LET'S GET STARTED...

IF I HAD MY WAY, I'd make this a better world, one with less lying, manipulation, and self-serving behavior, and one with more sharing, compassion, respect, and decency. Unfortunately, ambition, aggression, jealousy, selfishness, and materialism are basic human traits—and it is unrealistic to think that in the workplace they can somehow be separated from the humans displaying them.

When it comes to changing the world, in particular the business world, it is clear that I will not have my way.

Understanding, Surviving -- and Succeeding

The solution to surviving and succeeding within business lies in knowing how to see, understand, and take advantage of (not fix) the behavior that surrounds you, all the while knowing how to utilize the best and most effective characteristics of your own humanity, along with your talents, skills, and resources, in a manner that allows you to get where you want to go.

Let's be honest. There's not a business anywhere that is without problems. Business is complicated and imperfect. Every business everywhere is staffed with imperfect human beings and exists by providing a product or service to other imperfect human beings.

—Bob Parsons, Founder/Executive Chairman/Founder, GoDaddy

It can be exceedingly complicated to draw fine lines to establish moral, ethical or decency guidelines for behavior within the business world. We are not talking about the obvious stuff, but rather the day-to-day manner in which a business is run and the people in that business act. It seems that a natural default position for many of our colleagues is to be constantly offended. Instead, our ongoing challenge is the acceptance of many of the realities of business.

In fact, **the negative qualities of business exist because business is run by people**, the same people who have problems with friends and lovers, who have affairs, who experience depression and temper tantrums, who lose control of their emotions, who take advantage of situations, who bully or who are bullied, who get tired, sick, disillusioned and bored, and who don't know how to deal with their own parents or children.

Business is just one more place where humans coexist. It is only in light of this fact that we can understand how to survive business and even life in general. It's all people, and similarly, *It's (Not) Just Business* is about… people.

It's (Not) Just Business is a collection of rules and ideas, maxims and mantras, offered for your consumption and consideration. The ideas come not only from my own experience in the business world (including the multitude of mistakes that I myself have made), but also from the experience (and mistakes) of my colleagues, mentors, and executives at all levels of the corporate ladder.

In the end, this book is not about changing the world. It's about helping you to recognize and use the available tools to influence the circumstances that surround you.

Business doesn't want to be changed

In my own way, I've tried and failed to change the world, although I have learned to maneuver very effectively within it. As a CEO of a company designed to provide important family protections at an affordable price, I continue to struggle to make a difference. In past years I have climbed the corporate ladder, started a very successful business, and managed countless employees and projects.

All along the way, I've seen again and again that *the business world, like the world entire, simply doesn't want to be changed.* There are countless examples of human beings trying (and failing) to change. Call it inertia or stubbornness or any other word you prefer to rationalize this core attribute of human nature. What motivates us is often beyond us. Conscious change is typically overcome by unconscious reversion. True change is localized and generally unreliable. This book is about participating in the business world, a world of extremes, where a lot of very good and very bad behaviors co-exist. Like everything else in this world, either you will conquer what surrounds you *as it is* or it will conquer you.

INHERENT CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The public be damned! I'm working for my stockholders.
—*William Henry Vanderbilt*

Business exists for only one reason: *to make money.*

This is not a cynical but a rather realistic doctrine—that a business' first duty is to stay in business. While that generally requires a fine product and satisfied customers, no one can benefit from a business that cannot stay in business. And no goal of any business, no matter how virtuous, can be achieved by a business that lacks the money or resources to accomplish its purpose.

Most businesses fail or go out of business within their first four years, and there is no sympathy for the failed.[*] Society accepts the fact that any business that cannot sustain itself doesn't deserve to be in business. We all drive past failing businesses and going-out-of-business signs every day without any inclination to offer a helping hand. In the rare event someone does offer some financial assistance, it invariably comes in return for a piece

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[*] According to Census Bureau data, one half of the businesses employing other people and a larger percentage of non-employing firms are no longer in business within four years of commencing operations. Note, however, that being out of business does not necessarily mean that the business has failed financially.

of the ownership of the business or an interest-bearing loan in exchange for the *generosity*.

