



Communications Digest

Because Good Copywriting Should Grow on Trees!

Welcome Mid-May!

Gardening season returns to SK! With spring now in full force, I'm pleased to send you another issue of "Communications Digest."

Last month, I visited Amy Ballon's and Danielle Botterell's article, "How to say yes to new business" (from You.inc) and shared Bryan Garner's blog posting on the use of "nonprofit" versus "not-for-profit." Thank you to those readers who shared their thoughts on these articles.

In this month's issue, I revisit a book review I wrote some three years ago, on Arlene Dickinson's book, *All In: You, Your Business, Your Life* (2013). The book and my review of it discuss the hard emotional work of entrepreneurship, including such concepts as work/life balance and how to deal with failure. I hope you find the discussion worth revisiting.

And in "Word Nerd's Corner," I feature etymologist Bryan Garner on the use of the spring-like idiom "row to hoe" versus "road to hoe."

While you read and perhaps garden, enjoy the beauty of our spring!

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

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Article One:

Does work/life balance exist? And how do we deal with failure? Revisiting Arlene Dickinson's book, *All In: You, Your Business, Your Life* (2013)

An encore posting from May, 2014 . . .

She is a venture capitalist who has starred in CBC television’s celebrated programs “Dragons’ Den” and “The Big Decision.” She’s the owner and CEO of Venture Communications (one of the nation’s largest independent agencies, with offices in Calgary and Toronto). Arlene Dickinson knows a thing or two about entrepreneurship.

In 2013, I read and discussed her first book, *Persuasion: A New Approach to Changing Minds*. This month, I’m reprising her discussion of failure in business, in her second study, *All In: You, Your Business, Your Life* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2013).

But first to provide some context: Dickinson argues that for entrepreneurs like her, work often veers toward workaholism, which undermines the division between what we usually call “work/life balance.” She says that “work is life” for many business people (57)—that the two areas are not distinct.

That means, as a result, muddling through “the mess” of daily living, sometimes dedicating your life to business; later putting that business “on hold” to nurture a relationship; and so on. She says that “Balance is the enemy of excellence” for herself, and for entrepreneurs like her: “There’s no such thing as a part-time entrepreneur, in my opinion,” she writes. “You’re all in, or you might as well go home” (83).

Yet Dickinson recognizes that differences separate one entrepreneur from another, saying that “We all have to do what we have to do to survive and put food on the table.” Those survival strategies will vary from one entrepreneur to another. She also warns that perfectionism can undermine all early entrepreneurs’ efforts to build their businesses: “. . . it’s also true that there is no ideal time to leave the safety net, and it’s willingness to take the net-free leap that is the sign of a true entrepreneur.”

Even if you disagree with Dickinson's “work is life” philosophy, she advocates reasonableness in other ways, as a necessary ingredient for entrepreneurship. In particular, she says that “the idea of being ‘good enough’” is healthier than being “perfect or excellent or irreproachable” (64).

She says that the struggle to “be a good enough mother and a good enough entrepreneur at the same time” isn’t easy for women, but is an essential one to fight (84). Being “all in” (the title of her book) does not mean that you have to be perfect, but instead that you accept and learn from whatever your failures are.

And Dickinson’s writing on failure is some of the best in the book. Here are some highlights:

1. One reason that failure can sit so hard for entrepreneurs, Dickinson says, is that the worst “nay-saying” comes from yourself, not from your critics. When you criticize yourself negatively for whatever failure you make, the pain and agony that arise are far more detrimental than the original failure itself. Self-criticism surrounding failure can inhibit your progress in business.

Negative internal fear is called “resistance” (as Seth Godin has written, in his book, *Linchpin*). Dickinson shares Godin’s perspective that you must act against resistance, however uncomfortable that may feel, if you want to succeed as an entrepreneur. You may need to act before it feels comfortable to do so. But you also paradoxically have to be comfortable with failure itself, in order to learn from it and to work beyond it (217).

2. Mistakes are the form that failure takes: She writes that “It’s not the mistakes themselves that hone your entrepreneurial skill—rather, it’s what you learn from your mistakes and the degree to which you’re willing to grow from them” (215). Mistakes make people better entrepreneurs, and improvement “is honed with losses . . . not honed with profits” (217).

The book’s best line may be this: “Profits spur you to do more of the same thing; losses and mismatches push you to do things better” (217). She cites that early entrepreneur, Thomas Edison, who said “the fastest way to succeed is to double your failure rate” (215).

3. As an entrepreneur, Dickinson says that you need to look at your failures tolerantly and unemotionally: “[You] don’t just need faith in yourself and your creation to develop the kind of invisible shield that protects you from taking rejection personally or taking your own mistakes to heart. You also have to develop an almost forensic ability to view your missteps and outright failures objectively” (218).

Dickinson points here to a critical concept for everyone (and not only for entrepreneurs)— dealing with loss and negative emotions. She argues for the need first to deflect rejection or loss and then to bracket off or suspend it. I part company from her here, finding the work of avoiding one’s emotions to be unhealthy and ultimately impossible. Loss that comes from failures must be felt and worked through (in your own time and space), before you can learn and grow from it.

