

GROW, BUILD, SELL, LIVE

Praise for *Grow, Build, Sell, Live*:

‘Crispin has been helping me to develop my agency for the past six years. Thanks to his suggestions I’ve made major changes in financial, HR and client management. This has transformed our profitability and enabled me to develop a sustainable business that is helping me achieve my personal life goals. I recommend Crispin and Richard’s book to anyone intent on building a great agency.’

Patrik Schober, CEO PRAM Consulting, Prague

‘Agency leaders like me need a practical book like this. We have so many things to do day by day and hardly have time for our own professional development. But if we want to build a successful, long lasting business, we cannot stop learning and strengthening our knowledge. This book is a perfect resource for that.’

Andras R Nagy, Owner of Probako Communication,
Former Chairman of Worldcom EMEA region

‘This guide will not only inspire, but more importantly also focus minds on what really matters at an agency, giving owners renewed vigour to actually get out of bed in the morning. It should help distil disparate ideas into a coherent strategic overview, ensuring companies have a clear purpose to be successful.’

Henry Griffiths, Partner, Little Red Rooster PR

‘Running an agency has unique challenges, stresses and opportunities for growth. If I’d read this book 15 years ago, I would have made many different decisions, and reached them with more focus and less turmoil. In

short, reading this book is one of the best investments you can make in yourself, and your business.

Crispin Manners' understanding of agency strategy, operations are top-of-the-game. His insights into the nuances that can accelerate or impede agency performance, and the choices owners may make, are based on years of direct experience in the centre of the storm, which is rare and valuable. I've read several books on agency performance in the 30 years I've run my firm, and this is possibly the most incisive, and useful.'

Amy Berman, President, Corporate Ink, Boston, USA

'This book is a great resource for PR agency owners – and anyone wishing to build a great agency. I wish I had read it when I founded my agency. Every business leader working in a people-based business should have a look at it, the real-life examples can be helpful in every stage of the agency life-cycle: start-up, growth, sale or succession.'

Diego Biasi, Founder & CEO, BPRESS, Italy

'Whether you're an existing or wannabe PR agency boss, stop whatever you are doing and buy this book. It's so good, I wish I'd written it. With explicit guidelines on how formalising your purpose can revolutionise your culture and cashflow, and a must-read section on innovation, it's the best investment you'll make this year. Hands off my copy!'

Sarah Waddington, Founder and Editor of
#FuturePROof and Vice-president of the
Chartered Institute of Public Relations

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GROW, BUILD, SELL, LIVE: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO RUNNING AND BUILDING AN AGENCY AND ENJOYING IT

PRCA Practice Guides

BY

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CRISPIN MANNERS



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>Foreword</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
Introduction – Building a Great Agency – One Choice at a Time	1
1. The Dangers of Travelling Hopefully and How a Purpose Becomes a Plan	5
2. If You're Running a People Business, Then Make People Your Business	21
3. Culture Matters – It Will Determine How Fast You Succeed	35
4. Successful Agencies Need Good Leaders	49
5. Great Client Relationships Are Built on Respect Not Emotion	65
6. Cobbler's Children Is Cobblers – Why Marketing Matters?	83
7. Making Your Innovation Choices Pay-off	101
8. New Business – The Life Blood of All Agencies	119

9. The Money Matters – It’s What Agencies Are Really About	133
10. Make Sure the Business Is Good Enough to Sell – From Day One	151
<i>References</i>	167
<i>Index</i>	171

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1

Figure 1.	An Alignment Framework.	14
-----------	---------------------------------	----

Chapter 2

Figure 1.	An Agency's Colour Profile.. . . .	28
-----------	------------------------------------	----

Chapter 4

Figure 1.	Mapping Leadership Performance.	62
Figure 2.	Leadership Development Plan	62

Chapter 5

Figure 1.	Identifying the Impact Gap	70
Figure 2.	Assessing the Quality of Client Relationships	80
Figure 3.	Identifying the Defection Loyalty Divide . . .	80

Chapter 7

Figure 1.	An Adaptation of Geoffrey Moore's Market Lifecycle.. . . .	104
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Chapter 9

Figure 1.	Productivity, Profit and Growth.	148
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FOREWORD

Agency leaders spend the majority of their time on three areas – their people, their clients and on new business. These are all important levers for consultancy growth. But all too often, agency owners forget two more essential tools for growth: attention to the numbers and investment in their leaders. The consultancy leadership role can seem like an endless stream of fires to put out. It can leave leaders feeling as if their team, or their clients, are running their business rather than themselves. That's where this book comes in.