People generally work for one reason: *to make a living*.

That's not to say that people don't seek great fulfillment in things other than money, but in the end we all need to eat and afford shelter. From the entry-level person to the high-ranking officer, employees want paychecks, advancement, stability, prestige, and benefits. Most people want to help their company succeed—but if the business decides not to pay you, regardless of its virtues, you will at some point (most often immediately) choose to work someplace else. In a sense we are all mercenaries, subject not to one master but two, serving the best interests of the business as well as the best interests of ourselves, though usually not in that order.

Individual perspective is the fundamental conflict

This is where we find the root of the conflict of interest that is so much a part of the fabric of corporate life; it is summarized by the simple phrase: "I come first." Despite the frequently articulated, collective goals of the company or the business unit, despite all the effort invested in strategy-setting and mission statements, *it is the fact that each person sees the world from his or her own perspective, applying the circumstances of that perception to evaluate what is perceived as fair, kind, decent, mean-spirited, and so forth.* This means that conscious or otherwise, most people in the workplace assume the role of defending their own positions, departments, projects, employees, goals, needs and best interests. Individuals seek to make more money not for the benefit of the business but for the opposite reason—for the benefit of him/herself and his/her family and lifestyle. While many of these factors can result in parody and workplace balance, the core behavior will often appear selfish and offensive. *Ultimately it is this collection of unique vantage points, not outright selfishness or a desire to unfairly benefit, that drives the apparent self-interest (including self-preservation and self-promotion) that can be the driver of most of the behaviors in the workplace.*

Ignore this principle at your peril. Accept it, and you will understand the game and play it better. Even if you are one of those rare people who do not think they come first, most other people around you will not share your generosity of spirit.

Here are some ways in which the principle is manifest every day:

- Managers want to be promoted, take vacations, and find personal enhancement just like you and practically every other person in the business environment.

- Executives and managers want to work on the things that help them succeed at their own jobs, not on the things that don't. Thus, your manager prefers anything that makes managing you and other people easier. If you do not help your manager succeed at his or her job, or if you place your manager at risk, then your manager will attempt to distance him/herself from you.

- Businesses leverage the "I come first" principle by establishing monetary goals with limited bonus pools, and personal goals are judged subjectively. Supervisors, bosses, and executives might intentionally pit team against team and employee against employee to enhance individual and team productivity. They want their people to compete among themselves to determine who will earn the biggest bonuses and who will rise and fall within the corporate ranks.

- The "I come first" principle is at work when people naturally, whether consciously or subconsciously, treat those they personally like better than others they don't like, regardless of the other person's skills or value. Subordinates and peers who are otherwise equal are not treated equally. It does happen that some people are treated favorably as a result of competence, but being liked will offer tremendous advantages, particularly over those who aren't.

- Because the power of vantage point and perception is such a powerful driver of behavior, many corporate managers and executives, even at the highest levels, feel free to indulge in verbal abuse—yelling at and humiliating employees—and even libel, slander, and defamation, treating these as accepted parts of the corporate process, with no concern for the feelings of the person on the receiving end of the abuse.

- Theft is legitimized, often as a replacement for an unrewarded perk (or a suitable punishment for unfair treatment). It ranges from pocketing supplies such as pens and paper, to overstated and/or fraudulent expense reports, to the large-scale, obscenely self-indulgent and

self-serving behaviors of so many notable and newsworthy executives.

- Objective truth is another casualty of "I come first." It is not that intentional lying is rampant as much as it is that facts evolve based on the perspectives of the person reporting those facts. Nevertheless, misinformation and outright lying are expected and even integral at times (e.g., keeping trade secrets, managing teams of employees, and negotiating prices).

- Bad employees, for a wide variety of reasons related to "I come first" (maybe they're better liked; or they are a litigation threat to the business; or they condone an exceedingly aggressive take-no-prisoners business strategy), rarely get fired. Despite their incompetence, they often remain employed occasionally placed into a position of greater protection, further corrupting others as well as the workplace.

- Finally, it's "I come first" for people who find themselves out of their league but still fight tooth and nail to keep their positions instead of stepping down. It's up or out, rarely down.

It's not just business.

