

PART ONE

OWN IT!

TELL BIGGER STORIES . . .

And Make Sure Everyone Around You Does, Too

The late comedian George Carlin had a stand-up bit in the 1970s called “Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television”—seven words he said were so inappropriate and offensive that the FCC had banned them from broadcast. Well, Carlin had nothing on me. Apparently, to one company at least, I am three times worse: it sent over a speaking contract with 21 words I could never say onstage.

Let me be clear: I have been known to drop f-bombs. I have cussed with aplomb and used language some might call “salty.” I might even use such language in this book. Hide your children! Avert your eyes! Or just deal with it.

This company, an otherwise terrific software business, couldn't deal with it. They were willing to pay my speaking fee but wanted to fine me \$500 for each time I used one of the words on the list, up to a total fine of \$7,500. I counted on my fingers (math is not my strong suit) how many bad words that gave me: 15. Then I looked at the list. There were words on there I would never think of using. It would be very difficult for me to work them all in, but I *love* a challenge. I accepted the deal with every intention of using up all \$7,500.

Forget for a moment that the company never discussed any of this with me before sending over these stipulations. (Want me to tone it down? Just ask me. Don't bring in the lawyers first.) What I couldn't figure out was why this company wanted me to speak in the first place if this is what they expected. I am an open book. No one hires a dog like me and wonders why he doesn't meow. I am not effective or for everyone, and I know it, but as a result, no one ever complains that they got something they were not expecting. Why would they want me to change who I was on a fundamental level? More to the point, why would anybody who has met me *expect* me to change?

My success comes from who I am, not from trophies or titles. When

*It all comes
back to the
core of who
you are.*

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?"

BE YOURSELF IN EVERYTHING YOU DO

I once saw a speaker ask on his Facebook page, "How do you become authentic?" I thought, "That has to be one of the craziest questions I have ever heard. Who were you before?" Being successful as a speaker, in business, and in life starts with authenticity; the most successful

people I have known personally are (or were) the same at home as they were in the office. Steve Jobs was just as aggressive in his personal life as he was at Apple. My friend Daymond John, the founder of the multibillion-dollar FUBU clothing brand and one of the stars of *Shark Tank* on ABC, runs a slick business and lives a slick life; he literally and figuratively looks like, dresses like, and spends a million dollars all the time. Another Shark on *Shark Tank*, Barbara Corcoran, whose Corcoran Group is New York's largest real estate company, is as in-your-face in her personal life, in business, or on any show—hers or mine! And how refreshing. No one needs to second-guess them or their motives. You can trust them because they are the same people in every part of their lives.

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?

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. In my first book, *The Mirror Test*, I talked about how I am transparent about this 24/7: Sell me, sell the company; sell the company, sell me. I don't see the difference, and neither should you. Just like you can't be one person in your personal life and another in business, you can't separate who you are from what you do. The people who work with you are like a family, too, and you probably spend more

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

time with them than you do your biological family. They need to see the real you, too.

“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 businesspeople not understand this? Some of them lack confidence. Some of them are afraid. But most of the time, they and their businesses are stuck in stories that say, “I can’t.”

Understanding what that means and taking the steps to break free is essential to thinking big, acting bigger, and being a bigger you by developing a “because I can” attitude.

OWN YOUR OWN STORY

After I gave a presentation to the National Speakers Association, several members asked me where my TED Talk was. I told them, “I will *never* do a TED Talk.” They were stunned, but my reasons are clear.

If you have never clicked on the phenomenally popular TED Talks channel on YouTube, attended an event, or listened to the podcast or radio show, the presentations are a spin-off of the annual TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) Conference, which attracts some of the most important people in the world to speak on topics from science to culture. TED Talks are videos up to 18 minutes long, which are created not only from the main conference but also numerous worldwide satellite events and can be on any topic. According to the TED website: “TED looks for engaging, charismatic speakers whose talks expose new ideas that are supported by concrete evidence and are relevant to a broad, international audience.” Those talks have populated the web and social media like rabbits the past few years, and that leads into my two main problems with them.

