

Exclusive
eBook for
Solopreneur Hour
Listeners

Changing the World Ain't Easy!

by Matt McWilliams

9

Informative and Inspirational Messages
for the Solopreneur

Hello Solopreneur Hour listeners!

First off, I thoroughly enjoyed my time with Michael. That dude is kicking some names and taking some...wait, reverse that.

Over the years, I've been driven to educate, motivate, and encourage other solopreneurs and entrepreneurs. That's why I put together this short book.

This is just for you. My first hope is that you learn from it and use the information to transform your business. My second hope is that when times are tough and you need a little pick-me-up, you'll refer to the stories and encouragement here.

Changing the world ain't easy, but that's what ~~you're~~ *we're* doing.

Enjoy.

Phase One

It Starts With You.

It Starts in Your Mind.

You ARE an Entrepreneur. You WILL Change the World

Most of us have an entrepreneurial spirit whether we realize it or not.

You've probably started more businesses than you realize. Yes, I am counting your lawncare business when you were ten. Yes, I am counting the spy agency you started when you were twelve. And yes, I am even counting the time you thought you could somehow profit from making a giant ball of rubber bands (or was that just me?).

Most kids started businesses what seemed like all the time.

As a child you said...

When you were a child, you saw problems with the world and said:

"I need to do something about that."

"I should _____."

"I can solve that."

As an adult you say...

But something changed in you. As an adult, you see problems with the world and needs of others and say:

“Someone needs to do something about that.”

“I wish someone would _____.”

“Why doesn’t someone fix that?”

What happened?

Somewhere you lost the belief that *you* were the solution.

Someone told you that others had all the answers.

Someone *lied* to you. Someone told you to stop thinking so highly of yourself. Someone told you that all innovation comes from a company that we all know and a billion dollars a day in revenue.

And at some point, you believed them.

But you can still remember a time when you saw every problem in the world as something for *you* to solve. You can still remember when everything broken was fixable...*by you*. You can still remember the excitement you had when you encountered a need and you rushed home to see if you had the supplies needed to solve it.

You *can* get that back.

You can have that spirit again...in all aspects of life.

I often write about being more like a child ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Being more like a child is about changing your attitude. It's about recapturing the wild creativity and passion you had when you were younger, before you bought into the lies.

It's not about living completely carefree, irresponsibly, or in a state of pure naivete. It's about finding something lost deep down inside, seemingly lost. It's about finding the real you. The you that is capable of changing the world.

Being a world-changer comes naturally. We are born to do it.

We are born to change the world. Or else, we are unnecessary.

It's only when someone tells we can't be world changers, and then we buy-in to the lie, that we stop trying to be.

You can change the world.

You *will* change the world.

Go. Remember the passion and can-do attitude of your youth. Recapture it. Live it.

You are the only one who will ever do what only you can do.

Question to ponder: What lies have stopped you from believing you could change the world?

Of Risk and the Entrepreneur

What is risk?

That question was posed by a professor to sixty MBA students who were executives of public corporations.

I was reviewing my notes from the book, *The Millionaire Next Door* this week, and transferring them to digital format. My copy of the book is so old, I think [Gutenberg](#) himself printed it. E-readers were a fantasy when this gem came out. And yet, the book is still relevant today.

In the book, when the professor asked that question,

One student replied: Being an entrepreneur?

His fellow students agreed. Then the professor answered his own question with a quote from an entrepreneur:

What is risk? Having one source of income. Employees are at risk...They have a single source of income. What about the entrepreneur who sells janitorial services to your employers? He has hundreds and hundreds of customers...hundreds and hundreds of sources of income.

I was asked a similar question recently at dinner with some new friends. When I mentioned that I went out on my own almost two years ago, one man replied, “Wow. That must have been scary and risky.”

Scary and risky? Far from it. I told him that ***becoming an entrepreneur was the least risky thing I have ever done in my life.***

I went from having *one income to multiple incomes*. I went from the constant threat of a company selling and my family getting left in the cold to no such fear at all.

As an entrepreneur, the loss of a single client is an *inconvenience*, not a catastrophe (assuming you've built your business right). The loss of your sole employer, however, is often catastrophic.

This is not to say that you must drop everything and become an entrepreneur tomorrow. But, if risk and fear are holding you back, consider the idea that entrepreneurship is the employment equivalent of investment diversification. Instead of putting all your eggs in one basket, you spread the love...and the risk.

Have you ever dreamed of owning your own business?

