

THE THINGS WE THINK
AND DO NOT SAY

The Future of Our Business

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A Personal Mission Statement

By George Andriopoulos

Thoughts of a Management Consultant

Launchpad Five One Six HQ, 1:00 A.M.

It's 1:00 a.m. and my head has never been clearer, yet at the same time my thoughts have never been more scattered. Moments like this one are what I like to call my "spark moments." Some form of inspiration crawls inside of my head and mutes all the noise in the background leaving me with pure creative focus. I can't escape one single thought right now and I'm okay with that. All my years of personal growth have led me to moments like this where I have the opportunity...scratch that...the RESPONSIBILITY to attempt to fix the wrongs that I played a part in creating. There was a very definitive point in my career where my conscience, my sense of duty, my work ethic, and my passion all collided into a massive explosion that changed my outlook on this business for good. You might say it was the "big bang" of inspiration for me. People get inspired by all kinds of things. Jerry Maguire, the title character from the movie that inspired the idea for this manuscript, was inspired by a bad slice of pizza and the sudden growth of a conscience. Michael Jordan, my all-time favorite athlete and (in my opinion) the greatest basketball player of all-time, was inspired by competition. I was inspired by life. Let me clarify that statement...I was inspired by work and life, and how the correct balance between the two can be the most rewarding and fulfilling feeling that a person can ever experience. Suddenly, it wasn't about the money anymore. It was about quality and happiness and honesty and knowledge. The problem with that mindset is my line of business. My line of business IS business and the fact is that business as a whole is fundamentally broken. There, I said it.

My company Launchpad Five One Six began in a small 3rd floor office sublet that consisted of 2 small desks and a copy machine that I didn't really need. I planned out the intricacies of this company for six months before pulling the trigger on an office space, but the vast spectrum of consulting services that I wanted to offer were too broad to pigeonhole myself to one industry or genre. I remember looking down at the massive bubble chart that I created for the purpose of mapping out services that I would provide, and then it hit me. Management Consulting: the practice of helping organizations to improve their performance via analysis and the development of action plans. Perfect. As I researched case studies and built policies, procedures, and training manuals, I felt my future within my grasp. I was going to take my years of business experience and my skills as a turnaround artist, and turn them into a resource for struggling businesses...and I did just that. My half office sublet in Farmingdale turned into a full office, which turned into 2 full office rentals in the same building. Those 2 offices turned into an expansion to a second, new construction office space. We grew solely based on referrals which led to the launching of new ventures and subsidiary companies. Fast forward to late 2016 and my dream office in Farmingdale, which is not only my hometown but one of the great loves of my life. I'm home and I'm running my company out of an impressive Manhattan-esque loft office space that bleeds inspiration. Why do I still want more?

That question has haunted me throughout my professional career, but at every age in my career it meant something different. When I was 22, that question meant more responsibilities. At 25, that question meant more money. When I was in my late 20s, it meant more respect. Thirty was when I really came into my own in terms of skill and the self-awareness to affect change, so naturally I wanted it all...money, power, notoriety, money, respect, and did I mention money? I

mentioned before that business is fundamentally broken, but what I didn't mention is that I, at the age of 30, was everything that is wrong with business. Corporate greed is nothing new, but you can't blame the flaws of an organization on its desire to make money. That's what we're all here for, right? So where did it all go wrong for business as a whole?

It is the loss of our true selves that has damaged our industries. When gaining more of something that you desire means losing a piece of you in the process, you're doing it wrong. Trust me. I lost so much of myself during my late twenties and early thirties that I'm not exactly sure how I was able to put myself back together. It's tough to miss the newsflashes of major business misdoings heinous enough for the media to deem newsworthy, but multiply the number of horrific business related news stories that you've ACTUALLY heard by about a million and you'd be much closer to the reality of what goes on in the seedy underworld that we call business. I was one of them, I'll admit it. Money and status was my only route to satisfaction, no matter who stood in the way. Ideas were jackhammered into place rather than cultivated and nurtured. The concept of teamwork meant that my team had to get on board with my ideas or suffer the consequences. I hated what I had become but I was too blinded by stupidity to know it. My ego was too big for me to notice anything other than a zero or two missing from my bonus. My life and career mirrored the collapse of our economy a few years back with scary similarity. Eventually the other shoe fell for me (much like it did for many greedy business executives) with no prior notice: divorce; career ruin; emotional struggle; confidence destroyed. I hated what I had become. No...I hated my place in the world. So, to mirror the thoughts of one of my favorite scenes from the movie Jerry Maguire, my self-inflicted loss caused me to have a major BREAKTHROUGH.

