

# “Overcoming the Impossible”

(Part 1 of a 4-part Seminar Series)

Using fresh insight into why technology businesses often fail to fully meet their primary objectives!

Stephen Pollack, Serial Entrepreneur

*“Building Human Capital Through Experience”*

[www.INSIDESPIN.com](http://www.INSIDESPIN.com)



# About Stephen Pollack

- ***Serial Entrepreneur***
  - Newspapers, McDonalds, Car Wash, Camping Leader, Santa Picture Booth, Delivery Food, IT Manager, Inmate Tutor, Head Waiter, Security Guard, Adult Education Instructor, ...
- ***Founder, CEO of PlateSpin Ltd*** (2003-2008)
  - One of Canada's top technology success stories from the last 20 years
- ***Versatile Executive***
  - spectrum of roles over several decades and variety of markets
- ***Product Specialist***
  - Always focused on innovation and overcoming obstacles
- **Author - [www.INSIDESPIN.com](http://www.INSIDESPIN.com)**
  - articles to help address challenges facing leaders/entrepreneurs in the tech sector

***Never stop learning ... never stop moving forward ...***



# Following the Signs

*"In order to arrive you must follow the signs. The world is inscribed with the path that each man must follow. It is just a matter of reading the inscription written for you to find success."*

Adapted from "The Alchemist", by Paulo Coelho



# Our Life Long Challenge?

Adapted from "The Alchemist", by Paulo Coelho

- Why do dreams go unrealized more times than not?
  1. Starting with childhood, we are conditioned to believe that everything we want to do is impossible
  2. We know what we want to do, but are afraid of hurting those around us by abandoning everything to pursue a dream
  3. We fear the defeats we will meet along the path of success
  4. We fear realizing the dream for which we fought and how it might affect us and those around us



# Revealing the Incriptions (a.k.a. Agenda)

- Turn around negative conditioning
- Treating a Business Plan as a source of “Leadership”
- Reducing time spent on paths that lead nowhere
- Knowing who you are as a business
- Wishing to be successful versus planning to be successful



# Recognizing Negative Conditioning

1. Starting with childhood, we are conditioned to believe that everything we want to do is impossible
  - We grow up with this negative constraint building layers of prejudice, fear and guilt in our daily decision making
  - This can lead to a decline of accepting the tougher challenges given we're predisposed to think they are unsolvable
  - Through passage of time, we gradually descend to the level of everyone else, or even lower, if we have no support around us to buoy optimism to the top

Human experience is often conveyed through a “don't or can't do” filter which creates a systemically solidifying prejudice hindering path to success.



# Recognizing Negative Conditioning

- New ideas are often responded to with why they won't work
- Our confidence, or lack thereof, hinders a desire to push through a problem, we would rather go around problems instead
- We really don't understand our current situation, so we make assumptions based on some other premise
  - We end up relying on hindsight to drive forward which is too late
- The “tree” view is easy, we live it each day, the “forest” view is hard
  - We need to develop a habit of stepping back and away, unemotionally

Adjust the perspective, look at alternatives, innovate forward



# The Strength of Business Planning

- A [Business Plan](#) is a dramatic enabler for navigating a path to success
  - It makes decisions for us (providing leadership)
  - It captures what we should do when the unexpected happens (answers “What if”)
  - It reveals what will happen next if our assumptions are met (finds “Beacons”)
  - It helps us manage the difference engine separating gas from the brakes (“Risk”)
- Most do not have a leadership-oriented business plan at the level of detail appropriate for team dynamics, stage of business maturity
  - A living document modified to reflect the status of finding path to success
- The BP says this ... the BP says that ... so that’s what we do ...



