later served as president of Payless ShoeSource. Since 1997, Clark has focused her attention on Build-a-Bear Workshop, a retail store that lets customers create their own stuffed companions. The first store opened in 1997, and there are now more than 200 locations around the world.

Author's big thought: Whether you're looking to start a business, improve an existing one, be a better manager, or hire the best employees, this book contains the insights and information you need to succeed. The best employees – and those who consistently rise to the top – are those who think like entrepreneurs.

Part One: Getting Started

Dream the Dream Supreme

- Start by believing you can truly achieve whatever you set your mind to.
- Never discount the power of a positive attitude
- Not dreaming big enough is one of the biggest mistakes entrepreneurs make.
- Think about what your ideal business would look like if there were no obstacles- financial or otherwise – in your way.
- You alone are responsible for creating your own success.
- Only talk about what's possible.
- Don't let outside forces limit your possibilities.

Let a Child Inspire You

- Kids are insightful because they look at the world differently.
- Listening to children can help you figure out what their parents want.
- Seek the opinion of kids when starting your business, even if they're not in your target demographic.

Do What You Love

- To be happy and successful in business, you must do work that you are passionate about.
- Every place you have been has helped you to become the person you are today.
- The most satisfied people are those who have discovered the greater purpose in their work.
- Don't focus on selling. Focus on connecting. People won't buy unless they have an emotional connection with you and your products.

Beware of Conventional Wisdom

- Always listen to what others have to say, but be careful about the advice you actually take.
- Conventional wisdom in itself isn't bad. The problem is that following it makes you look like everyone else.
- Come up with ways to take a conventional product or task and put your own unique spin on it. Think Starbuck's, McDonald's, and even Build-A-Bear Workshop.
- Trust your instincts above all else.

Pour Your Heart Into It

- In order to make your company successful, you've got to pour your heart into it.
- Your employees, friends, and customers are often the source of the most brilliant ideas for your business.
- Be prepared to bare your soul with others as it relates to your vision for the business.
- If you convey your passion to others, they'll quickly come to understand what your company is all about.
- The best way to build a successful company is one passionate, emotionally attached person, at a time.

Envision the Core User

- Think about the product or service you sell. Who is buying it – or may want to?
- To create brand identity, identify the core user of your product and tailor your marketing message, product, and delivery to that person alone.
- The tighter and more narrowly focused your business strategy, the more likely you are to connect to your customers with perfect precision.
- Data is great, but it doesn't address the motivation or personality of your core customer. Visualize your customer.

Imagine Your Company from the Inside Out

- Defining the personality of your company is one of the most important early decisions you can possibly make.
- Your company's personality, or culture, is like the foundation of a house. It is the foundation on which everything is built, the rule that guides every future decision and action. This choice about your company's personality will influence your brand and how customers experience your company.
- When creating your business from scratch, let all of the good and bad experiences you've encountered over the years shape how you decide to do things.
- Consider allowing employees to work flexible schedules, and embrace a relaxed atmosphere.
- Never lose sight of whom you are working for.

It's All in the Details

- Details can make the difference between a good versus a bad impression, and even success versus failure.
- Tending to the little (big) things that others may overlook will help you to soar above the competition.
- Don't get bogged down with all the little stuff that doesn't matter.
- Never handcuff employees with silly rules. Success is in the details!

Develop Strong Partnerships

- To work, good business partnerships require compatibility, trust and cooperation.
- The most successful corporate partnerships are formed between like minded companies, joined together for a mutually beneficial common goal.
- Good partners are like good friends; they'll do everything they can to help the other succeed.
- If you don't trust a company or its employees, don't do business with them.
- Put your business terms in writing so everyone is clear.
- Don't rely too heavily on any single partner or vendor.

Be Financially Secure

- Having your financial books in order will help to attract quality investors, employees, vendors, and business partners.
- Going into business under -funded is the biggest and most damaging mistake entrepreneurs make.
- If you don't have enough money, your business will struggle.
- Undercapitalized companies can't respond adequately to customer demands, complaints or suggestions.
- A low bank account balance will hamstring growth, leaving your company with little room for mistakes – or new opportunities.
- If credit cards are your only choice to fund your new venture, beware.