Have you dreamed of changing the world with your product?

Has fear or perceived risk held you back?

What else has held you back?

When Life Hands You Lemons

When life hands you lemons, open a lemonade stand.

Better yet, when life hands you lemons, have a lemonade stand already open.

Whatever you do, don't just sit back and make lemonade.

Life will hand you lemons. But two things will greatly impact how you come out of a downturn.

1. How you choose to respond.

This is the positive outlook and determination side of it. The old saying goes, "when life hands you lemons, make lemonade." I agree with the idea of that, but why not go further and open a lemonade stand?

Start a business, offer a service, or make something that you can sell. There has never been a better time in American history to start a business and there is certainly never a better time to open a lemonade stand than when life hands you a large pile of them. Just add sugar and water.

2. How prepared you are.

Even better than opening a lemonade stand after the fact is having one ready. I've written before about the values

and virtues of [having a side business](#), so I won't repeat those here. But the gist is that having a side business in addition to your "full-time job" gives you two things: extra income to save and a ready-made lemonade stand when life's lemons are poured out.

My story

When I was twenty-four, my dad fired me. Literally the day after my twenty-fourth birthday. Even though I totally deserved to be fired, it sucked. But I left the golf course that he ran and immediately went home to work on a client's website. I was able to finish that home construction site more than a week early due to the extra time. I got numerous referrals from them.

A year before I started a web design business on the side to supplement my income during the tough winter times. I relied on word-of-mouth referrals and wasn't actively looking for clients, but I saved up the extra money. When my dad fired me, I had more than six month's expenses in the bank.

I spent the next few days actively marketing my services. And since I had a decent portfolio already, I wasn't starting from scratch. Within a few weeks, I had multiple clients and was making more than I had made working for my dad.

All because I had a lemonade stand already open.

Years later, I was married with a newborn and a brand new house. I woke up on a beautiful Saturday morning and what started out as a promising day immediately went sour when I was laid off. The company I was working for was struggling financially and had to lay off close to half their staff. I was one of them. That afternoon, I worked on some stuff for one my side business' clients.

For the previous four months, I had been working with some small clients as a consultant. The income from that not only gave us a huge cushion to withstand months of no "full-time" job, but I was literally able to pick up two new clients within a couple of months.

The rest, they say, is history. I now operate my version of a lemonade stand, [Matt McWilliams Consulting, Inc.](#), full-time. It *is* my business.

Looking back, the reason why life's lemons never buried me was because I already had a stand open. And come to think of it...the lemons turned out to be huge blessings.

What can you do today to prepare better for life's lemons?

Phase Two

In the trenches.

Don't give up.

A Note to All the Struggling Entrepreneurs in the World

According the Small Business Administration, almost 90% of all businesses in America fail.

When I heard that statistic, I wrote this in the hopes that someone, somewhere might read it. And that it would give them hope.

Dear Struggling Entrepreneur,

Fight. Don't quit.

You've gotta be a fighter to be a successful entrepreneur. What you are doing as an entrepreneur is far too important to quit.

Entrepreneurship is hard. Just because you get to do what you want, where you want, and when you want doesn't mean this is all cupcakes and lollipops. It's hard.

For most of human history, the success of a nation was 100% based on its fighters. It was based on military strength. That was where a nation's power came from.

But not anymore.

Now a nation's strength comes from business. And it mostly comes from entrepreneurs.

Most great innovation today comes from entrepreneurs and their companies. And innovation is what changes societies.

In America, entrepreneurs are the ones who will grow the economy, slash unemployment, end poverty, get people off welfare, and probably save marriages, decrease divorce, improve our schools, and cut the murder rate.

Think that's a stretch? Well let me tell you about where I live.

I live near an area going through a rough stretch. The homicide rate in South Fort Wayne, Indiana is higher than almost anywhere in the United States. We passed the homicide count for all of 2012 by the beginning of summer this year. I said to a friend recently, "I wonder what would happen if most of these people had \$1000 in the bank or had a business?"

His response was simple: "It would change everything." Everything.

Entrepreneurship *can* cut the murder rate, cut childhood obesity, and who knows...end dandruff. Entrepreneurs are the ones who will fund a cure for cancer, AIDS, and who knows what else...end the common cold.

And its not just in America. In fact, it's even more important in emerging markets.

Big corporations paying \$0.10 an hour are **not** going to transform Rwanda, the Congo, or Eastern Europe. It's going to be entrepreneurs. We're the ones who will change the world.