Breakdown. BREAKTHROUGH.

When you strip a person or a business down to their core, removing all the layers of stupidity, greed, inefficiency, and any other unoriginal preconceived notions, you get a clean slate to rebuild on. I swear. I'm telling you that it's possible to rebuild yourself, your organization, or anything else that you've broken. That's what this manuscript is about. Redemption in an unforgiving business. There is very little caring and emotional investment between an individual and an organization in today's world, so I'm tasking YOU, the person who was intrigued enough by the cover of this personal mission statement to read it, with the responsibility of caring again. If you've lost the drive to care along the way, reassess what matters and find that drive. If enough people start caring about what they do, then maybe we'll all start caring about others again. My father was a furrier for over 25 years and a school custodian for almost 30 years. He recently retired at 65. If you're thinking that the math doesn't add up between those two careers, it's because they overlapped for many years. Why? Because he cared about his family enough to dedicate 100% of his effort to two jobs for a long time. That's 200%, which is about 175% more effort and caring than most people put into their jobs. It's not because he was "old school" and that's what old school people did. He cared because that's who he is. My father figured out a long time ago that dedication and hard work gets you to your end goal, glitz and glamor aside. How do we package this and sell it?

You can't. It's not that easy to change. The advisors in my industry, an industry that's supposed to help organizations, have packaged profit, ego, and success into a series of formulas and action plans that will have "a 98% success rate according to the model metrics and past case studies,

and bla, bla, bla.” Bullshit. We’re people and without a human connection to our work, there will always be a missing variable that affects the one immeasurable metric: us. Today, I think back to all of my mistakes. I think back to all the mistakes I watched others make, because I’ve always tried to be a sponge for knowledge and take in everything around me. I look at those mistakes and think, I will not do that again, and suddenly...I’m freed of that mistake. You are not tied to your mistakes nor are you defined by them. You are made stronger by your mistakes, no matter how big or small, provided you turn that mistake into a strength the next time around. Surround yourself with likeminded people, whether they are your consultants, advisors, coworkers, friends, or employees. Do not believe the person who claims they can fix all your organization’s problems if they’re not helping you and your staff work on yourselves first.

Make no mistake, we are losing the battle with all that is personal and real in our business. We have come to a place where the lines between our real lives and our work lives have blurred so heavily that we are losing ourselves. If you’re an employee, when was the last time that your boss noticed that you have elderly parents whose health situation is putting a strain on your work performance? If you’re a boss, when was the last time that an employee of yours pointed out that they could help alleviate the stress of a financial crunch by suggesting innovative ways to add revenue to the company? If the answer to either of these questions was “recently,” don’t ever leave your place of work. You win the game. I’m guessing most of your answers were “um, I can’t remember.” We need to fix this and to do that, we need to reconnect with ourselves by goal setting in our personal and professional lives simultaneously. Those of you that say “my work is my work and my home life is my home life” can keep drinking the Kool-Aid, but the

reality is that a proper work-life balance has produced immeasurable changes in mood and productivity in the workplace in recent years.

Picture this: a fledgling consultancy gets the opportunity to pitch their services to a 30-employee company, a fairly small business in the grand scheme of things but the largest this consultancy had ever pitched at the time. A wide-eye George sits down with the owner to discuss the issues that her business was having and offers insight into how he and his team could help. He asks the right questions about finances, efficiency, staff, but true to his disruptive form he has a spark in his mind that said, “ask her why she’s doing this.” Surprised by the question, she responds that she needs the company to become more profitable. An inquisitive George responds, “why are you really doing this?” After a moment of pause as the figurative wall between them came down she replied, “my husband is a good man and he makes a good living and provides for our family, yet I own this big business and I feel like I’m treading water with my company when I should be able to alleviate some of the burden off of him.” George knew there was more so he asked her what else she was thinking. “I want to pay for our daughters’ college...I want to be home to watch them play in their games at school...I want to enjoy my family and be who they need me to be without the worry that I carry all the time when I leave work every day,” she said.

