



Think Big,
Act Bigger,
and Do It Your Way
—Because You Can!

Jeffrey Hayzlett

All my life people have been laying down rules or telling me what I need to do in order to be successful. I choose not to play their game.

From my years as a successful small businessman in printing, marketing, and business development in South Dakota, through my time as the CMO of a Fortune 100 company, and into my current work as a speaker, bestselling author, host of a national TV show, and creator of the C-Suite Network, people have asked me one question more than any other: “Jeff, how did you do it?” My answer is:

“I think big and act bigger.”

Acting bigger means tying visions to actions—getting beyond the stories and excuses, the self-imposed limitations, preconceived notions, and constraining structures—and becoming the biggest, baddest, best version of who you are and what you want to be. Thinking big and acting bigger is all about action and attitude: being fearless and bold, steamrolling obstacles, ignoring perceived limitations, and even being a little irrational and pigheaded at times. It's about putting yourself out there and making a difference for yourself and others.

And it is about hard work. I've gotten to where I am because I have outworked the competition and used every resource I have not only to survive but to thrive. But before the hard work started it was about trusting in who I am and doing things because I can. When people told me, "You can't!" I refused to listen. I beat back the naysayers and pushed past people who told me "this won't work." Instead, I thought big and acted bigger.

I filled my new book, *Think Big Act Bigger* with stories of how I did that and from dozens of people I know and admire who serve as examples of how you act and rise above the odds. But it all starts with you saying, "Because I can."

The key to thinking big and acting bigger for any person and any company of any age or size is to own who and what you are because you can.

Do you believe you can? That's the first of all the essential questions you must ask to think big and act bigger and *own who you are and everything you do*.

Be Yourself in Everything You Do— and Make Sure Your People Are Too

My attitude is always about owning who I am in everything I do: Sell me, sell the company; sell the company, sell me. When people hire me and say, “Make it like it used to be,” I say, “No. You can’t go back, and I don’t want to.” I don’t look the way I did when I was 20; I look better. Sure, I have lost some hair, but I also lost any doubt as to who I am. I’ve gained some weight, but I have also gained experience, character, and worldliness that make me better than I ever have

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been. Simply put, I am all that I say you should be: fearless, bold, and relentless. That's not arrogance, that's awareness—that's an attitude that says, "I own who I am!"

My success comes from who I am, not from trophies or titles. When someone recently said to me, "You're wearing success well," I took it to mean that I'm wearing who I am at my core well. It's not the camera, the book, or the stage that gives me my authority and defines my success. It comes from the core of who I am and how I act every moment of the day. People sometimes tell me, "Jeff, I like that you're real. You really are who you are," and I always reply, "It's hard enough to be me. Why would I want to be someone else, too?"

Why have we all been so conditioned to think being our true selves at work is risky? That we need to be different people personally and professionally? That doesn't just sound inauthentic, it sounds exhausting. If you don't know who the hell you are, how the hell can you be someone? If you're not real, how can you expect to get real responses back from your team and your customers? How can you or your business stand for something?

Anyone who makes you think you can't be yourself and be successful is selling you a lie—because it is not your story.

The world doesn't need another TED Talk to tell us what we have to do. TED speakers can be moving and entertaining, but the idolatry of TED has often led to too much change in the wrong direction—away from helping people become a bigger “you” and toward helping people do things the way the speakers tell them to. There is no single solution to any problem—no one-size-fits-all approach, no absolute rule. Absolute rule is what makes totalitarian regimes tick. Think I'm going too far? Perhaps, but given our culture's propensity for quick sound bites and selective listening, it is a legitimate concern that has even led to parody via a hysterical quiz by MotherJones.com: [“North Korean Slogan or TED Talk Sound Bite?”](#)

My second problem with TED Talks ties into my larger problem with franchises and chain stores and what they have done to the American landscape (and mind). TED Talks force people down the same path to imitation—to become a bigger “them,” not a bigger “you.” They say, “You must be like this!” Don't get me wrong: I am a franchising fan, and I have no problem with convenience. But they provide an easy excuse to give up on individuality. When I go to Atlanta or Orlando or Houston or virtually any city across the United States, I can't tell one neighborhood from another; so many are filled with the usual sets of repeating and repeatable stores and houses. The founders of those stores may have been big thinkers who acted big, but the result of their work is sameness for the rest of us to buy into.

Am I saying I have never watched or even enjoyed a TED Talk? Of course not. I also enjoy a riblet appetizer at Applebee's occasionally. But I go out of my way to enjoy Stroud's chicken in Kansas City or bacon at Ben & Jack's Steak House when I return to my apartment in New York City. I support all the family-owned diners and neighborhood joints I can, because I like places with real people who have succeeded on their own terms. These people embrace the independence that comes with thinking big and acting bigger every single day.

That's why when I say, "Own it," I do *not* mean I want you to own who I am. I want you to own who you are. I will never, ever tell you there is "One Truth." You are in control. Isn't that what all the companies selling technology to control our lives and our homes tell us? Everything connects through us, thus our responsibility is greater than ever to own the power of that connection. I'm not saying you shouldn't ask for advice, but at some point those voices just make you smaller.