So keep fighting. Don't give up and don't get discouraged. This world needs you.

The world does need entrepreneurs. It needs entrepreneurs who don't give up, who keep fighting, and who don't stop until they leave a legacy.

If You Build It...They Won't Come

Life isn't like Field of Dreams. Just because you build something it doesn't mean anyone will use it.

Just because you open a business, create a killer product, offer top-notch consulting services at competitive prices, or incorporate yourself doesn't mean that people will flock to give you money. The fact is that *most businesses fail because of their marketing and sales.*

Not for lack of great ideas. Not for lack of an amazing product. Not for lack of talented team members, dedicated founders, or even bad financial planning. Ultimately they fail for a failure to move enough units. They fail to create enough buzz and attract enough customers.

All because they didn't make time for it. That's what happened to me.

A business is born...and then what?

In January 2010, I decided to start a [consulting business](#). Granted, to skip ahead in the story, it was July 2011 before I had my first client...and that is the point.

- **I had all the credentials.** I had just won a [major industry award](#). I had a known name (brand) and was respected among my peers.

- **I had permission from my boss.** He encouraged me and actually shared the best piece of business advice I've ever received (I'll share that later).
- **I had the support of my wife.** I had encouragement and advice from my best friend, who is someone I look up to in business. I had everything...except a marketing plan.

What's in a name?

I even had a name...and had spent hours coming up with it. It changed by the time I got my first client.

Great, so I had credentials, support, and a name...and yet no one came knocking. I was employed full-time as the head of marketing for a [DVD-based instructional company](#) so money wasn't an issue. I didn't *need* the business, but I really wanted it. I wanted to do this full-time someday...and the reality was that I wasn't doing the most important thing to make that happen...*marketing myself*.

Look at your calendar

When I did start to pick up some clients, I all-to-often noticed the same problem with them. They spend inordinate amounts of time on product development, hiring programmers, coding this and that, and making things look pretty and they leave marketing for the end of the day or for the weekend. Marketing got their leftovers.

When I looked at their calendars, less than 10% of their time was spent on marketing. I told them to flip the numbers for a while. Focus on getting customers or clients first, and then perfect the product.

Stop honing your craft

When I decided to get into consulting my fear was that the product was not worth the price...in other words that my expertise and advice was not worth what I was charging. So I kept honing my craft...and never got to actually charge for it.

Don't get me wrong, honing your craft is important. Continuing education is important. Staying on top of trends and learning from others is critical.

But first you need business. You need customers trying your product. You need clients trying your services.

And it's OK if you suck at first. Or, like me, you discover that your product is already worth it.

I'd spent five-plus years honing my craft. I was already considered one of the best in the business. I didn't need to keep learning, testing, and planning to make my services worth the price. I just needed to sell them.

What about you?

Are you holding back on launching a company?

Have you already started one but have no or too few customers?

Are you scared of marketing? Unconfident in your product or service? Afraid to be told it's not good enough?

Or perhaps you just plain don't like the marketing? (That's why people often hire me...I am amazed at the number of business leaders who just hate this part of it.)

What is holding you back from marketing your business or yourself more?

Autopsy of a Failed Business

Can business success lead to business failure?

Yes. I've allowed it to happen.

Five years removed from my time at one business, I had time to do an autopsy. Here is what I learned.

Chris LoCurto once asked on [his blog](#):

Why don't successful people and organizations automatically become very successful?

He then presented four stages which moderately successful business often go through:

Phase 1: When we *really* have clarity of purpose, it leads to success.

Phase 2: When we have success, it leads to more options and opportunities.

Phase 3: When we have increased options and opportunities, it leads to diffused efforts.

Phase 4: Diffused efforts undermine the very clarity that led to our success in the first place.

The business I was a part of at the time went through *all four phases*.

Phase 1: When we really have clarity of purpose, it leads to success.

In 3 years, we became the largest privately held company in our field...*in the nation*. \$18,000,000 in projected 2008 revenue. \$11,800,000 in actual 2007 revenue. Best in Business Award from *Nashville Business Journal*. From one employee in above the garage to 52 and a posh office...in 3 years.

All because we had an intense clarity of purpose:

- to be vastly different from the competition
- to super-serve our clients
- to provide a quality of product that was far superior to anyone else, even if it meant a lower volume of product.

Phase 2: When we have success, it leads to more options and opportunities.

Options. They sound so innocent, even attractive. Options diversify risk, right?