# The Strength of Business Planning

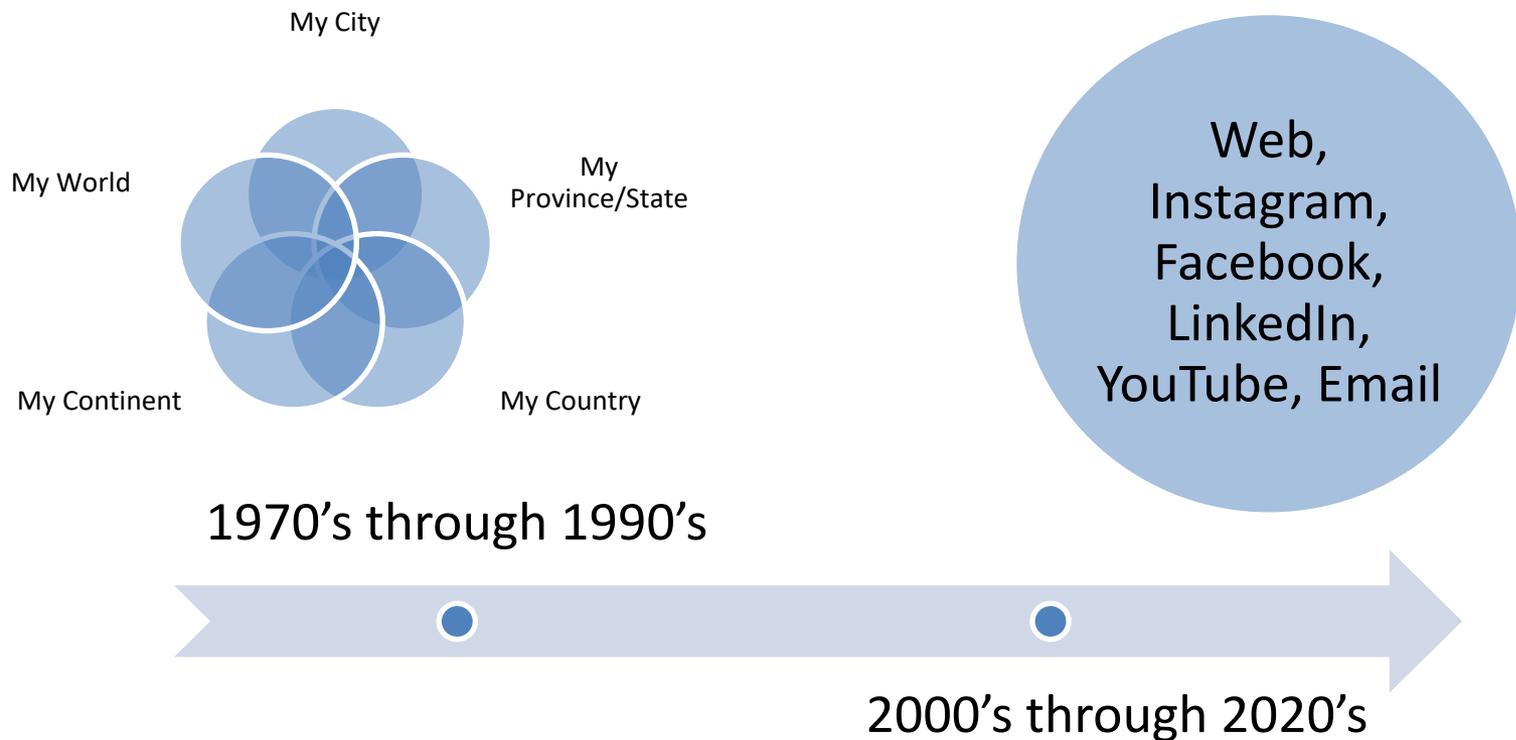
- Metrics to measure by
  - Identify ways to recognize you are on a path to goal achievement
    - Reduce risk, identify reward, trigger pivots and changes where needed
- Reminders of the path
  - Vision capture, milestones, purposes for doing a->b->c
- Responsibilities and accountabilities
  - Enable more leadership, clarify ambiguities, take responsibility
- Measure, measure, measure ...

Great leaders enable decision making within their organizations



# Avoiding Paths That Lead Nowhere

- We all know what everyone knows, access to the same information globally



# Avoiding Paths That Lead Nowhere

- Learn to Ask, [“So What?”](#)
  - Stop spending time on tasks that ultimately have no impact on success.
  - Stop looking for beacons that don’t matter if you find them
  - Have confidence in your plan if it is well designed and thoughtful
- Most Common Time-Wasting Example → Competitive Analysis
  - Often a dedicated project to find out what competitors are doing
  - Web research, product research, market analyst reviews, customer surveys, live presentations, ..., lots of time, resources, money, distractions
  - Questions whether you are confident in what you are doing? ...



