

## ! Working DRAFT – Book Introduction “And When You Get It Right...”

### “AND WHEN YOU GET IT RIGHT...”

Impact and Profit –

Draft -- 10-7-06

David Matteson

## INTRODUCTION

Life happens.

What is important, I believe, is that *we each have choice in how we react to life, that we choose what attention to give to our intentions, and together these impact how life unfolds around us*. It's taken me a long journey to begin to understand the deep power of this simple statement. It has made me excitedly curious about *what is the source of my intentions, and the process by which good ideas move from intention into action, and how those actions impact the well being of the world*. Understanding the life cycle of ideas and the role of individual choice along the way makes it possible to *nurture ideas such that they have both a healthy impact on myself and others, and a positive impact on profits in my personal pocket*.

This book explores the journey of ideas from mind to market, how individual choice influences their unfolding, and how each of us can reap reward without guilt for our efforts. Like water flowing from clouds, to land, to streams, to rivers, to oceans, and back to the skies, ideas flow into the world, take form, combine and separate with other ideas, collectively shape the physical landscape, and then dissolve and cycle back to re-emerge.

I believe ideas move through each of us, and therefore each of us is shaping the reality of the world around us. I believe we can and need to be more conscious of this role we individually and collectively play. Being better stewards of good ideas improves the odds that innovation has a positive impact, and is something each of us can do as a political act of personal responsibility and contribution to a healthier more peaceful planet. I also believe that if an idea is to have real impact in the world today, it must be successful in the market place. In other words, it has to be molded into a form that others will pay money to use. This is explored in the first and second parts of the book.

While this book applies to anyone with an idea aching to emerge, it is especially written for innovators, entrepreneurs, and visionary leaders. It demystifies how ideas move from concept to concrete, and gives guidance to ensure their healthy growth at each stage of their lifecycle. It debunks the notion that you have to control an idea for it to be successful. It provides nuts and bolts for how to build a business to house an idea, keep it safe, and inspire its useful and profitable expression. This is laid out in Part III.

This book is the culmination of nearly 40 years of high-level, hands-on work, and my own search for meaning and meaningful impact. It is my attempt to distill the central principles of what I have observed to be essential to achieving business success that delivers more than empty calories of consumerism, while inspiring me with a deep sense of personal purpose and allowing me strong financial reward. It's been a crooked path, but in the rear-view mirror it seems almost intentional in how it has evolved. And, it is a continuing journey, not a final destination. How to continue the journey and be present to one's own growth is the focus of Parts IV and V.

But, let me start at the beginning, as I will use examples and stories throughout the book from my many years of working with business and thought leaders who have been trying to have impact and make profits.

I started my own journey around the questions of ideas, choice, impact, and profit in the 60's as a double-degree major in engineering and biology. I was intensely curious about the interplay between the emerging technology boom and its effects on social and ecological systems. It was clear even then that shortsighted thinking could have seriously harmful effects. Science, equations, research, and statistics seemed vastly powerful, enough so that surely a right answer could be found through logical rationality. But, what I discovered was that no one seemed very interested in good data, or if they were it was only in data that supported what they thought they already knew. People seemed compelled to form their opinions and make their decisions based upon some other system of analysis and choice making. This ran counter to the rational thinking model that I'd been taught in school.

I naively concluded that the problem was that people didn't understand the data, so I earned a masters degree in education and taught high school science for two years. Surely if I could figure out how to get my good data accurately embedded in people's heads, then better decisions would result. But, again, I was disappointed. The vast majority of the people I met were not very interested in learning, and worse they often seemed hostile to the suggestion that there might be something they needed to learn. I wanted to buy each of them a tee shirt that said, "Don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is already made up!"

I began to understand that facts are odd things. They are not so solid as I'd been lead to believe. It used to be a "fact" that the world was flat, or that the universe revolved around the sun, or that Pluto was a planet. However, with new discoveries more facts come into play that revise or replace notions that people hold to be a fact. Even in the contemporary world of physics where great precision exists around hard facts, new discoveries are revising what is held to be true.

The point is that much of what we hold to be a truth is the consequence of a layer of meaning that we wrap around things that we observe in our own lives and life around us. This meaning wrapper is an intricate weave of culture, personality, family dynamics, economics, and so forth. I became very curious about how people, particularly groups of people, ascribe meaning to what they observe and experience in their daily lives. What guides their choice making? Are they even conscious about the choices they make and the consequences that are set in motion?

The other curious thing that I noticed is how poor choices were made even when there was agreement about the facts. People still chose to smoke and governments continued to support the tobacco industry, long after the undisputable link was made between smoking and lung cancer. The same is true of industrial pollution and birth defects, automobile emissions and breathing disorders, and prescription drugs and their side effects – you get the picture. Why do people make such knowingly unhealthy decisions?

Still believing that someone could teach me the answers to these questions, I again went back to school and enrolled in a dual masters program. I studied public health, because health seemed to be the central theme to all my questions. Good choices, I reasoned, should lead to health promoting outcomes. My public health thesis was entitled, “Creating Healthy Environments, and Reducing Reliance on the Medical Model.” I didn’t know it at the time, but this was a radical, almost heretical notion in the late 1970s. I also studied urban planning and public policy, and did my thesis on the “Use of Social Impact Analysis as a Means to Effective Public Policy.” While in school I started a consulting firm specializing in public input and decision-making in the area of large-scale land use and natural resource development. After five years of study, research, and consulting I found myself just as confounded as ever as to why people, particularly groups of people with clear intentions, were so inept at making effective, health promoting decisions.

So much for finding an expert who already held the answers I was seeking. Going back to school obviously was not my solution. So much for joining a profession with a large enough perspective to hold the question I was grappling with. I was on my own.