Grow, Build, Sell, Live features practical and implementable advice and tools to address the day-to-day reality of running a successful agency. In addition to giving guidance on people, clients and new business, the book covers leadership and the numbers in detail to ensure leaders have the tools and knowledge to be in control. The content draws on proven approaches, helpful science and real-life examples to give practical recommendations to improve readers' ability to achieve the controlled growth which is essential to agency success.

If you are thinking about starting your own agency, have started one and hit your first round of growing pains, or are a veteran looking for an exit, this book is for you. It will appeal to current and aspiring agency owners who want to understand their choices and take control of their agency.

PRCA Practice Guides are a series of practical and readable books that provide PR and communications professionals, new and experienced alike, with hands-on guidance to help them succeed in a highly competitive sector. Written by experienced practitioners who have already succeeded in the world of PR and communications, *PRCA Practice Guides* offer powerful insights into the challenges of the modern industry and guidance on how to navigate your way through them.

Francis Ingham
Director General, PRCA
Chief Executive, ICCO

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Crispin Manners

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Richard Houghton

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INTRODUCTION

BUILDING A GREAT AGENCY – ONE CHOICE AT A TIME

A practical guide for Owners, CEOs and MDs on how to build a successful consultancy so it gives you what you want from your life

Every three minutes, somewhere in the world, a new PR/communications consultancy is born. That's an extra 175,200 potential competitors every year. In every one of those companies there is a leader like you. Someone full of hope, excitement and maybe, a little trepidation. Five years later, about half of those consultancies will have survived – so that's an additional 438,000 competitors.

No wonder running a PR agency can be hard work.

So, if you are thinking about starting your own consultancy, have started one and hit your first round of growing pains, or are a veteran looking at an exit, this book is for you.

In it you'll find practical and implementable advice and tools to address the day-to-day reality of running a successful

consultancy – without a lot of the stress and angst that usually goes with it.

I.1. DON'T FORGET YOU MATTER TOO

If you're like most agency leaders, you'll spend most of your time on three areas – your people, your clients and new business. These are all important levers for consultancy growth. But two other areas need at least the same level of attention – the numbers and YOU. Yes you. Too often the owner/leader doesn't invest enough in their own needs – and this lack of 'investment' in themselves can really hurt when the business needs them the most.

So, in addition to giving guidance on people, clients and new business, we've made sure that you and the numbers are both covered off in detail.

I.2. BUILDING A GREAT AGENCY ONE CHOICE AT A TIME

We talk a lot about choices – and the fact that we all have more choice about what happens next than we think we have.

The business model for a consultancy is a simple one. We package expertise, creativity and contacts as 'time' and then sell it. The reality, as we all know, is that delivering on this model, day-in-day-out, is demanding at best and exhausting at worst.

When you grow at 34% compound for a decade, or reshape an ailing agency for a global group (as we have done), you learn a lot of lessons. We've experienced the inevitable lows created by day-to-day issues, such as staff churn, unreasonable clients and price-cutting competitors. But we've also enjoyed the highs that agency life can

deliver — doing great work, winning awards and seeing good people develop into great people.

The consultancy owner/CEO/MD role can seem like an endless stream of issues to handle and fires to put out. It can leave you feeling as if your team, or your clients, are running your business — rather than you. And that your company runs your life, rather than helping you to create the life you want to lead.

That's where this book comes in.

1.3. TOOLS AND GUIDANCE TO PUT YOU MORE IN CONTROL OF THE CHOICES YOU MAKE

We've put together practical and implementable guidance on how to manage your consultancy so that you have more control and, most importantly, so that it gives you what you want from your life.

The content draws on proven approaches and some helpful science. It also quotes some real-life examples from leaders we know. We've changed the names to protect the innocent!

We talk a lot about growth. Not because being big is best, but because in our experience, controlled growth is essential to getting the best from your people and your business. How much you grow depends on why you started the business in the first place. Which brings us back to choices.

We wrote this book, not to be prescriptive but to encourage you to think about your choices more, and to think about them earlier.

We want you to understand your choices. We want you to make them conscious rather than unconscious choices. Only then can you control them, rather than have them control you.