Self-interest rules the day, every day. We are each wired to see the world from our own perspective. We judge everything—our importance and responsibilities, the value and competence of others, and our sense of fairness and entitlement—from that isolated vantage point.

We may think we have empathy and that we can understand the plight of everyone around us. Yet we are limited to our own narrow perspective. What we are observing can be deeply colored by our personal interests, responsibilities, loyalties and experiences.

I don't mean to rationalize self-serving or substandard behavior, nor do I mean to suggest that the corporate world consists only of bad deeds and backs stabbed. There is enthusiasm, stability, excitement, money, creativity, and even love in the corporate world. But if you really see the "bad" stuff for what it is—integral, even natural—you'll see it's not dramatically terrible. It's just... there.

So we deal with it.

ACCEPTING OUR HUMANITY

We are mostly selfish.

Studies have shown that people will take longer to pull out of a parking space if someone else is waiting to pull in. Holding onto a parking space for those extra few seconds is selfish and territorial for its own sake, an often subconscious behavior, without logic, existing for no apparent reason other than to deprive another person of something that is about to be voluntarily surrendered anyway. It is evidence of our natural predisposition to protect our territory, in the end inflicting on someone else a loss of time, as a punishment for our unnecessary actions.

This is obvious as well on any roadway when one person refuses to let another person pull ahead, oftentimes opting to play a dangerous game of chicken when a bit of generosity would offer safety and cost nothing.

Selfishness and martyrdom

Even in cases of otherwise pure generosity, many people expect something of equal value in return. For instance, instead of just asking us to write a check to a worthy cause, charities organize lavish fund-raisers. Donations give us tax deductions, personal satisfaction and sometimes big parties, political advantage and business opportunities.

Even martyrdom brings with it pride and principle. Religious fanatics who blow themselves up expect that they will automatically go to heaven (and their enemies to hell). As far as reasons go, a person may do practically anything if he or she believes it will be of some corresponding personal benefit. Unfortunately in this world, depriving others of something seems to constitute a personal benefit.

Fear and other motivators; the great equalizer

Also, we are mostly *afraid*.

Perhaps we fear the loss of our jobs, but we also fear not making progress, being embarrassed, getting punished, being saddled with too much work, having too little work (thus being perceived as dispensable), missing out on something, losing the people and things that we love, coming up short, and (admittedly less likely) watching the world end.

We are driven by emotions, intellect/logic, risk tolerance, animalistic urges, sex, desires to be wanted and loved, attempts to hide our own deficiencies, and by our complex subconscious pushing and pulling us where it will.

I'll leave the psychology to the psychologists. For the purposes of this book, there are two kinds of emotions: those that help us (and should therefore be nurtured) and those that hinder us (but should be de-mystified, recognized, acknowledged, and quietly left at home, not bottled up, ignored, or "fixed").

While businesspeople can embrace limited amounts of compassion, emotion, and sensitivity, *business' primary nature is driven by healthy amounts of self-interest, jealousy, aggression, territorialism, controlled vindictiveness, and the drive for power and prestige.*

But take heart: These traits, among others, have the power to help us; recognizing them in others also helps us. Conversely, traits like neediness or being overly emotional or sensitive, although natural, can be crippling in the business world.

In the end, our humanity is the great equalizer. The executive with the fancy title and the houses and cars is every bit as human, and just as fallible, as the entry-level employee. In that way, we are all peers.

THE FOUNDATION OF POLITICS: THE PRISONER'S DILEMMA

Much of our humanity, as well as the root of the corporate dynamic, is laid out in the classic negotiating exercise called "The Prisoner's Dilemma."*

The exercise tells us, over and over, that even among groups of good friends people generally have a very hard time trusting each other when their own personal welfare is at risk. When one person distrusts others, that person is much more likely to look out for his or her own interests and is more willing to sacrifice others'.

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* Originally created by Merrill Flood and Melvin Dresher at RAND in 1950. Formally named by mathematician Albert W. Tucker.