One option we had was starting a call center. It seemed like a good idea. No one else is doing it, so we should...*despite that none of us had any experience in that area*.

Or going into “just a little bit” of debt to buy what could be a powerful asset...except that the debt burdened us so much that we ended up doing nothing with the asset and lost a ton of money in the process.

Or working with a competitor that we *knew* would hurt our quality and cause us to lose customers...but those \$250,000 monthly checks were so pretty!

Or...I could go on.

Phase 3: When we have increased options and opportunities, it leads to diffused efforts.

Like trying to run a call center, thus taking our focus off our core business. We spent more and more money on it and it only getting worse.

Or not fixing a faulty IT infrastructure that we easily could have rebuilt with cash on hand (had we not gone into debt), which led to needing more manpower to make up for the lack of automation.

Or fighting to keep customers due to poorer quality when previously we had almost no customer turnover.

The extra options lead to unfocused efforts and confusion within the organization.

Phase 4: Diffused efforts undermine the very clarity that led to our success in the first place.

Like operating out of a place of FEAR.

Debt leads to fear in business. Failure is suddenly an option. Your home is on the line. Your retirement fund is up for grabs.

Businesses cannot operate in a state of FEAR. It is impossible. It will destroy you. It will usually lead to the very thing it is trying to avoid...failure.

Clarity is non-existent through FEAR. FEAR is a dense fog through which no leaders can see.

We introduced FEAR when we opened a call center.

We introduced FEAR when we bought that asset.

We introduced FEAR (and loathing I might add) when we worked with that competitor.

Success ***can*** lead to failure...and I have learned now, it can also lead to more success...but that, my friends, is a story for another time.

Has success ever led to failure for you? Which of these stages spoke loudest to you?

Phase Three

You WILL make it.

And will all be worth it.

I've Made It

It was 11:00 in the morning on a Monday...and I was on my way to the zoo.

That's when I realized *I've made it*.

I recently [recorded an interview](#) with one of my favorite people in the world, John Lee Dumas of [Entrepreneur on Fire](#). (Side note: He wrote a killer guest post for me that will be coming up soon...I can't wait to share it with you.)

One of the questions he asks every interviewee is, "Have you had an 'I've made it' moment?" For some reason, that question rattled in my brain for a few days after we scheduled the interview.

My voices

Here's what [the voices in my head](#) told me:

"Have I made it? Of course not. That would mean I've reached the pinnacle as an entrepreneur and as a person."
"

"I'll never make it. I don't want to make it. It's a lot cooler to continue to strive and push and set goals.

"HA! You think that's why you'll never make it? You'll never make it because you aren't good enough, don't work hard enough, and won't sacrifice enough."

“You work too hard. How can you ‘make it’ if you are always working so hard?” (It’s ironic that one voice says I don’t work hard *enough* and the next says I work *toohard*...voices are like that)

“You don’t even know what it means to ‘make it.’”

That last one was true. I didn’t know what my definition was of “making it.”

But the others were all crap. And I realized that at 11:00 AM on a Monday while driving to the zoo.

The zoo

Fifteen minutes earlier I was deep in work. I was focused. I was kicking butt and taking names. Until my wife called.



This is my “I’ve made it moment.”

Tara and our daughter, Aracelli, were at the zoo together while I was working. But today was a special day, the zoo luau. So Tara called just to let me know.

And that’s when I got up and left.

OK, I finished my thoughts, made a list of things to do later that day, and *then* I left. I then spent the next three and a half hours at the zoo. I even had a call cancel at 2:00 that allowed me to stay a little longer (Interesting how things like that happen sometimes).

On the way there, it hit me. *This* was my definition of making it. That, in the middle of the day, I could leave work and spend 3+ hours with my family at the zoo.

That is the beauty of [entrepreneurship](#). One day, you *will* make it. Whatever your definition is.

If you work hard enough and smart enough, dream big enough, and surround yourself with the right people, you will:

Make more money than you ever dreamed of.

Find joy in your work.

Have the freedom to do what you want when you want.

Be able to encourage others to do the same.

For the most part, I've found all four. So I can honestly say, "I've made it."

And I want the same for you.

The Billionaire and the Hare

Entrepreneurs can learn a lot from a children's book.

My wife and I attended a Financial Peace University class at our church a while back. For those who don't know, Financial Peace University is a series of classes done by nationally syndicated radio host, TV host, and best-selling author, [Dave Ramsey](#).