Put Your Plans in Writing

- Having a well-thought-out business plan is an essential component to launching your new venture.
- Any business plan should include several essential elements. Here are the key components:
 - An energetic summary of your business idea and the niche it fills.
 - A look at the company's ownership structure (i.e. sole proprietorship, corporation, partnership, or limited liability company)
 - An accounting of capital needs
 - Specific details on how the capital will be utilized
 - A review of trends in your industry
 - An assessment of the competitive environment
 - Financial projections
 - Hiring projections
 - The management team
- A good plan forces you to confront and address the opportunities and challenges facing your business. It makes it possible for investors to understand your vision. And it shapes the thinking of management and employees, allowing everyone to have a shared road map for success.

Make Investors Come to You

- You might be able to attract outside investors willing to help fund your business.
- The first step to getting money is to write a solid business plan.
- Don't be afraid to share your ideas with others in a position to help you.
- Networking is the best way to attract investors to your business.
- Seek out media coverage in the business press early in your company's history so potential investors can learn about you.
- Entrepreneurs able to fund at least part of their business growth with their own money – or with the help of family and friends- are in a very powerful position.

Part Two: Being a Great Boss

Showing a Willingness to Do Any Job

- The best mentors are willing to roll up their sleeves and help with the task at hand.
- Great leaders are always there, guiding their employees through the process, and lighting the pathway towards success,
- Get involved in the successes and accomplishments of those who work for you.
- You can't expect someone else to do a job well unless you are willing to do it yourself.
- Good leaders set the example that no job is beneath them.
- When you work alongside your employees, they'll see that you're human, just like them.
- When you work at every job, you'll quickly see which processes do and don't work.

Seek and Find Those Who Share Your Passion

- Look to hire those who share common values, interests, experiences, and passions.
- While experience is important, don't neglect to assess how well a candidate will fit into your company's culture.
- Your customers may turn into your best employees.
- Having a committed, like-minded workforce will make your job much easier.
- If you want employees who will choose you and your customers over a raise and promotion, hire with both your head and your heart.

Create a Fun Place to Work

- Everyone ought to look forward to Monday mornings.
- The more fun people have, the harder they'll work.
- Sometimes you need an occasional break from the ordinary to inject some fun into the workday.
- Celebrate the special milestones in the lives of your company and employees.

Celebrate Mistakes with a Red Pencil Award

- Consider rewarding employees who make the most mistakes in your company. Mistakes are merely part of the learning process.
- Give workers license to take risks without fear of failure or management's wrath.
- Encourage people to try new things.
- Experiment freely, and view every so-called mistake as one step closer to getting things right.

Respect Those Around You

- As the head of your company, you hold a lot of responsibility for your employees, customers, and investors.
- Create a company where people work for you because they *want* to, not because they *have* to.
- *Bosses* are in charge and dictatorial. *Leaders* listen to what their employees have to say and create a climate of reciprocal respect.
- Follow the Golden Rule: Do unto to others as you would have them do unto you.
- Coach people to reach their full potential and make the biggest contribution possible.
- Employees like to feel valuable at work and know they are appreciated. It's not just about the paycheck!
- As a company leader, realize the impact your words and actions have on everyone else.

Empower Your Employees to Contribute

- Listen to those who work for you.
- Make yourself easily accessible to employees. Otherwise, you'll miss a direct connection to your customers and a tremendous source of ideas.
- Employees are the brain trust of every company.
- When you empower your employees to contribute, you position your company to be more successful.
- Ask new hires what you're not doing that their previous employer did that could make their jobs easier and the company more successful.

Know What You Don't Know

- Don't feel like you have to do everything alone.
- The question you *don't* ask of experts can really hurt your business.
- Consider business interruption insurance in case a disaster forces you to temporarily shut your doors.
- Before writing your business plan, get experience in your chosen industry.
- Don't rely on your family lawyer for business advice. Find a specialist in the subject at hand.
- Never be afraid to ask for help.

Seek the Help of Outside Experts

- You sometimes have to seek help from outsiders to supplement your in-house resources.
- Think about your core competencies when deciding what to take on yourself, and what to farm out to the experts. Sometimes outside experts may eventually become part of your staff.
- Part of the value outsiders bring to your business is an unbiased viewpoint, with fresh ideas and legitimate criticisms.
- Contract with people who are truly experts at what they do. Make sure they are trustworthy and understand your company's culture.
- Make the terms with outside consultants clear by demanding a written agreement.