The dilemma is this: Two people are detained for a major crime and interviewed separately by detectives. The detectives do not have enough evidence to convict the two men of the crime, but do have enough to charge each of them on a minor offense. The detectives offer each suspect the same deal:

1. if one person testifies against the other, and the other remains silent, the betrayer goes free, and the silent suspect goes to prison for ten years;

2. if both suspects stay silent, they both go to prison for six months on the minor charge; or

3. if each suspect betrays the other, they each end up with a five-year sentence.

Each prisoner must make the choice to either betray or remain silent. Of course, neither prisoner knows for sure what the other is going to do.

So imagine that you and a close friend or co-worker find yourselves in the dilemma.

The two of you benefit most if no one talks. This requires total trust and a personal sacrifice, since you are agreeing to spend six months each in jail. Your dilemma is that if your friend decides to talk and you don't, he'll go free and you'll find yourself in jail for ten years. So as you begin to get nervous, you consider talking, then persuading and even lying to your friend to convince him not to speak. You consider talking because you don't want to go to jail. But even if your friend speaks, five years in the clink is better than ten. By the end of the exercise, you learn that *looking out for the group is very difficult to do when you aren't sure if the entire group is looking out for you.*

The Prisoner's Dilemma and corporate life

Corporate existence is very much the same. If we all do our part, work hard, and achieve our goals, we all benefit. As we do, the business earns the greatest amount of money, and more money, in total, is paid to the employees in salaries and bonuses. Society as a whole benefits.

However, if too many people do well, the best performers might end up with less, as more people share in the profits than if more people did poorly. Too many good performers make it harder to stand out and get the highest rating. Even a few top performers make it harder to be promoted.

On the other hand, if one or more others do not do their jobs, we don't want them to bring us down, and we are therefore more likely to sell that person out to protect ourselves rather than risk having that person take some of our money or make us look bad.

Just as the prisoner likes his freedom, the typical person likes money and stability and aspires to promotion. Some strive for power and responsibility, although many strive to avoid responsibility. The dynamics of the Dilemma explain why it is easy for us to want to look out for ourselves right now rather than for the whole group later. There are fewer things left to chance.

The "Manager's Dilemma"

Managers are required to act as the prison warden in the Dilemma every day—even while participating in their own Dilemma. They have employees who exist not to be productive but to cover their butts, as well as those who pretend to be very busy in order to avoid additional work, and those who cause others to look bad so that they can look good.

The Dilemma finds its way into the company's relationship with us as well.

We want to believe that in return for our caring about the business, the business will look out for us. But time and time again, we are shown that the common corporation (and its executives) will look out for itself (*e.g.*, golden parachutes and executive salaries while a business loses revenues and lays people off), so the employees feel further justified in making personal long distance calls, surfing the Internet, wasting corporate time, taking company supplies home, and so on. The formerly loyal employees decide that minimizing corporate expenses at their own risk and inconvenience is no longer worth the effort.

Everyone's dilemma

The Prisoner's Dilemma is replayed constantly, in every situation in which employees interact with one another; the more that is at stake, the more likely one employee or team may end up acting in their own interests, at the expense of (or even sabotaging) the others. This trade-off exists prominently in every situation of blame, every "cover-your-ass" memo, and every case in which one person speaks negatively of another.

In fact, it is the basis for practically everything that follows.

PERCEPTION ISSUES

The personal success story in business is actually made up of three parts: getting hired, ensuring that you are perceived as a superior performer, and engaging in whatever process is necessary to continue to be valued, retained, and moved to the next level.

You may be wondering where "fulfilling your job requirements" or "performing excellently" fit into this equation. Well, they don't. Not necessarily. Fulfilling your requirements and performing excellently are good, but are only helpful from a career perspective if you are known and recognized for your achievements. Since this book is not about how to do your job, but about how to survive, achieve and succeed, let's assume you are already satisfying your job requirements. Quite honestly, if you are not capable, even if you are perceived as brilliant, you might eventually be discovered to be a fraud (although I know of people who have feigned competence for decades).

Actual and perceived performance

How can businesses ignore actual performance in favor of perceived performance? There are several answers:

1. we don't know what we don't see (if no one knows what great things you've done, you won't be rewarded for them);

2. we trust and retain the people we like;

3. while many activities maintain objective criteria to be judged against, there are typically subjective "factors" which are used to impact that judgment, producing a largely subjective and even predetermined result;

4. there are almost always fuzzy variables in success that must be weighed right along with the rest of the performance criteria, such as the ability to build and inspire teams, sell ideas, and build relationships.