First, I wasn’t saying those members who asked me about my nonexistent TED Talk shouldn’t do their own or that they can’t lead to success, only that they weren’t necessary. The world doesn’t need another TED Talk to tell us what we have to do. I once heard someone say “TED Talks suck,” and I am inclined to agree. TED speakers are

often wonderful, inspirational, 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. But 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?” (www.motherjones.com/media/2015/02/quiz-north-korean-slogan-ted-talk).

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). 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. 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!”

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.

So 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. This is not a “be like me” book but a “learn to act like me but be yourself” book to become a bigger *you*. Everyone is inundated with lessons on exactly how to do something. I

just want to inspire you to do something *as you*. I will never, ever tell you there is “One Truth.” That’s Jim Jones, not Jeff Hayzlett. I hope none of you are using this book to brew my Kool-Aid. Brew your own, with any flavor or color you want. Better yet, brew your own brand. Someone already came up with Kool-Aid; come up with your own drink. You are that good.

So, when I hear speaking consultants say, “You need to present things this way. You need to sell products in the back of the room. You need to have a training video.” I say, “No, you don’t. Not if you don’t want to.” They’ll respond, “You can make a fortune doing it,” and I’ll say, “Yeah, I can make money, but I don’t want to do it. And if I don’t want to, I don’t have to. Anyone who tells you otherwise is selling something they have a stake in.”

I know this, because I once listened to those consultants who said I had to do things a certain way to be successful. I spent tens of thousands of dollars to position myself the right way, because that’s how people told me others had done it. I had the pictures taken, like everyone else. I created marketing materials like everyone else. I bought the clothes like everyone else. I even ditched my cowboy boots! But I

Use who
you are.
OWN
THAT.

soon stopped doing things “their” way. *Because it was not me.* Can a speaking sizzle reel or a brochure be helpful? Yes, but you don’t have to do any of this, and you cannot do it before you tap into your core. That’s why when a person tells me, “I have to license my content online as the first step to success as a speaker,” it feels like someone sticking needles in my ears. I want to

grab them by the shoulders, like I wish someone had for me, and say:

When someone says you must do this or that to be successful, tell those people to shut up; you’re writing your own story. Why have something that looks like someone else when it could be you?

That’s what your business needs to reflect, too: an identity of its own. Stop listening to “them” if you want to be the best you. The first time I did TV, I thought, “I have to act like more of a TV person,”

because that's what "they" said. All that did was make for bad TV, while just working on being the best version of me made for great TV. Consultants, speakers, masterminds . . . they always talk about secrets to success, but those "secrets" are really just about figuring out:

- Who are you?
- What do you want to do?
- Where do you want to go?
- What is your end game?
- How does all this connect to the story that sells you?

Tell me: What are your main criteria for the direction you want to go, your conditions of satisfaction that apply to all these questions? Can you list yours? If you can't, what the hell do you own? Someone else's expectations? Nothing at all? Mine have been the same for decades, and they always remind me why I'm in it at all. Everything I do in business has to meet these conditions of satisfaction: have the ability to make me money, to grow professionally, and to have fun doing it. Those are the criteria I use for any direction I want to go. I might consider a business opportunity that satisfies two of the three under the right circumstances, but never just one, no matter how good the money is. Yet none of my conditions do me any good if I can't use the conviction they give me to inform my story and thus connect them to what I am selling to an audience, my customers, my potential clients or business partners, and my teams. Start by finding out what makes you happy and meets your own conditions of satisfaction. Stop reading and do it now, because I have learned that every time I violate my conditions—every time I do something that won't build me wealth, make me grow, or be fun—it never works out and usually ends up costing me money.