What I did have, however, was a big picture perspective about how information, people, and institutions all fit together. From this vantage point, I was able to see relationships and connections that were unobvious to others, but that were integral to good decision-making. The problem was that most of the people around me had no idea what I was talking about. This seemed to be the age-old dilemma of not being able to see the forest for the trees.

Choice. Choosing between this idea and that one. It seemed the central key somehow. How do people know a good choice when they make one? What does it mean to make a choice, one that holds clarity and commitment? What are the consequences of choosing? And, what are the implications for responsibility and accountability when someone makes a choice that affects other people? I was as confused as ever, and feeling more than a bit discouraged. Even after all these years of preparation, I was clear that my quest for answers would not be served by taking a job in any of the fields in which I held credentials.

A fortunate opportunity came to me. I was recruited for a position as director of the Conflict Management Program, which was funded by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlitt Foundation to explore the use of mediation and other dispute resolution techniques to resolve complex environmental and public policy disputes. What a chance to observe up close and personal how people and organizations advance ideas and make decisions about issues that affect the health and wellbeing of lots of other people! We successfully mediated sprawling controversies that ranged from locating halfway houses in residential neighborhoods, 25-year old transportation issues involving 28 disputing agencies, jurisdictions, and communities, development of natural resources on pristine lands held sacred by local native communities, conversion of rural farm lands for urban expansion, and many more. It was intensely

gratifying and complex work. However, after four years of diligent effort, I felt I was only slightly closer to better understanding the dynamics around ideas, choice, and their impact in the day-to-day world. Nonetheless, my confidence grew that I on to something.

My experience as a mediator gave me a unique perspective. I stood in the middle of emotionally charged discussions about choice making gone bad. So bad that people needed specialized help to sort things out and make new decisions. I came to realize that in the vast majority of the disputes the conflict stemmed from very poor clarity of decisions in the first place, compounded by very poor choices along the way, and exacerbated by people trying to control ideas. Further, as often as not the problem was because people had not really made a clear decision, they had simply gone along, only waking up when things were about to happen. I wondered if there would be a way to help people avoid disputes, by working with them before things escalated to a crisis state.

Being a mediator of large public disputes also gave me an insider's view of life and thinking in corporate boardrooms, the offices of senior government officials, and the inner sanctums of grassroots community organizations. One thing that became crystal clear is that it was business that was both the cause and the solution in nearly every case I worked with. Why, I asked myself, was business so seemingly naïve and self-abusing about how it conducted its affairs? They consistently were shooting themselves in the foot! Somehow, helping business make better decisions around moving their good ideas into the world seemed like the place to be.

It seemed like a stroke of unmitigated good luck, or perhaps it was a magical moment of synchronicity, when I was again recruited to my next position, moving from the world of non-profit thinking to the no-holds-barred domain of serious big business. This was the perfect laboratory for learning more about what makes business tick. For the next seven years I worked my way up the ranks in what was arguably at the time the world's most prestigious public affairs and corporate communications firm. I managed accounts for small clients and for companies with household names, doing everything from marketing research and planning to crisis communications, from designing information and media campaigns for hot public issues to facilitating strategic planning retreats for boards of directors, from orchestrating legislative initiatives to preparing business plans and venture capital presentations, from product recalls to preparing CEOs to appear on 60 Minutes. What a learning curve!

I learned, of course, a great deal about all the dynamics required to build and defend a successful business. You'll find lots of tips in this regard, particularly in Part III. But, I also learned that it doesn't matter what business someone is in, or how much money they have, or how good the product is, or how tough the competition. What seems to matter most boils down simply to people and the relationships between them. Leaders who focus on this are far more successful than those with the best MBA credentials and strategic skills. This aspect will be explored in Part IV.

There was something missing in my work at the agency. The corporate "golden handcuffs" were feeling heavier with each promotion, new perk, and bonus. There was no soul in what I was doing. Could business have a soul? Could I do work in the world that had meaning and made money? And, what was I doing before I climbed on the corporate ladder? Oh yeah, I

wanted to work with businesses and leaders on ideas that would improve people's health and the health of their environment.

It seemed at the time a major risk to walk away from the comfort of a "real job." My kids were young then, my wife had suspended her career to be the at-home parent, and leaving my very viable career path seemed ill advised. But my heart was louder than my head, and I decided to take the plunge and see if I could apply the ideas and strategies that I had been developing. It was time to make a move. My friends told me I was crazy, and from time to time I found myself agreeing with them.

So, over the past 15 years I have applied myself to working with entrepreneurs, innovators, and visionary organizations to move healthy ideas from mind to market. I've started several successful organizations and businesses, held numerous executive positions, am co-founder of my own health product company, and have a thriving consulting business working with good people, on good projects that have the potential to have a healthy impact in the world. Over the years friends, colleagues, and clients have encouraged me to share more broadly the successful strategies and models I have shared with them. I resisted this suggestion for a long time, until I became clear about why I would do so.

It is my intention in writing this book to inspire anyone who has a healthy idea to move it forward, and to improve the odds that their idea will survive the volatile journey from mind to market. It is my desire to help them make effective choices that yield healthy results. I am more convinced than ever that what the world needs now is choices, particularly in business, of a nature that can address the increasing complexity, interconnectedness, and interdependency of the modern world. I don't need to wax on about the state of the world and the rising concerns about our future, there are plenty of others who have written well about our potential plight. And, at the same time, the level of innovation and the rising consciousness and desire of people to live more in balance support some prognostications that the future is brighter than ever.

I believe that with full-hearted intention, conscious decision-making, stewardship of healthy ideas, and pragmatic application of sound business principles the world can find a healthy balance.