Accordingly, managers rely not on absolutes but on patterns and generalizations. Everyone is busy and finds it much more convenient to draw conclusions based on patterns and past experience rather than actual facts and outcomes.

Despite the problems inherent in relying on generalizations, including some inaccuracies, patterns do tend to provide consistent results.

For instance, it is reasonable to presume that people who show up on time and dress well are good and desirable employees. It is more likely that people with past criminal convictions will commit theft or violence again. History tells us that those who use drugs might not show up on time or work as hard as those who don't. A newly married woman in her twenties or thirties is more likely to become pregnant in the near future and may take extended time away from work, or perhaps not come back at all. Single employees in their mid-twenties are far more likely to be distracted by the lures of social exploits and other vices. And married people of all ages are far more stable, particularly those with children.

Like so many other managers, I have hired and fired enough people to know that these presumptions are generally quite accurate.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERCEPTION

Except for those jobs that judge performance solely on objective/quantitative criteria, how you are perceived is more important than who you are or what you do.

If you are perceived as smart, a hard worker, or an asset to the corporation, then you are. Once you become trusted by your superiors, it becomes much harder to be perceived negatively, and positive reviews become more automatic. Bad work is excused because it is inconsistent with the general pattern.

If, on the other hand, you are perceived to be looking out solely for yourself, then it doesn't matter whether you are or are not in fact acting in the best interests of the corporation. If you are perceived to lack trustworthiness, then your expense reports will be more closely reviewed. And you might as well be a lying thief.

Perceptions resist change

It can be difficult or even impossible to convince people that their perceptions are not true. If it can be done at all, it can take months or years,

particularly if someone is trying to overcome negative experiences. Once trust is damaged, repair can be nearly impossible. Just look at how long it takes one spouse to begin to trust another after an affair.

Everything counts

How you dress, act, speak, walk, move, react, answer the phone, show up at meetings, decorate your office, arrive and leave every day, handle stress—and every other action, no matter how inconsequential—it all matters, in every possible way, contributing to other people's perception of your trustworthiness, seriousness, competence, and connection to other people and to the business.

Corporate politics plays off these perceptions. It accepts the difference between perception and reality; it can cause great people to fail and bad people to appear trustworthy.

So "success," in this context, equals satisfactory work. Manage others' perceptions of you by behaving in a more conscious and self-aware manner, and focus on developing a sixth sense about striving to see who other people really are.

PLAYING KEEP-AWAY

Play "keep-away"— draw firm boundaries between your work life and your personal life. You have a closet for a reason. Keep your skeletons and personal life away from the spying eyes. Show only what you want them to see. Keep your work colleagues out of your personal space and, except for special occasions, out of your home. *Never* let your personal problems or sexual interests enter the workplace. And never lose control of your temper or emotions.

But on those occasions when you do allow your personal essence, emotions, and instinctive reactions to manifest themselves in your behavior, which will (and should) happen naturally from time to time, find a way to do it in a mindful manner, and in a way that exerts a positive rather than negative impact.

This game of "keep-away" can be a challenge, but consider it in light of the fact that you are protecting the way you are perceived—your most important asset. Protect it with your corporate life.

IN DEFENSE OF POLITICS

At its purest level, the word *politics* relates simply to the manner in which people, often with different degrees of power, interact with one another to get things done. The most common political process simply involves getting the *right* ideas adopted. Effective politics starts with building friends and relationships, because people tend to listen to their friends and with those who are loyal and whom they trust. This process helps our ideas find a receptive audience.

Politics is the art of the sale

We sell our ideas and value to the company and to the client, and we survive in business by getting people to invest in us, hire us, trust us, and listen to us. In this sense, politics is pure and virtuous, merely a good discussion with knowledgeable people that leads to decisions that benefit the business and perhaps all of society.