Keep Score

- In business, as in school, you must find ways to measure employee's performance and reward them for a job well done.
- When you get a letter of praise concerning an employee, pass it around as a way of motivating others.
- Positive reinforcement works much better than criticism.

- Tie bonuses to both individual achievement and group performance.
- Never castigate an employee in public or use his or her mistake or failure as an example.
- Let customers be a part of your employee appreciation efforts.

Read, Act, and Share

- A lending library is an easy and inexpensive way to offer professional development to your employees.
- By reading other business books, workers will gain better insight into your company and their jobs.

Part Three: Connecting With Your Customers

See Yourself Through the Public's Eyes

- The best way to learn about your business is by becoming a customer and looking at yourself through the public's eyes.
- Ease into the background and simply watch and listen to what's going on.
- Find ways to observe customer interactions without influencing them.
- Solicit the opinions of real customers, instead of hiring paid observers.

Learn from Your Customers

- Current customers are your number-one source of potential new products.
- Compile a dossier on everyone who buys from you. This is your best source of market research.
- In today's world, you need automated processes if you want to keep up with the competition.
- Other ways to learn about your customers include contests, questionnaires, focus groups, conversations, and observation.
- Find out where your customers live and where they like to go.
- Always ask the key question: why?

Build an Advisory Board

- If you want to make your customers happy, listen to what they have to say.
- Create an advisory board comprised of members of your core audience who can be called upon regularly for feedback and advice.
- If you seek customer input early, you'll be able to tailor your business to their specific and unique needs.
- Save every e-mail and letter you get from customers.
- To keep your advisory board fresh, stagger the terms and set specific limits on how long someone can be part of it.
- It's not a good idea to pay people to be on your advisory board, though you can reward them in other ways for their service.

Bring Out the Child in Everyone

- We all crave fun.
- Being a kid means having few responsibilities, not needing to worry about things, and knowing you are taken care of. Those are the same things your customer wants.
- Make it as easy as possible for people to do business with you.
- Customers of all ages like free stuff, to be pampered, and to feel like their whole family is welcome.
- On occasion, allow yourself to think and act like a kid, regardless of how old you are.

Spending More Money Creates Value

- Think carefully about the long-term consequences of your spending.
- Money spent wisely now will pay off for you in the future.
- You can never go wrong spending money on customer goodwill.
- You always win when you make customers smile.

Don't Cater to All Audiences

- Attracting different customers and broadening your focus beyond your core user is a disastrous way to grow.
- No matter what the temptations or outside pressures, stay focused on your primary customer group.
- Always listen to your customers first and the marketplace second.
- The demands and needs of your primary audience will surely change. You've got to keep up with them.

Ensure That Each Person Feels Special

- Your primary job is to make your customers feel special. Taking care of your customers will lead to many personal and financial rewards.
- If you give people a reason to do business with you, they will travel far and wide to do so.
- Among the required ingredients to make people feel special: quality products, attentive service, personalized communications, and involving them in product decisions.

Answer Customer Letters

- By ignoring those customers who write to you, you're missing an opportunity to create free goodwill, cultivate loyalty, collect valuable feedback, and connect with them.
- Everyone who writes to you is a current or potential customer.
- If someone takes the time to send you a note, you owe that person the courtesy of a response.
- The best time-saving device is to use technology to your advantage.
- Some tricks of simplifying correspondence: create standardized responses, personalize every letter, and keep organized records.
- Responding to feedback is bound to make the angriest customer loyal. Ignoring their comments will make them even angrier and lead to lost business from countless others with the same frustrations.

Part Four: Creating an Incredible Experience

Make First Impressions Last

- You have to work much harder to earn back lost business.
- Your appearance, dress, telephone manner, and written communications all impact how customers think of you.
- Customers begin to experience your company even before stepping through the front door.
- When it comes to impressing customers: Do it right the first time.

Turn Every Day into a Holiday

- Tie your product or service in with the celebration of one's birthday.
- Wishing someone a happy birthday gives you a perfect reason to get your customers when they're in a good mood.

Emulate the Five Pillars of Success

- The five pillars are price, convenience, product, customer, and overall experience.
- Every company must meet the threshold level for each of the five pillars in order to stay in business.
- Determine where your business stands on each of the five pillars, and identify those areas you most need to improve upon.
- If your performance is lacking in any area, ratchet it up so that you're at least meeting the expectations set by the marketplace.

