

If you think some of your colleagues work "insane" hours, you might not realize that they're not nuts, they're nuts about their work. That leads to a logical question: Do you really like what you do?



## Should you be in this business?

When you examine companies like Dell, Microsoft or any of the other Wall Street giants, it's easy to dismiss the idea that there are any lessons we "ordinary" business people can apply to ourselves. After all, these are huge corporations led by brilliant individuals who dominate their industries worldwide. Most entrepreneurs neither have the inclination, nor the positioning of their company to even attempt to be an industry leader. Nevertheless, we can learn from the actions and ideas of the Bill Gates and Michael Dells of the world.

### Fire in the belly

Most successful entrepreneurs are people of tremendous energy. This is not because of genetics or some right brain /left brain psycho-babble oddity. Their energy comes from the passion they feel for their work. They LIKE their chosen field. They are keenly interested in it. As a result, they see problems that would make others cringe as "challenges," not insurmountable hurdles. Of all the qualities I've observed in successful people of any field, passion is the most important. Everything else flows from it.

When you enjoy doing something, it is easier to confront what must be done to succeed. A great athlete doesn't hurt any less than everyone else when he runs at top speed, but his passion for the sport is greater, so he works at it more. Michael Jordan not only had great talent, but he tried harder than anyone else. He wanted it more.

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hours, you might not realize that they're not nuts, they're nuts about their work.

That leads to a logical question: Do you really like what you do? If you don't, you have three choices:

1. Find an area (or position) you do enjoy and get proficient at it.
2. Change your mind about your current situation and discover some things you do like about it — then do them well.
3. Keep doing what you are doing and live a thankless existence.

I don't know about you, but I like #1 and #2.

### Eagle eyes: that 'vision' thing

The next question to ask is if you have a vision. That can sound like pretty esoteric stuff, but in reality, "vision" comes from understanding your work, concluding what is likely to happen in the future and deciding how you will be a part of that future.

In Dell's case, he projected the future demand for computers that everyone could use —the PC. He reasoned that if he could build a small computer efficiently, provide good service and give people what they wanted at a great price, his company could dominate the field. It did. Bill Gates (and a host of others) saw that the DOS operating system was too complicated and unwieldy to be user-friendly. Developing a simple, compatible operating system was a solvable technical problem. Selling it and getting everyone (except Apple) to use it was the major sales coup of the century. It is why he is the richest man in the world.

For a landscape industry business, however, getting

vision doesn't need to involve special insight into the future, or extraordinary brain power. It usually means finding out what your customers need and want.

Ask existing and potential customers some of the things they want, then ask about problems they have relating to your product or service area. Their responses may surprise you — even for long-time customers.

This will help you develop an approach that can give your organization an advantage over your competitors — you can establish a niche. Interestingly enough, this "niche" is often just something you do better than most because you like doing it better. You believe in it. You are willing to work harder at it. With this niche, you can go virtually anywhere. Without it, you can never be significantly better than your competitors.

#### Time to get tough

Whatever it is, the next step is to exploit your strengths (your niche), which means marketing. It goes without saying, however, that once you have decided

upon this particular niche, you have to deliver what you promised.

This usually requires another key ingredient in successful people — and something that usually goes un-

### Do you have what it takes?

#### HOW DO YOU STACK UP AGAINST SUCCESSFUL ACHIEVERS? TRY THESE QUESTIONS.

- ▶ Do you really love (not just like) what you do?
- ▶ Do you know what you do better than your competitors?
- ▶ Can you make tough decisions? Do you look for balance in your decisions?
- ▶ Do you know where you want to go?

If you answered yes to these, you're obviously focused and on your own track to success. If you said no to all four, try spending some time re-evaluating your career and goals. You might do better in another field or situation.

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# it's your life

noticed — toughness and perseverance. Life in general (and business especially) is sometimes a series of difficult decisions. I have never known someone to rise to the top without being able to make tough decisions. This doesn't imply being a "hatchet man," either. A difficult decision is one where there are a lot of possibilities, both good and bad. It is difficult to evaluate at the time because it isn't obvious. But that's part of being a manager.

Our lives have many aspects: ourselves, our families, employees, friends, our organizations and more. The best decision is usually one that does the most for the greatest number of these elements. Being tough in business doesn't mean you have to be nasty; it means you have to be willing to do the right thing for the most people in your life. No one said it would be easy. It takes courage.

## Where are you going?

The last part of this idea involves something that is so basic, it almost goes without saying, and it seems incredibly easy to forget. You need a clear goal.

This sounds overly simple, but let me explain. If you traveled in a foreign country and were told you must stay on a particular road and keep a certain mountain to your left, to reach your destination, you would be crazy not to do it. You could lose your way if you left the road or lost sight of the mountain.


So it is with a goal — when you forget about it, you become unfocused and in danger. With a clear goal, your plans, strategies and solutions also become clear. They almost seem to pop out at you.

If you add these traits together, the ideal situation would be that you are vitally inter-

ested in your profession. Like Michael Dell or Bill Gates, you survey your market and decide how you can get a competitive advantage. You market it. You use your brains, guts and determination, and deliver what you promise. Voila! You're a success.

Too bad it's not that simple. Don't lose sight of the fact that reaching your goals normally takes longer than you think it will, at first. And once you get there, wealth and power don't necessarily equate to happiness. But you'll never enjoy the journey if you don't enjoy your work. Have some fun along the way.

— *The author is a registered principal/independent stock and commodity broker with more than 20 years experience in the financial industry. He can be reached at (800) 643-1155.*



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