Understanding "playing politics"

However, that's not what the phrase "playing politics" has come to signify. It implies something far worse—a persuasive and manipulative, sometimes unethical tactic that presumes people might seek to undermine, injure, lie and lobby, not publicly, but privately.

But reality compels us to take a broader view.

Politics starts with convincing your friends and allies of the worth of your idea (or convincing them that they should adopt or support you as a person offering an idea). Promotion of one idea might implicitly involve attacking other ideas or people.

Politics can involve the use of leverage or other tactics to suggest consequences or otherwise motivate others to support your idea or cause at their own personal and/or professional risk. Or it can involve forming coalitions and crushing counter-ideas that might otherwise be considered and adopted.

"Politics" (according to *www.thefreedictionary.com*) also refers to dealing with internal conflicts and with "maneuvering within a political unit or group in order to gain control or power." As defined by Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, to "play politics" means:

"a. to engage in political intrigue, take advantage of a political situation or issue, resort to partisan politics, etc.; exploit a political system or political relationships; and

"b. to deal with people in an opportunistic, manipulative, or devious way, as for job advancement."

The behavior of politicians shows the inherent conflicts we have already discussed. Politicians are often more concerned about their own re-election than their constituencies. The most effective politicians align with people who can help them accomplish their objectives, all the while protecting their livelihoods and perceptions.

Corporate politics in action

Politics in action is, albeit natural, often not purely benign (particularly when viewed from the vantage point of the non-politically savvy), particularly in larger, higher paying or more bureaucratic settings. It can appear as a game of power and self-interest, finding its strength in controlling and manipulating perceptions. We all have experienced circumstances in which power politics has worked against us. While it's a natural process, it sure can be an ugly, dirty game.

In my own career, after several years of practicing law in a major firm and enjoying considerable success as an entrepreneur and in the corporate world (see *About the Author)*, I took an upper-level position in a highly political environment working for a person who was broadly despised (both in the company and throughout the industry).

It was impossible for me to succeed, because the other executives were interested in sabotaging my boss. Since I had no direct representation within the executive team, my advice could be discounted or refused outright because of the person I worked for.

I decided that I would rise above the political game by displaying very high standards for truth and integrity, hoping to survive with flying moral colors.

I took a "the-buck-stops-here" approach. My clients were senior executives who had their own agendas, and the people who worked with me took full advantage of my naïve approach. They soon learned that my butt was always available to cover theirs. Eventually, this became a very real problem for me, and there is nothing harder to overcome than a problem you allow to continue for too long.

The inevitability of politics: play or lose

One thing is absolutely clear: *it is not possible to stay above, or outside, the political fray*. Whether you have extremely high personal values or are entirely devoid of any moral or ethical scruples, you must engage yourself in the process.

If you fail to build relationships, you will have no political base to draw from. If you fail to make a case for your ideas in a way that forces them to be noticed, they will not be heard or adopted. If you fail to defend yourself, you will be trampled. The buck can only stop with you if you have the clout and power to rise *above* the buck.

If you don't—and most don't—a buck that stops with you will eventually be the cause for all kinds of problems sure to follow.

We do not get to hide from politics. Hiding from politics is akin to avoiding the entire decision making process. And while it is quite possible to engage in the game without sacrificing your values, it ultimately is play or lose.

Becoming familiar with the way in which the corporate political game is played in your company (and industry) should be a priority. Getting to know and connect with the people who matter to you should be one of the first things you do.

Success in business is, and always has been, largely related to who you know (including who will teach you, help you and inform you) and how well you're liked.

Getting things done with political savvy

When you have something to achieve, you should think through how you want to get that idea or project accomplished. Plan as if you are going into battle. *Your value and the value you bring are not enough. Quite simply,*

one rarely finds true karma in the workplace; good people and ideas are not automatically rewarded but instead must be sold.

Instead, the politically savvy among us *demand* to be accepted and not embarrassed; we take advantage of the way other people act and react so that we can get things done. Some are expert at taking advantage of others' flaws. Some players sit back and watch other people create their own problems without throwing a lifeline—and sometimes even encourage a problem or two here and there. Ultimately, the savvy almost always seem to find a way to rise to the top.