Now, what are you *actually* selling? Selling is not a dirty word. We are all selling something. But what we must sell in the best way possible is bigger stories that connect on a deeper level to the product, person, or service. We are selling someone bigger ideas through us that connect to what they want! We talk a lot about getting your two- or three-sentence elevator pitch down for your business. That's essential, but how much work do you do on the story that goes with the pitch? Not the product

or service alone, but the story that goes with it. Sometimes we *think* we know what we are selling, but we don't. In my first two books, I called this pitch the "118"—the number of seconds you actually have to pitch: eight seconds to hook people and no more than 110 seconds to reel them in. I still believe you need to hook people in eight seconds. That's the length of time it takes for someone to start losing attention and for a qualified ride in professional bull riding; you must get business prospects to lean in *and* hold their attention and not let them throw you off just like you were riding a bull. The next 110 seconds—and probably fewer—are the time to drive your message home with no bull. Audiences and readers love the idea of the "118," yet I am still surprised by how bad so many of them are at doing it. And I think I know an essential missing piece: They lack the connection to a deeper story.

I was speaking with the executives of MGM long before they appeared on my TV show, and they kept telling me they were in the gaming and hospitality businesses. I said, "No, that is your industry. You are in the experience business. I'm not coming to you just to gamble, drink, eat, see a show, and look out at the lights of the strip from my room. I'm coming for the experience as a whole. I'm coming for an experience that I think can get no better at any other place." If MGM's leadership looks at it like that, they can say, "How do I make the experience spectacular?"

For example, think about it like this: Domino's isn't selling pizza; it's selling ease and convenience for hungry students, busy parents, and tired workers. Those old AT&T commercials from the 1980s that told you to "Reach out and touch someone"? That wasn't about long-distance service; it was about connection. That's what Apple is selling today—not phones but status and social connection.

In the end, my way is always going to be right for me because it is mine: I'm writing my own story with purpose and direction and doing what I do because I can. I've gone from doing right and wrong on Main Street in Sioux Falls to right and wrong on Fifth Avenue in New York City and countless streets around the world. The only thing that ever limited me was the voices in my head telling me I couldn't be that or that I needed to do something different.

YOUR WAY, NOT THE HIGHWAY

Even when I met my conditions of satisfaction and owned my story, could I have done things differently or even better? Yes. But I'm doing it my way because I can. People sometimes call me arrogant for saying this. Would you prefer modesty? Modesty is for reflection, not action. Athletes might be humble in the public eye after the big win, but I assure you none of them went on that field anything less than arrogant, believing that they could win. That doesn't mean they didn't look, listen, and pay attention beforehand. It doesn't mean they don't care about the team, the coaches, or the fans. It doesn't mean they're assholes—the greatest ones never are. They just own who they are and what they have to do.

That's how you need to be in your business. Don't apologize for it or try to change who you are! Whenever Jim, my writer, hears about someone who tried to change who they were rather than be themselves, he tells the joke about the golden screw. A boy is born with a screw where his belly button should be. He goes through life questioning it, wondering why he is different from everyone else, longing to be rid of the golden screw. Finally, he consults a wise man who tells him to accept himself as he is rather than change to be someone else. The boy doesn't like the answer, so the wise man says, "Fine. Then on your next birthday, just unscrew it." The boy thanks him, and when he wakes up on his birthday, he gets a screwdriver, removes the screw, and his ass falls off.

I may be an ass sometimes, but I assure you that mine is firmly secured to who I am. Why would anyone want to act any other way? Too often we just don't believe that being ourselves and holding ourselves accountable must be foremost in everything we do. I have found who I am, own it, and am contented with it. I will never turn that screw, and neither should you.

Well, that's not entirely true. Sometimes I've turned the screw "because I can," fully aware my ass might fall off. I've refused high-paying jobs that would make me less happy. I've turned down daily hosting on national TV, because it wasn't what I wanted. I have taken on too many jobs because I saw my conditions of satisfaction in them

all, and when my partners told me that I was doing too much I got pissed off. They will tell you they had to fight to make me see that, but I owned my mistake: I started because I can, and I stopped because I can.