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Yes, your story will need to evolve over time. Yes, you must refine how you think and act to face emerging challenges as you grow and face new competition. Yes, you have to adapt to respond to change. But if you do all this having defined the core of who you are and hold true to it in all parts of your life, evolution, refinement, and adaptations do not change who you are, only how and what you do. “Not being you” might succeed in the short run, but over time, it will kill your and your team’s morale, productivity, loyalty, vision, and eventually your bottom line. As soon as I began to understand this, business (and life) got a lot better and easier for me.

So why do so many leaders *not* understand this? Some of them lack confidence. Some of them are afraid. But most of the time, they, their businesses, and their people are stuck in stories that say, “I can’t.” Yes, your people. You want your people to be empowered in the same way—to act like themselves, but bigger.

This is the foundation of an essential rule in my book and my offices: If I have to answer something or do something that you should be able to answer or do yourself, then why do I need you?

The people who work for you need to be empowered to create and own what they do in support of you, your team, and your customers/clients. This allows them to break free from limitations and lead to new stories, bigger thinking and action, and their own “because I can” attitudes. And don’t get me started about the youth of today being entitled and lazy and blah blah blah. There are issues with “us” as much as there are issues with “them.” More often than not, the issue boils down to the fact that we want “them” to own our stories instead of learning, understanding, letting them create their own stories, and figuring out together how their stories fit in with ours.

Give your teams the tools to succeed, make sure they understand what you expect, and then let them put their stamp on it so they work hard and own it to win. No matter what happens. No one—not you or anyone who works with or for you—should be embarrassed about the mistakes we make or the actions we take, even when we fall on our faces. *We should own them because no one is going to die.*

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I wasn’t pigheaded enough.”*

Remember: No One Is Going to Die!

Sure, you will lose a few times in business. Heck, I often fail five to six times trying to launch something new. But if I wait for something perfect, I am still going to fail and miss new opportunities and possibilities. Better to get over yourself and keep moving: What's it going to cost you not to own it and act?

Thus, I exhort in my book for you to do what I do in life: *Connect a “no one is going to die” to your success, not just your failures, and let it drive your passion as you think big and act bigger.*

Failure has become too much of a badge of honor in this country. I'm never going into a situation thinking I'm going to fail no matter how risky or seemingly impossible it is. I believe we are making so much of our mistakes. We are thinking “failure is the new black” and getting bad at celebrating actual success. And isn't that what we are really talking about here: success? Did you ever notice in the stories about failures that we never talk to the long-term losers—only those who failed after making big wins or went on to greater triumphs? If they hadn't ever succeeded we wouldn't be talking to them. I wouldn't want to make a career as a continual loser who finds success only in failure. You wouldn't want to listen to me. No one listens to permanent losers.

Maybe the reason we don't celebrate success enough is because we think and act small; the successes are not much to celebrate. That's the real danger here: allowing the voices in our heads to creep in again and keep us from thinking and acting big. Stop overthinking things, coming up with reasons why not, and then playing it safe—*even if that means being a little pigheaded and irrational.*

Push Harder and Farther: Be a Little Pigheaded and Irrational

I've been called pigheaded a number of times, and I've never taken offense, because I find pigs smart and delicious. But until I wrote this book, I never looked up the actual definition of pigheaded, which according to Merriam-Webster means "refusing to do what other people want or to change your opinion or the way you do something: very stubborn." Synonyms for pigheaded include everything from "headstrong" to "opinionated" to "willful." I'm good with being those things when necessary, especially when considering the opposites of pigheaded: "acquiescent, compliant, pliable, relenting, and yielding." In fact, my only regrets in my business career are from when I wasn't pigheaded enough.

The sad truth is sometimes people just want to do what they're told and get stuck in excuses and inaction. That's when you not only need to be pigheaded but employ a little "irrational leadership" and create tension and results. To truly be irrational, you can't just push *hard*; you have to push *far*—to the edge of the table. How do you know where the edge of the table is? You don't, but for most of us the edge is much farther away than we think. If you are mostly comfortable, you aren't even close. If people laughing behind your back, you're getting there.

What are you doing to push beyond the usual outcomes and expectations? How will you hold people to higher standards than you ever had before? And how do you keep focus and balance—doing what you need to be doing—as you push to change? No excuses!

That's the main reason leaders need to be pigheaded and irrational sometimes: Excuses. Excuses are the easiest answers to find, create the shortest stories to live in, and carry outside weight in your fight against "because I can't." We've been beaten to death with what we can't do, so we default to excuses for not doing things. Don't rock the boat! Don't offend people! But when you ask why people can't do something, you find they are just creating reasons to support the status quo or some limited worldview.

We've all heard the excuses (I list more than sixty from the sublime to the ridiculous in the book), and you're lying if you say you've never used one of them. Maybe you dropped one to protect the feelings of someone you loved. Maybe you used one to cover up a larger problem you were trying to solve. Or maybe you used one because it was the truth. I'm not saying excuses and lies. I'm saying excuses are easy, addictive, and designed to shut things down. Sh**t happened? Fine! What happened after you cleaned off your boots?