Be a realist

Until you are running the business or are in a profession in which you are somehow immunized, be a realist. See the world objectively, fully expecting, anticipating, recognizing, and appreciating its humanity.

Many people who succeed in business seem to harbor a constant cynicism and acceptance caused by their awareness of corporate self-interest, conflicts, corruptness, manipulation, and interpersonal disrespect; they accept these negative traits as part of human nature and the twisted reality of the world.

While you may (and should) adhere to those values that matter to you, your career is a type of game with no time-outs and no slip-ups, and if you hope to get things done and to reach higher places in the business world, you must embrace politics: *you must find a way to become more influential, more respected, and less manipulated*.

THE EVOLVING WORKPLACE

Just like almost everything else in the world, the workplace is constantly evolving. Just as the last generation was the first to be born into a world of computers, today's new employees are the first to be born into a world of cell phones, text messages, e-mail, social media, and the Internet.

They (if you're like me, you) don't (or have forgotten) a world without ubiquitous smartphones, instant messaging, and constant interactivity, and they/we are master multitaskers, researchers, and resource-mongers. They/we know how to use online tools to gather or convey instant information, and

they/we use text and free web-based social networks and e-mail systems to become highly social, and to take on alter-egos and multiple personalities.

Members of this generation play video games against competitors located anywhere around the planet. They have been exposed to violence, sex, porn, and dirty jokes at a far younger age than anyone in past generations. And they know that location matters less than it ever has before.

Youth, diversity, and loyalty

The youngest participants in business have always set the tone, and there is a great deal of writing and media attention about this new world. Today's workplace is diverse in every sense; employees are working from home and are demanding perks previously unavailable—at least until the recent economic downturn.

On the productivity side, employees are accessing information and multitasking at levels never before possible.

Furthermore, statistics show that this generation is loyal more to itself, not only because of the transient aspects of the technology, but also perhaps because it's the first generation to refuse to be loyal to the modern business that has lost its ability to be truly loyal to its employees.

Business has evolved to the point where it does not offer (nor do its employees take) jobs with the expectation that the employee will stay for more than a few years. Employees are expected to leave when they find a better deal elsewhere. Then again, this was, until recently, the only generation never to have seen a failed economy. That has changed.

Navigating cyberspace

While few are born ready for the competitive world of business, vying for attention in the Internet world is a magnificent education.

Cyberspace is a hard, cold place built on anonymity and bluntness, where only the strongest survive in terms of prominence or fortune. Branding now begins in youth. Information is disseminated and manipulated (including biographical information) to an extent never before seen.

Navigating this landscape requires advanced political and marketing skills. Messages are tailored, images created, and people are transformed

into legends—or diminished overnight. Networking, previously avoided by many, is now built into the fabric of communication, as we see with blogs and popular social networking websites such as LinkedIn, Facebook and photo and social sharing websites.

While these can be valuable strengths, they can raise complications (lost transparency, for one) for the exceedingly politically correct business world.

The unchanging human condition

Years ago I watched comedian George Carlin give a performance in which he launched insults at practically every group of people, eventually targeting the baby boomer generation. He reminded us that these are the same people whose slogan changed from "peace and love" to "just say no," a natural hypocrisy, perhaps based on acquired wisdom or conservatism, that sought to deprive the youth of those things that the boomers once deeply enjoyed and cherished.

The point is that we all keep changing along with our age, perspective and circumstances. Sometimes people end up wiser and other times parental, stubborn, cynical or disconnected, just as they did forty or even one hundred years ago.

This book presumes that as human beings we are and always will be very similar. Each of us must be able to adapt to any situation that might arise—and with the right skills and tools, we can. Each must develop personal and working relationships with people of all ages, regardless of the fact that as a species, we haven't changed much in thousands of years. Our music, fads and styles have changed, business has evolved, and technology has improved. But while our sensibilities change, we, as human beings, are still cut from the same cloth as we always have been—young and old, fat and thin, sharing the same emotions and stresses that human beings always have.

The lessons here do work. Just apply to taste.

