

# 'Drive Thy Business, or it will Drive Thee'

WHEN IT COMES TO DISPENSING ADVICE ON RUNNING A SMALL COMPANY, THE SLICKEST MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER AROUND HAS NOTHING ON THE ELECTRIFYING BEN FRANKLIN BY JIM KNEISZEL



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If Benjamin Franklin were alive today, he could make a heap of money as a keynote speaker at business building seminars. A quick survey of this founding father's wise words reveals today's popular motivational speakers as pretenders to the podium.

For quotable quotes, few hold a candle to Franklin, whose list of one-liners could prove both hilarious and potentially profitable. Sure, everyone can have a chuckle over these ditties: "Guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days," "Beer is living proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy," "Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead," and, "He that displays too often his wife and his wallet is in danger of having both of them borrowed."

But for the small business owner, Franklin had a lot to say more than

and their employees. Everyone knows his line "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man health, wealthy and wise." But how hard a person works during their waking hours is even more important, as Franklin said: "Fatigue is the best pillow."

**'An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.'**

Remember this bit of advice the next time you have the urge to complain about obtaining continuing education credits in your profession. Franklin clearly believed in lifelong learning and not getting stuck in a rut in the way you approach new business

businesses, as he did for many years. Franklin stressed paying attention to details. Are you charging what you should to turn a profit on every job? Are you watching costs as closely as revenues? Are you keeping up with routine maintenance to preserve your expensive equipment? Is your accounting system working well? Many small drains on resources can impede your company.

**'If you want something done, ask a busy person.'**

How many times do you go back to your top-performing employee when a job has to be done right and

"If you can't pay for a thing, don't buy it. If you can't get paid for it, don't sell it.

Do this, and you will have calm and drowsy nights, with all of the good business you have now and none of the bad."

**BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**

reminder of the genius of perhaps the cleverest of our Colonial statesmen.

I've gleaned some of Franklin's best small business advice from hundreds of his most famous quotes. Follow these mantras and, like old Ben, you might harness electric energy for your company.

**'Energy and persistence conquer all things.'**

One of Franklin's major messages from his early days as an entrepreneurial printer was that hard work is the dominant ingredient for success. He couldn't abide laziness or time wasting, and implored business owners to watch out for both in themselves

challenges. Through his editorials in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, he frequently advised readers to seek and heed good advice. "He that won't be counseled can't be helped," Franklin said. He could be speaking directly to today's construction industry, which faces ever-more-complex issues like heightened government regulation, healthcare and intense competition.

"To succeed, jump as quickly at opportunities as you do at conclusions," he said.

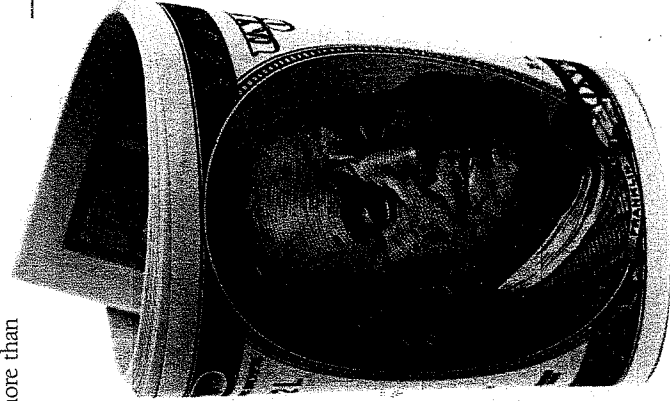
**'Beware of Small Expenses. A small leak can sink a great ship.'**

In Franklin's day — as he sailed back and forth across the Atlantic to promote the American ideal — the second part of this tip could be taken literally. But for people who run small

on time? Franklin reminds business owners that they need to both reward their best employees and demand more of the rest. This means regularly praising the efforts of great workers, offering them more money and greater responsibilities in your organization. His advice also calls on you to motivate the rest of your staff to raise their efforts to match the standard-bearer.

**'Anger is never without a reason but seldom a good one.'**

Simply put, don't blow your top when dealing with an employee, a difficult customer or anyone you encounter in business. Let a cool head prevail in an argument. If you approach a conflict with a positive attitude, you may turn around a customer service disaster or a problem employee.



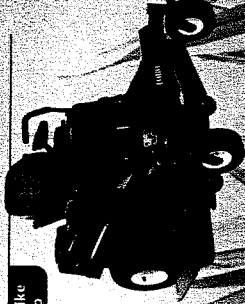
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Butting heads will usually get you nowhere fast. "If passion drives you, let reason hold the reins," Franklin warned.

**'There are three great friends: an old wife, an old dog and ready money.'**

Franklin clearly wasn't concerned about political correctness in his writings. For today, this bit of advice isn't about "an old wife" or an "old dog." It's about "ready money," and the time-tested importance of positive cash flow and careful spending. Which companies were best suited to ride out the recession over the past year? The ones determined to collect on their bills in a timely fashion, watch borrowing, and salt some profits away for a rainy day. And when I read this line from Franklin, I was certain he faced deadbeat customers just like you do: "If you can't pay for a thing, don't buy it. If you can't get paid for it, don't sell it. Do this, and you will have calm and drowsy nights, with all of the good business you have now and none of the bad."

**'The best investment is in the tools of one's own trade.'**

They didn't have the convenience

of high-tech construction equipment in Franklin's day. But he knew that to print newspapers, build furniture or farm the land, the best technology available made the work easier and the results better. Franklin often preached about efficiency, reminding that "time is money" and, "You may delay, but time will not, and lost time is never found again." Today, Franklin would advise business owners to keep an open mind to new trends and processes, and maintain a reliable inventory of equipment.

**'By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.'**

The buzzword used today is "systemizing." Break down every task in your business so you know how much time it should take to complete and so anyone can be trained to do a job to the same level of quality and efficiency. Franklin was sending the same message on getting organized in Colonial America. You don't need a fancy life coach or a business consultant to get things together. Just listen to Ben when he says, "Drive thy business or it will drive thee," and "A place for everything, everything in its place!"

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