Suddenly, it hit him. It starts with people. This is how he was going to make a difference in this woman’s company. He would speak with everyone that worked there about their work life and ask them how it ties to their personal life. What are their aspirations, their goals, their IDEAS? Janitor, manager, CEO...it didn’t matter. Everyone mattered and so did their ideas. That was George circa 2014, less than a year after starting my company. There was so much progress that I had made personally in the time between my fall from grace a few years before (the Winter of

George as my friends liked to call it) up until that point, but there was still something missing from this new-old version of me. The moment I landed that client and began working with their staff this feeling came rushing through my body. The best way I can describe it is that I was a tire that had a blowout a few years back. I started patching the tire over the years and refilled it with air, but even though the car was moving it still had a slow leak. Well wouldn't you know it, there was another hole in it that I had never noticed. When I came up with this new-fangled strategy for my client and realized how much I was helping so many people, it plugged that hole for me and I could feel the air rushing through and inflating me. What actually happened was that my mission for the start of this company of mine was fully realized at that moment because I saw that I was providing a sustainable service that was necessary and good-intentioned.

Suddenly I was my father's son again and I started realizing the simple pleasures of what I do for a living. I do something that matters and helps others while filling my soul, not just my wallet.

The 8-month journey with this client was transformative for all parties involved. I left there satisfied with what I had done, yet I had gained and lost things because of this consult. I gained a clarity in my direction for the future. I gained a new set of business values and it wasn't until the engagement came full circle while I wrote up my post-consult evaluation that these values all became clear to me: less money; less clients; emotional investment in the product for both sides; caring for others; caring for ourselves. Through countless conversations with countless employees, I discovered that for the most part people are good. It is not necessarily the person that is bad, it is the circumstances around that person that create bad decisions. What's the key to that observation? WE create our own circumstances, so a bad decision is nobody else's fault but our own. You're miserable at work and can't seem to figure out how to make it better? Maybe

it's time to leave and move on. You think your employees suck and nobody knows what they're doing? Maybe it's time to rethink your managerial style. Now, onto what I lost during this consult. I lost one thing and it was pretty major for me. I lost the ability to bullshit. I had so many personal connections, so much investment in my work, and so much emotion that flowed through me during these 8 months that I came out in the end with an upgraded conscience that would no longer allow me to operate in business with anything less than high integrity.

Suddenly I was the me that I always knew I could be and I have enjoyed every second of my personal and professional mission since. I don't have all the answers. I don't even know what caused me to start writing this. What started out as one page became nine. What started out as a whim on a December night in 2016 turned into a mission statement that has taken me over 2 years to write. I always knew that writing this was going to be very personal and that's why I took my time. If it was a lecture that I was writing then I could bang out 10 pages in under an hour, but when you title something "The Things We Think and Do Not Say," you better damn well take your time making sure you say it all. For me, it comes down to a simple principle. Whether it's in good times or bad, we owe it to ourselves (and I owed it to myself) to protect ourselves and those that we lead no matter what the circumstances. Clients, staff, spouses, children, family, friends, even perfect strangers...we need to lift each other up because it's most often a circumstance that causes bad decisions. Change your circumstances. Help others change theirs. When you invest yourself in something, whether it's your work or your personal life, your life will begin to feel meaningful. When you connect the dots between the two? That's a fulfilled life and that's where caring for others begins.

How did we get from talking about the fall of modern-day business to talking about fulfilled lives and feelings? I hope you've already connected the dots between the two, but in the event that you have not yet figured out what I'm trying to say here, then most likely you have yet to live some of the life experiences that brought me to this understanding. So, as I did when I was writing this and got stuck for the next sentence to write, put this manuscript down. Go out there and live. Laugh, think, and cry, as one of my heroes Jimmy Valvano would say. Experience the circumstances around you, then one day I want you to reflect on them and pick this manuscript up again. This isn't a roadmap for you...this was MY roadmap. My hope is that you can translate my journey into something that relates to your journey. I pray that you experience the simultaneous heartache and joy that I did that one night in December of 2016 while I was burning the midnight oil and suddenly had so much to say and no one to listen. This is my mission statement and the reason that I NEEDED to put this to paper was because we can't create change unless we put our intentions out there so others can hold us accountable for what we promise.

Dedicated to the three most influential people in my life, my wife and children.

For Colleen, Mia, and Johnny

My promise to you is the most important of all.