REST OF THE BOOK: THOUGHTS, GUIDELINES AND PEARLS OF WISDOM

Here's an actual rule of my current company (paraphrased only slightly for dramatic effect): "In case of fire, leave the sick, old, and infirm behind in the stairwells. And be sure to remember to tell the fire department where you left them."

Now, this rule accomplishes its intended purpose—getting the greatest number of employees out of the building in case of an emergency—and it helps to ensure that other employees are not injured, while it allows the fire department to do what they have been trained to do and minimizes potential legal liability.

But this is exactly the kind of rule that illustrates our twisted corporate existence! We used to reward traits such as generosity, courage (particularly in the face of danger), and the idea that the sick or old deserve our special attention. We don't anymore.

"Save yourself" is literal corporate policy.

"Politically correct" vs. "correct politically"

This book aspires to be straightforward. Instead of focusing on being politically *correct*, we will focus on what it means to be correct *politically*.

To be clear, it is usually correct politically to be politically correct. There is great virtue and decency in seeking to avoid offensive statements and acts. However, in our case, we are following established rules of political correctness and etiquette not for the betterment or benefit of society, and not to make other people feel less offended, but for our own interest—to become a master at navigating our own corporate waters.

Our humanity is our primary obstacle. The irony in business is that smart business decisions can so easily be undermined by our human frailties.

Obvious examples are emotional outbursts, workplace hostility, and sexual misconduct. Why do some people lash out at others even at risk of being terminated? And why are some people who hold public office, or act as teachers, baby sitters, police officers or priests, unable to find a way to control their sexual desires and behaviors? Or tempers? Or greed?

Many politicians can't even find a way to restrain their damaging behaviors for the shorter length of time they are running for in office. Some even commit the same behaviors that they're already under investigation for!

While not condoning any bad behavior, I'd imagine that bad acts continue to occur because we are human beings first. Our emotions, urges, and tempers *always* get in our way.

The politically savvy employee

The concept of civility requires that many of our uncivilized, early-human traits, notions, functions, and reactions be unnaturally suppressed. And while the corporate world is a tug-of-war between incivility and humanity, and each is awarded its share of victories, politically savvy employees are almost always those that appear at all times to be the most calm and civil, correct politically, and able to act in a manner that is understanding and embracing of the treacherous environment that surrounds them.

Let's take the rest of our time together to offer some thoughts, ideas, guidelines, and pearls of wisdom for success in the modern business environment. These are for your consideration and contemplation. Perhaps you will find some insight here into how you should relate to your job and career, and perhaps you will become better aware of the behavior of others. Maybe you will be entertained. And of course it is fine if you disagree.

As an attorney, I hope that my clients listen to my advice and the advice of my team. I hope that they appreciate our knowledge, experience, research skills, and background.

Then, I hope that they will use their own intellect and intuition (which is usually quite outstanding) to consider the advice, develop an understanding of the issues that are being raised, and make their own decisions. When choosing a course of action, there is rarely an absolutely right or wrong answer.

Patterned behavior and human emotions

But in general, our advice, when judged in retrospect, is usually correct, because problems, when viewed objectively, tend to be simple and obvious and to follow the same patterns they have followed countless times before.

Yet, regardless of these objective patterns, once we add emotions and desires and the rest of human nature to the equation—including our constant desire to perceive ourselves as competent, moral and ethical—we become blinded to the obvious, and things always seem to end up a bit screwy.

Learning the rules

In the end, the business environment is a game of role-play; being savvy means respecting the rules of this strange and deceptive world. This advice is offered by lots of very smart and successful people.

How do we learn the rules? For most of us, these rules are learned and tested over time, over the course of thousands of mistakes big and small, from being around thousands of others, and having fired or been involved in decisions regarding the firing of others.

Whether you agree or disagree with the ideas presented here, the most important thing you can do is to weigh these thoughts against your own situation and values. In doing so, I hope that you end up more capable and better suited to the complex world you're in.

> *Disclaimer: I do not claim complete originality for some of this advice, but here it is—in one place—along with lots of stuff that you may not have heard and that is entirely original. These rules carry the weight of gospel (whose, I don't presume to know), and all bear repeating. No one rule can work for every person in any given situation. Worse, the ideas are offered to you by a fairly opinionated author.*

With that said…