In his lesson about investing, Dave discusses a recent meeting with a billionaire. Currently, there are only about 300 billionaires in America, so you can imagine how excited Dave must have been. It is a very rare opportunity to meet with one of these people.

He eagerly met with this man hoping to learn a few of his secrets about how to be a billionaire. He had his notepad and pen ready and asked what advice this man had for him.

The man told him only two things. The first was to keep on giving. Dave gives away a lot. To callers on his show, he often gives them a book or pays their way through Financial Peace. He has a non-profit to help people get out of debt and save money. This man told him to never stop doing that. For Dave, that was a no-brainer.

The second thing the billionaire told Dave was to read a certain book. Dave got excited. Like me, he is a reader.

This man told him that he reads this book over and over; in fact he has read it many times to his grandchildren. The name of the book is one that almost all of us know, *The Tortoise and the Hare*.

There you have it...the secret to being a billionaire is to read that book! No, not really, but the man's point was that slow and steady does indeed win the race. Every single time the tortoise wins! Every time.

Business success is much the same. Entrepreneur tortoises win. The tortoises start slow and have some bumps along the way. Entrepreneur tortoises plan carefully and work their plans. ***Entrepreneur tortoises relish that a business rarely has overnight success and requires years of intense dedication. (Click to Tweet)***

Entrepreneur tortoises don't mind watching the hares sprint ahead only to pass them a year or two later. Tortoises don't listen to the naysayers who say that what they are doing is impossible. Tortoises don't fret about growing only 10% this year or having a bad month every now and then.

To be clear, entrepreneur tortoises certainly are not satisfied with stagnation. The tortoise in the fable did not merely stand still. He slowly crept toward his goal, the finish line. Entrepreneur tortoises work hard, but more importantly they work smartly and consistently.

When your friends, some “guru” or some ancient voice from your childhood is telling you to quit or to try to be the hare, just remember, the tortoise wins every time!

Are you the tortoise or the hare?

The Final Phase
Empowering Others.
Changing the World.

The Seven-Year Old Who Can Change the World

This is the story of a seven-year old entrepreneur who could change the world.

Seven-year old Jalen asked me, “Do you like Burger King?”

I told her that I don’t and she mentioned that she was trying to sell a coupon for a free burger for a dollar.

“Is that for school?” I asked.

“No. I found it in the newspaper and I’m trying to sell it. It’s worth two dollars and I’m going to sell it for a dollar.”

I was finally leaving my office in an old neighborhood near downtown Fort Wayne, Indiana. I was freezing cold, ready to get home, and yet I stopped.

I know little about Jalen’s background, but from what I can make of it, she certainly *doesn’t* come from privilege. So when she showed me more entrepreneurial spirit in that moment than most people will show in a lifetime, I knew what I had to do.

“I can’t use it,” I said. That’s a lesson in targeting and rejection.

“But keep trying. Keep finding things to sell. I wish there were more people like you, Jalen. If you keep it up, you can make so much money. Keep at it, OK?”

“OK,” she said. “I know someone will buy it.”

I know that someone will too.

There is no doubt in my mind that *America...the world...needs more entrepreneurs*. It needs more people willing to create, find, and offer a service of value and accept payment for it.

Someone is getting a dollar off a burger. Jalen is getting a dollar for her efforts.

How is that not win-win?

How is that not the American ideal?

How is that not the way out of recession?

The way out of poverty.

The way out of 16 trillion dollars in national debt.

The way out of depression. Out of addiction. Out of the seemingly endless cycle of family lack, abuse, and suicide.

Don't you dare tell me that's crazy. Being an entrepreneur gives a person purpose. It gives a person something to dream about.

Purpose and dreams are what pulls people out of depression. It's what pulls a nation out of a recession. The money is secondary to the spirit that will overtake the powers of darkness prevailing in so many homes, so many schools, and across this country.

Entrepreneurship should be encouraged like never before.

The responsibility to do that rests on you.

It rests on me.

We encourage it by setting an example.

We encourage it by telling a seven-year old to keep doing it when she shows the spark of entrepreneurship.

We encourage it by celebrating entrepreneurs who have made it.

Who are about to make it.

Who are trying to make it.

Who just started.

Who have failed and are trying again.

Who have failed *again and again and again* and who are doing it *again and again and again*.

This can change the world.

What are you doing to encourage entrepreneurship?

This is bigger than you.

When you make it...and you will...

**Help someone else do what you've
done.**

Be a world changer.