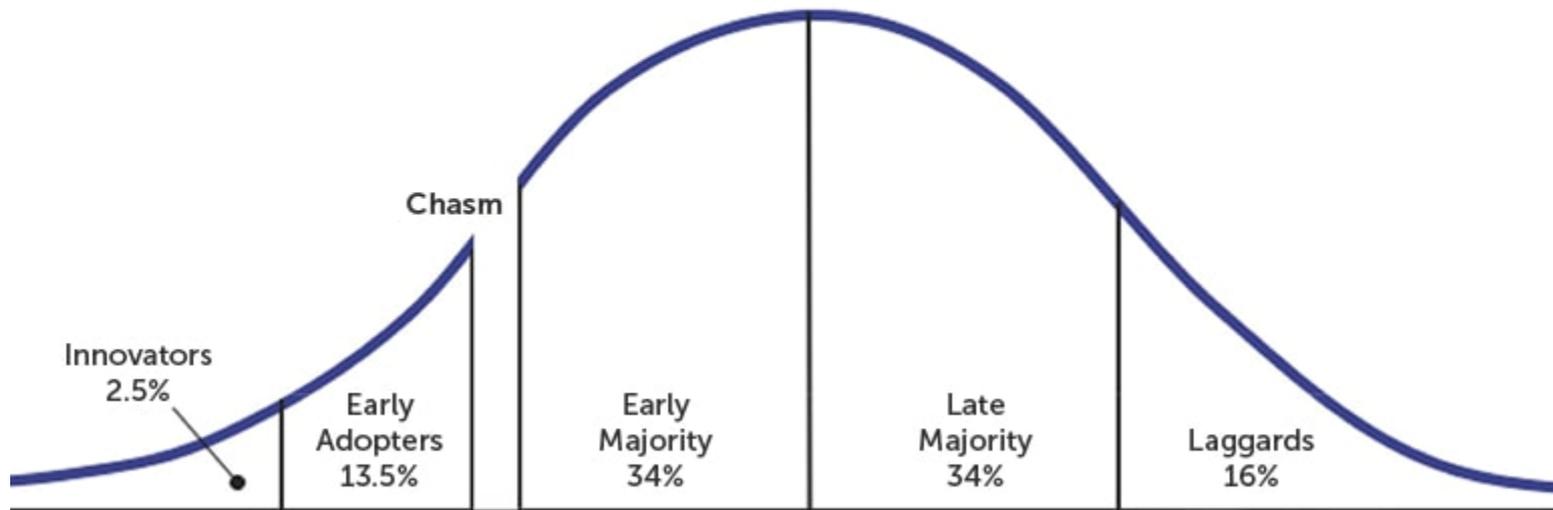
# Avoiding Paths That Lead Nowhere

- Why do you need to know all that stuff about your competitors?
  - Are you going to change something you do based on what you learn?
    - Perhaps your team is not properly qualified to do their jobs
  - Are you going to copy something your competitor is doing?
    - Perhaps your business plan is not about innovation and leadership
  - Are you going to pivot finding out competitors are doing what you are doing?
    - Do you not understand your customer needs? Are you afraid to compete?
- Asking “So What” forces everyone to reflect on “Why I am Doing This”
  - Build a decision tree and see where you get to
  - If no where interesting, stop, if somewhere interesting, stop when you get there



# We need to know Who We Are

## Technology Adoption Life Cycle



Geoffrey Moore – Crossing the Chasm  
Circa 1990's



# We need to know Who We Are

- Set achievable goals not unrealistic goals
  - Missing a goal is often more harmful than not trying to reach goal
- Build a leadership business plan even if starting as 1-person shop
  - Let business plan makes business decisions, not the people
- Understand where focus should be. Base it on stage of product, market opportunity, customer maturity and team maturity.
  - The right fit goes a long way to achieving the desired goal(s)
- Review often, communicate too much, shift and pivot even if just to practice
  - Shifting and pivoting excellence is NOT a common trait of many businesses



# Plan to be Successful!

- Make sure you know what it will mean to be successful!
  - Don't wait to implement systems and processes
  - Have predetermined plans and answers to questions related to growth
  - Never risk underservicing
  - Minimize product “tax”, plan for scaling (don't put it off)
  - ALWAYS hire “A” candidates when they come along
    - Have proper definition of “A” candidate

“Was ZOOM ready for its COVID-19 opportunity?”



# Business Case Study – Free Software

- How to compete against a free product or service?

**Option A - “Folding the tent”**

**Option B - Pour money into creating an equal/better “free” offering**

**Option C - Focus on the value of your solution and continue forward**

Every company, especially large ones, have common points of weakness to exploit ...



# Facing Down the “Impossible”

- Level of customer satisfaction
- Pace of innovation over equal timelines
- Focus point of customer relationship
- Level of installed base and R&D legacy
- ...



# Facing Down the “Impossible”

- Option C - Focus on the value of your solution and continue forward
  - Shift marketing to reveal value in ways competitor can't
  - ALWAYS charge what product is worth
  - Service and support to establish excellence
  - Instill a belief that you can overcome the impossible

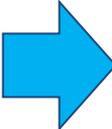
Customer loyalties often transcend  
just features and functions



# Facing Down the “Impossible”



**\$0 Bankruptcy**



**Become One.**  
Novell acquires PlateSpin. Physical and virtual worlds unite.

**Novell.** |  **PLATESPIN**

[Click here to learn what the acquisition means to you.](#)

**\$205M USD**



# PlateSpin Success Came From ...

- Understanding the stage of the market opportunity
- Making sure it had kick-ass technology
- Developing a confident team culture to pursue success
- Making decisions with a high degree of pragmatism
- Choosing the right sales model
- Investing in market brand attractiveness
- Competing successfully against 2 free offerings from large market leaders
- Obtaining a balance of investors to support business risk profile
- Delivering depth-oriented vetted business planning
- Asking “So What” when needed
- Enjoying how some “luck” played into achievement.



# Why We Fail To Achieve?

- Why do business dreams go unrealized more times than not?

1. Starting with childhood, we are conditioned to believe that everything we want to do is impossible
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# Go Back and Reflect on These Cornerstones for Success

- ✓ Turn around negative conditioning
- ✓ Treating a Business Plan as a source of “Leadership”
- ✓ Reducing time spent on paths that lead nowhere
- ✓ Knowing who you are as a business
- ✓ Wishing to be successful versus planning to be successful

Bring fresh insight into meeting  
your primary objectives!



# Seminar Two – Pursuing the Business Dream (Nov 19)

- Why do business dreams go unrealized more times than not?
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**Questions -> Use ZOOM Chat Function**

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