Keep Inventory in Check

- Inventory should match demands closely as possible.
- It's important to have good inventory control systems in place so you can make smart buying decisions.
- It's better to reap smaller profits on a particular item than to disappoint customers.
- Let past experiences be your guide when estimating future demand.
- Pay attention to what your competitors are marking down for insight into what you might want to order less of.

Pay Attention to Packaging

- Packaging should be a priority for every company.
- A resume, marketing brochure, and clothing are all forms of packaging.
- When done right, packaging is a great forum for advertising your business.
- Clever and creative packaging gives you a chance to distinguish your products from those of the competition.

Offer an Escape from the Ordinary

- Every company can offer its customers an escape from the ordinary with small, inexpensive, and unexpected gestures.
- Emphasize those small touches that signal to your customers that they're special and appreciated.
- Maximize the customer experience by replacing the common with the extraordinary.

Part Five: Using Essential Marketing Strategies

Be a Great Brand

- A brand is a lasting imprint you leave on the marketplace.
- Think of your brand as a promise your company makes and fulfills every day.
- The time to start defining your brand is when you begin planning your business.
- Brands, like countries, have their own cultures, traditions, and languages.
- More than anything, a brand is a company's soul.

The Best Advertising is Free

- The most powerful advertising happens when one customer heaps praise on your company to another.
- To generate positive word-of-mouth advertising, you must cultivate customer evangelists.
- Evangelism is where advertising and marketing intertwine.
- Don't scrimp on spending when it comes to customer service.
- The best way to get people buzzing about your business is to show them they are important.

- Never forget to say, “Thanks you.”

Target Your Pitches

- Getting positive media coverage is priceless.
- The first question reporters will ask is, “So what?” You need to give them a good reason to do a story about you and your business.
- Follow-up is a critical step to getting media coverage.
- Make it easy for the media to cover your business by giving them newsworthy story ideas.
- Identify which reporters are likely to do a story on you, and target your carefully crafted pitches to them.

Respond to the Media

- There are many good and bad reasons a reporter might want to interview you.
- Always be prepared to address the media with a quick, honest, thoughtful, and thorough response.
- Set up a system for handling media calls, and have a point person who should screen all such inquiries.
- Never give a reporter the response, “No comment.”
- Your relationship with the media should be based on truthfulness and mutual respect.
- Being uncooperative won’t stop a reporter from writing a story.
- Always be prompt when responding to media requests.

Advertise Smart

- Figuring out how much to spend on paid advertising is tricky.
- When planning an advertising campaign choose the medium that delivers the biggest audience for your business at the best price.
- If you can’t afford prime time TV ads, consider buying “fringe” spots.
- Because the Internet is dynamic, you can tailor your online advertising efforts to fit your budget.
- Earmark a percentage of revenues for advertising.

Create Buzz

- You want people to talk often about how great your company is.
- Buzz involves people seeing others having fun at your business.
- When creating buzz, tap into the notions of popularity and exclusivity.
- Charitable events offer an effective way to generate buzz.
- Utilize your existing customers to get buzz going, and plan events that no one can resist coming to.

Use the Web Wisely

- Every business must have a web site.
- Companies without a Web presence are ignoring a valuable and crucial point with customers.
- Selling on the Internet shouldn’t be your priority. Instead, focus on building an online community that enhances your ability to communicate with customers.
- Unless you have only an online presence, the number one goal of your site should be to drive business to your physical locations, where you can deliver on your brand promise.
- Keep your site exciting and packed with information customers need.

- Register several domain name variations of your company name so customers can easily find you.

Embrace Viral Marketing

- The Internet has created new opportunities for companies to communicate with and market to their customers.
- Viral marketing is a way to spread your message from one person to another online- the same way a virus spreads.
- Spreading the word through a series of trustworthy referrals is the crux of viral marketing.
- There is really no limit to what you can do with viral marketing.
- If you have a database of customer e-mail addresses- and you should- orchestrate opportunities for these customers to tell their friends about your business.