To change your thinking, you must lead by example and make your people question things and have zero tolerance for excuses. You need them to write big stories without boundaries, not one-line short stories based on presuppositions and assumptions that go nowhere. And if you can do that, you will have owned the first part of the "think big, act bigger" attitude. Only then, can you focus it on all that you do and make things happen. Doing this requires you to do things like *clean your own bathroom*, steamroll obstacles, and most importantly in the end: have a servant mentality.

What do I mean by this? Here's how I put it in my book.

Clean Your Own Bathroom!

How can you expect your people to do the things you want them to do if you won't do them, haven't done them, don't know them well enough to understand what needs to be done, or are completely disconnected from them?

Disconnects lead to inauthenticity, losing touch, and eventually going from growth to gone. That's why I remind myself to clean my own bathroom. Yes, I actually clean the bathroom at our offices. I do it as a reminder to keep getting my hands dirty and to never see any work as demeaning or beneath anybody—and to stand as an example to everyone in my companies as a result. It also reminds me to stay connected. When was the last time you walked the floor of one of your businesses? Picked up the phone and talked to an important vendor or customer? Ate in the cafeteria or ate your lunch at a communal table? Read and reviewed your systems, rules, or operating manual? Sat and talked with people in your office who are normally filtered by your direct reports or assistants, not because you had to or for a review but just to listen?

For far too many people, the answer is: “almost never.” Change that. Own what you do and ask people to do and clean sh** up. Remember: Everyone poops—keep your perspective!

Disconnection is a lonely island of entitlement in business—it's a dance for sure, but you must find that balance between pushing forward and staying grounded as you *confront the obstacles in front of you*.

Steamroll Obstacles and Enemies: Think Differently!

All of us have overcome obstacles to get where we are, but it is being able to use what we have learned to steamroll ongoing obstacles that take us to the next level again and again. The only way to do that is to put the obstacles front and center.

Ask yourself: What's your obstacle, and what do you need to get through it, around it, or remove it to make big things happen? Are you stuck in traditional thinking? Maybe you are refusing to think beyond the questions and obstacles you have now to eliminate them for the future? Perhaps you lack resilience in the face of bad time or bad people? Whatever it is, don't get mad. Don't get even. Just figure out the answer and get ahead.

The bigger the obstacles are, the more opportunity in taking them down. And make sure you should have the biggest, baddest enemy you can imagine in your space, because you want to be the biggest and baddest in that space. Don't have an enemy? Create one. Yes, I just said create an enemy. There's a reason every great business success has an "enemy" to take down, and it's the same reason every great fairy tale has a villain: it makes for a great story for people to buy into. And what happens if the other guy is the good guy? Well, then you're the villain. And that's OK, too. You can be the villain, just not your own enemy.

In the end, you can be as big or as bad as you want as long as you create bigger and badder stories to tell. Just remember authenticity is paramount no matter how big you get: You can't get bigger and delude yourself; you can't get bigger and dilute yourself. And you can't leave your people behind. *Serve them well—relentlessly!*

“Disconnects lead to inauthenticity, losing touch, and eventually going from growth to gone.”

Have a Servant Mentality

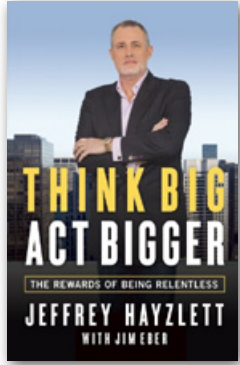
That's the ultimate lesson in *Think Big, Act Bigger*: I did not get where I am because I am smarter or physically or fiscally bigger than my competition. I got where I am in part because somebody mentored me, gave me advice, or guided me when I needed help.

Thus, to think big and act bigger and move forward in the most open-hearted way, I never forget to pay it forward relentlessly in the smallest, most intimate way possible: helping others. Those people who helped me knew what I have now learned myself: we get ahead by helping others get ahead, too. The more I help people, the more it comes back to me in some way. Don't lose sight of that, *ever*.

If you need help, ask. If someone asks, answer. Simply put, people serve people, not companies. Do you inspire devotion like that in the people you work with, and is the feeling mutual? If not, what can you do to change that? Ask them! Acknowledge their presence! Be aware of their existence and the stories they tell! My book and *all our* stories cannot be written without them.

I know you can do that and all of this, because you can. 🙏

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Jeffrey Hayzlett is a primetime television host of *C-Suite with Jeffrey Hayzlett* and *Executive Perspectives* on C-Suite TV, and business radio host of *All Business with Jeffrey Hayzlett* on CBS on-demand radio network Play.It. He is a global business celebrity, speaker, best-selling author, and Chairman of C-Suite Network, home of the world's most powerful network of C-Suite leaders. Hayzlett is a well-traveled public speaker, and the author of two previous bestselling business books, *The Mirror Test* and *Running the Gauntlet*.

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