Crispin and Richard

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CHAPTER 1

THE DANGERS OF TRAVELLING HOPEFULLY AND HOW A PURPOSE BECOMES A PLAN

Issues that may be familiar:

- Wondering why all the hard work doesn't seem to be paying off the way you hoped
- Wondering why it's always you that has to solve the agency's problems
- Wondering why your people don't seem as excited about what the agency does as you are
- Wondering why the clients you want to work for don't seek you out
- Wishing your people would be a bit more proactive

This chapter focuses on both the tangible and intangible outcomes that will make you feel you've achieved something special.

A lot of people start their business with the famous Robert Louis Stephenson quote in mind: ‘It’s better to travel hopefully than to arrive [updated for brevity’s sake]’.

Others start a business because of a ‘sliding doors’¹ moment – a choice that created an agency rather than taking another path. Some, in my experience the exceptions, had a clear goal in mind before they opened their doors for business.

So, as you read this chapter, ask yourself. Why did I start (am I starting) my business? What is the Purpose of the business and for me? If you can’t recite your Purpose instantly, then we recommend you run a session to define it. And, define the Purpose in terms that mean something important for you (and your family), for clients and your people.

Some of you may say it’s obvious, it’s to make money. But how much money and by when? And do you care how you make it, or does the type of service you provide matter too? What about the type of clients? Will you work for anyone or are some types of organisations off limits? And what value will you deliver to your clients? Is it tangible value like revenue or intangible value like trust?

Defining both your personal and company Purpose with clarity will provide three valuable outcomes.

- It will give you a framework for guiding your choices and your business plans.
- It will explain the value you deliver to clients and thus make it easier to win them.

¹*Sliding Doors* is a 1998 British-American romantic drama film written and directed by Peter Howitt and starring Gwyneth Paltrow and John Hannah. The film alternates between two parallel universes, based on the two paths the central character’s life could take depending on whether she catches a train, and causing different outcomes in her life.

- And, it will help you to attract people who are motivated by delivering the company Purpose.

1.1.1. A FRAMEWORK FOR MAKING CHOICES

By defining your company Purpose, you will create a decision-making framework that will make your future choices and decisions much easier. This is because of a psychological effect that aids decision-making that Robert Cialdini² calls *commitment and consistency*. By writing your company Purpose, you are making a commitment to achieving it. Once you have made a commitment, every choice you make will either be consistent or dissonant with achieving the Purpose.

We like to call it the law of little steps. That's because you won't achieve your Purpose in one giant leap. But having made a commitment to it, each choice you make should move you one step closer to achieving it.

In Chapter 10, – ‘Make Sure Your Business Is Good Enough to Sell – From Day One’ – we mention Ian and how he transformed his business by establishing a personal Purpose for the business. In his case, this was earning enough to send his two children to university in the USA. About a year after he defined his personal Purpose, Ian asked if I thought he should take a part-time Chairman's role at a membership organisation. I reminded him of his personal Purpose and asked him if he thought the distraction caused by the role would be consistent with achieving his personal Purpose. He said it would not. But then he mentioned a new factor – he wanted to make his parents proud and thought

²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Cialdini

such a prestigious role would be consistent with this goal but not with his original personal Purpose.

The fact that he chose to take the position shows that making his parents proud should have been a part of his original personal Purpose because it is a powerful driver for him.

In hindsight, taking the role was indeed a distraction. Ian's business suffered because he lost clients while his attention was elsewhere. We're not sharing that story to show how smart we are. We are including it to encourage you to really think about what matters to you. If Ian had included the pride of his parents in the original personal Purpose i.e. 'my business needs to enable me to put my children through university in the USA and make my parents proud', he would have taken other choices (such as ensuring he had a strong deputy to oversee clients while he was away, or waiting until he had this person in place before taking up this role). This would have helped to ensure that his business didn't suffer while he fulfilled the chairman role.

1.2. USING YOUR PURPOSE TO ATTRACT THE RIGHT TALENT

Research shows that people are more energised, productive and happy if they buy-in to the Purpose of their employer. I've heard agency owners say that they hate the fact some people treat their work like a job and show no real passion. But the same owners usually can't provide an explicit and transparent company Purpose that would inspire people to go the extra mile. Nor do they make it completely explicit how the daily actions of every employee help to deliver that Purpose.