Part Six: Growing Your Business

1 + 1 =10

- To get through all of the loud marketing messages consumers are inundated with, your offering must be really special.
- Don't be afraid to seek the right strategic fits, even if the target you desire seems unapproachable.
- Putting two seemingly divergent ideas together can create some of the biggest connections for your customers.
- Partnerships are all about working together to create something bigger and better than you could on your own.
- The smaller you are, the bigger you need to look.

Live in the Now...and the Future

- Live in the now, but with a watchful eye on the future.
- Pace your hiring and capital expenditures to match projected needs.
- Spend in advance of your needs, but not so far out that profit margins get squeezed.
- Many miss out on opportunities by not preparing for the future.

Learn From the Experiences of Others

- Try to learn something from every person you meet, every place you visit, and every book you read.
- One of the best ways to learn is by asking lots of questions.
- When you buy from a vendor, you're also buying their expertise and insights.
- Inspiration is all around you.
- Let good ideas inspire you, instead of just stealing them as your own.

Grow Without Compromise

- Don't grow your company just for growth's sake.
- Expand smartly and without compromising those things that are important to your business.
- Your goal should be to make the company stronger with each expansion.
- Expand only when you're financially, operationally, and mentally prepared to do so.
- Having a bad location is a primary reason companies fail.
- Never let a new project take you away from your core business,

Be prepared for the Unimaginable

- Having a well-devised plan will help you to weather any crisis.
- A crisis can strike at any time, and often without warning.
- The best businesses are like the scouts- always prepared for anything.
- Have a written contingency and crisis plan in place addressing a wide variety of potential scenarios.

Innovate Incessantly

- Success can often be a barrier to change.
- You must be willing to make the innovations necessary to strengthen your business.
- Introducing new products and services gives customers a reason to keep buying from you again and again.
- Continuous improvement should be a company-wide priority.

Speak in All Languages

- Make your first global forays into countries with demographics, cultures, and languages that are similar to your own.
- Not every business translates well internationally.
- Assimilate your company's operations to the local culture.
- Even if you don't expand beyond your own borders, you may still need to serve an ethnically diverse group of customers.
- Choose your partners wisely.
- Think locally – tailor your products and services to the local marketplace, while maintaining your brand image.
- Let your customers be your guides. Find out where your best customers live and listen to their suggestions when considering a new location or expansion.

Turn “No” into Your Own “Yes”

- Give employees the privilege of saying “yes” to your customers.
- If you don't have the exact product or service a customer wants, find other ways to meet their needs.
- Never forget that time is money for your customers.
- Offer to perform some services without charge. It will earn you much respect and goodwill.
- Seek input and suggestions from frontline employees on how you can turn “no” into “yes” more often.

The Harder You Work, the Luckier You Get

- Most successful people create their own luck through hard work.
- Stop waiting for your lucky break to come.

Five Questions That Will Help Propel Your Business

1. What business are you in? You need to discover what your company is all about.
2. Whom do you really compete with? To overshadow the competition, provide a more optimal customer solution.
3. Can you dominate the competition based on your sustainable advantage?
4. What are your listening posts? Listening posts can be either formal or informal ways of gaining insights from customers. Your listening posts should be your store managers, customer service agents, or even the company receptionist.

5. What do you measure, and how quickly will you adjust? Getting information from multiple sources will give you more data to make better decisions.

Part Seven: Giving Back

Good Works are Good Business

- It's not how much money you make that defines your success, but rather what impact you have on the world.
- Contributing to others is a way of paying back the universe for your own good fortune.
- The practice of partnering with your customers in philanthropy is what's known as *cause marketing*.
- When you get your customers involved in both the fund-raising and the cause, it makes a much stronger statement about the kind of company you are.

Share and Share Alike

- We all have a chance to be a mentor when we take a few moments to teach and help others to improve their skills.
- You have the power to help someone else's dream come true.

Recommendation: This book is a wonderful guide to the essential of business. I would highly recommend it to any budding entrepreneurs.

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About the reviewer: Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, PhD

Many CEO's find themselves asking "What now?" to sensitive situations that only an experienced former CEO can understand. Frumi is brought in to solve problems and often remains to work with you, as your confidante and secret weapon. She has an uncanny knack of getting to the heart of your corporate climate and maximizing your team's performance, profitability and sustainability.

To schedule a free ***Break From the Pack to Success*** consultation email ceoconfidante@frumi.com or call 949-729-1577