In other words, I am always 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.

*Just stop
and act:
Make the
voices in your
head smaller,
not you.*

I love how Tania Yuki, the brilliant young CEO of the social media company Shareablee, puts it: "I have to learn over and over to pull the trigger—to say 'I don't know the perfect answer. I don't know how to really start to do it. I am just going to do it.' Sure, crap comes to you every day that you have no idea how to deal with. You could collect the advice of great people all day long. I used to. I would reach out to five people I respected, and each one of them said something completely reasonable, good, and *different*. 'Mother of . . . What do I do now?' I thought. 'I guess I am just going to have to be me and decide what I think and own it.'"

Right! In the end, acting like you *can* make up for a lot of knowledge. Believing there is one right way or that absolute rules exist distracts us from seeing opportunities in different guises and being ready to act on them. Rules should be questioned, tested, reviewed over time, and broken if they are not a law or commandment. That is the single biggest difference between me and most other people. Imagine what you could accomplish by just being yourself and unapologetically owning your story. Be your story, live your story—that's the first key to unlocking your success.

"THE KATELYN RULE"

No matter what anyone says, there are ways to get things done without compromising who you are. And you want your people to be empowered

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in the same way—to act like themselves, but *bigger*. This is the foundation of what everyone in my office calls “The Katelyn Rule”:

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?

Here’s how the rule got its name.

From time to time, I am asked to consult for high-growth companies—businesses I call “Big Dogs.” We love Big Dogs. Big Dogs are the cornerstone of our motto at The Hayzlett Group’s TallGrass Public Relations: “To run with the big dogs, you got to learn to piss in the tall grass.” I have a team that backs me up for these Big Dog consultations, and our work begins before we get the business. The team assembles background information and presentations, sits in on meetings, takes notes, and helps me do the deep dive into the work that needs to be done. As part of the companies’ evaluation of us, we then meet with CEOs and their teams to lay out our plan and define what our value proposition is in light of what they have to pay us. We call this our “Big Dog Plan.”

My team is all about being Big Dogs in the Big Dog Plan presentations: do it big or go home. Expectations are high, which they were for the 2:00 P.M. presentation the day our newest employee, Katelyn (we’ll call her that because that’s her name), walked into my office about 15 minutes before we had to leave. In her hand was the single color copy of that day’s Big Dog Plan presentation.

“Should I bring color copies of our presentation to the meeting?” she asked me.

Before I continue, let me tell you how Katelyn became part of our team. A little more than a month before this moment, I had given a talk to a large group of college students considering advertising as a profession. Like most events, the advertising group that invited me had started social media activation in the weeks before, and one woman was doing it consistently and smartly, not in a heavy-handed way: Katelyn.

*Act like
yourself,
only bigger—
remember
The Katelyn
Rule!*

That gets the attention of someone like me. I am always looking for talent when I work. I'm like a jumpy prairie dog sticking its head out of its hole looking for connections and danger: *Hey, what's going on? Who's here? Where's the eagle?*

Katelyn had impressed me. So, after my talk, I asked the audience who and where Katelyn was. I found her in the back row. "That young woman is going to go places," I told the entire audience. "She was the only one actively engaged on social media before this event, and I want to meet her." I asked her to come to the front where she belonged. When she got there, I shook her hand and said, "You're all getting a copy of my book today, but Katelyn is getting hers first." Later that day, I talked with Katelyn, told her she should come work for us, and made it happen.

And now Katelyn—the woman who was going places—had gone someplace she never should have: into my office, 15 minutes before a Big Dog Plan presentation, asking *me* if we needed color copies of that presentation. I swiveled my chair to face her. She's petite, so I was pretty much looking at her eye to eye.