Experiencing loss and pain, when you know the source and reason, can become the opportunity for insight, self-understanding and growth. It can also create respect toward others, including those who may be the source of criticism.

This amounts to an alternative way in which the work/life dichotomy collapses. Life can be “messy,” as Dickinson acknowledges, and there may be venting (or tears) in the boardroom and in one’s own office. While I disagree with Dickinson that removing emotions or finding an “objective” way to view failure is possible, I am with her in eyeing the same goal—to be able to grow from one’s failures and mistakes.

Dickinson deserves much credit for bringing more attention to the detrimental effect of *shame* on business and on entrepreneurship, which many entrepreneurs may register only unconsciously. She

writes that failure shouldn't be a "cause for shame" (217), while also recognizing that our culture attaches shame to our failures.

She defines shame effectively as a "feeling of innate wrongness and isolation. And when you're experiencing shame, you're actually telling yourself that there's something deeply wrong with you—not only with specific actions you've taken or words you've said, but with you—as a person" (213).

Shame is, therefore, the most soul-depleting emotion there is: Dickinson observes that growing through mistakes should never involve feeling ashamed for having made them. (And here she reflects influence by Brené Brown's writing on shame.) Dickinson writes that shame destroys the "self-esteem, entrepreneurial spirit and creative drive you'll need to bring your business to reality. The work of building a business is hard enough—you can't bring it your all if you're playing hurt" (213).

And she also adds the tremendous insight that if you're in an environment (be it entrepreneurial, artistic, academic) where "by virtue of the fact that you just don't fit in, you're labelled a failure, you've got to take immediate steps to protect yourself, because entrepreneurship is a marathon that you'll need all your mental energy to run" (213).

Who among us hasn't experienced that kind of a toxic environment? So Dickinson's book *All In: You, Your Business, Your Life*, bravely addresses the role of failure in growing as an entrepreneur.

Failure may arise from negative self-commentary; it may be as minor as not having as many clients as you need; it may also take the dramatic form of declaring bankruptcy, as some entrepreneurs must. Failure is rarely final, she writes. "'No' usually means 'not yet' or 'not quite like this'" (221), and can be the basis of extraordinary professional and personal insight and development.

For me, my business must allow for times of balance, if I'm to be a creatively nourished and productive person. Work is not life to me, but I recognize that the boundary between the two does blur, during intensive periods. *All In* (which echoes Sheryl Sandberg's title, *Lean In*, but is a term coined by American psychologist Brené Brown) ultimately refers to an attitude of creative and emotional engagement with work that does not necessarily yield workaholism.

Engagement can instead mean times of intensive work, followed by intensive rest: Dickinson views an alternation of productivity with rest as the only realistic kind of work/life balance there is. Saskatoon-based marketing guru Sara Wheelwright (of "Trusted Saskatoon") has said exactly that, at local networking events. She may have been reading Dickinson!

In what ways do you find balance between work and life? And how have you learned from failure as an entrepreneur? How can these insights from Dickinson bring about growth and strength for you?

Please send me your thoughts; I'd be delighted to hear from you.

WORD NERD'S CORNER: The case of "row to hoe" vs. "road to hoe"

The idiom "row to hoe" is an agricultural or gardening metaphor that means "a challenging and perhaps arduous project."

For instance, one might say, "It's going to be a tough row to hoe."

The idiom is often ludicrously written as "road to hoe," especially, Garner says, in sports writing.

For instance: “Though victories over Newcastle and Aston Villa showed Leicester how they can preserve their status, it will be a hard *road* [read *row*] to hoe this winter.” Michael Henderson, “Leicester Dig in for Long, Hard Winter,” *Times* (London), 25 Nov. 1996, 33.

And here’s another instance of that mistake: “Even if David Robinson comes back, it will be a hard *road* [read *row*] to hoe to make it into the playoffs.” “NFL Has Finally Gone Too Far with Super Bowl Hype,” *San Antonio Express-News*, 2 Feb. 1997, at C5.

As you hoe rows, window boxes or container pots to plant your garden this spring, you may remember this tip from Bryan Garner!

SHOP NEWS

Many thanks to business advisor and leader of growth and training programs, Lori Jestin-Knaus, of Women Entrepreneurs of SK for leading its Mentoring Circle for another year! The fellow women entrepreneurs in the group have shared highs and lows, suggested strategies and offered support.

We are all grateful to Lori for facilitating valuable discussion and fostering strong entrepreneurial relationships among us.

W.E. of SK has begun to co-sponsor great events with the Raj Manek Mentorship Program and I encourage you to join us, at them!

ABOUT US

Since 2011, Elizabeth Shih Communications has chronicled the stories of small- and medium-sized businesses (and selected not-for-profit organizations) on the Prairies and across Canada.

Do you need help telling your entrepreneurial stories?

Please contact me through my website, via the CASL-compliant email form, on the right-hand side of each page (www.elizabethshih.com).

I specialize in entrepreneurial storytelling--chronicling how small- and medium-sized businesses succeed and at the same time give back to the community.

I tell such stories primarily through articles, case studies and newsletters. But I also adapt stories to write press releases, blog postings, brochures, website copy, annual reports and other documents.

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