"Katelyn, you are fairly new," I said. "You and I haven't really had a chance to talk much about expectations and promises. So here is what we are going to do: Let's imagine that you only get to ask me 21 questions a month. Why 21? I don't know, but let's imagine you get only 21 questions. They can be about anything. You can ask me about the meaning of life. You can ask me the difference between a steer and a bull. You can ask me about the best Italian restaurant in New York City. You can ask me if I think your boyfriend will like something you bought him. And, of course, you can ask me questions about work. Anything you can imagine, but you get only 21 questions. . . . Are you still going to ask me right now if we should take color copies to a meeting that we've been preparing for since you started? Is that one of your effing questions? Do you *really* want to use one of your questions right now?"

She took a breath. "Probably not."

"Good career move. Because if I have to answer that question, what the hell do I need you for?"

I could see my words start to sink in, so I continued: "This is what

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I pay you for. This is what I expect from you. I hired you because you're going to be a superstar in this company, and I have to answer a question like that? What, are you nuts? That is not a Big Dog question. That is a question that no one with any experience should ask."

I paused to catch my breath. "Now, will we look better if we bring color copies instead of black and white?"

"Yes."

"Of course we will. Will anyone die if it is in black and white?"

"No."

"So, it is adequate."

"Yes, it is adequate."

"Now let me ask you a question. Let's imagine that I answered your question, 'Yes, we must and should print color copies because that's what Big Dogs would do.' Do you have time to make them before we go?"

"No."

"No. So why would you want me to say yes and then not have the ability to deliver?"

I looked at her. She looked at me, and it became clear that Katelyn now owned the rule that bears her name: 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? In fact, Katelyn never violated her namesake rule again. She is now a superstar. That's the reason the rule is named *in her honor*—not because she continued to fail. In fact, her mistake helped me define my expectations for any team:

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 or clients.

Otherwise what do we need them for? If I am going to *own it*, my team needs to own it too and know:

- They must think things through and first ask themselves the questions they want to ask me.

*Empower
your team to
create and
own what they
do in support
of everything
you and your
business do.*

- They are empowered to make decisions, because that's what I pay them for.
- Moments like these allow them to break free from limitations and lead to new stories, bigger thinking and action, and their own "because I can" attitudes.

Would this have happened with Katelyn even if I had explained my expectations before we had this encounter? That's a fair question, and the answer is, "Probably."

Just like the budget story from the introduction, I am constantly amazed at the self-imposed barriers smart, capable, willing, and especially young people put up for themselves. It's like an invisible force field around their bodies. But it's all in their heads. Who said they couldn't do that? Who put up those barriers? I hate to watch people miss out because of voices in their heads that say they can't. Few things make me angrier. If there were some magic bullets for eliminating whatever holds young people like Katelyn down rather than pushing them to be bigger than they are, I'd be the first to fire (and I'm a pretty good shot). All I can do is my part: Make sure I don't beat them down. You shouldn't, either.

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. This is, at best, limiting if we know our stories and, at worst, downright awful if we don't.

Make sure your people know what your story is and understand their stories, too. 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. Without that, you can only expect them to own your story, not theirs.

What's the problem with that? Richard Lowe, the president and chief operating officer of Franchise Services, Inc., which owns the brands Sir Speedy, PIP, Signal Graphics, and TeamLogic IT, explains

it this way: “We give our franchisees everything they need to succeed: high-value products to sell and training in operations, production, finance, marketing, and sales. Yet the business is still theirs. They have to do the work and follow the system. Running one’s own business still takes an entrepreneurial spirit and drive. It’s a myth that people who own a franchise will be successful just because it is a franchise. We may give them the tools, but they have to be the driving force in their business.”

“If you look at our most successful franchisees, you will see a common thread in the way they run their businesses and in their personalities,” adds Don Lowe, Richard’s father and the CEO of the company. “They recognize that they have a proven system to follow, take charge of their business, and make it work for them.”

LESSONS LEARNED: TELL BIGGER STORIES

Remember: Stories are powerful. We live *for* and *in* them every day. As much as these stories give us the power to connect, we fail to see how they hold us back. Too many of us are stuck in stories that say, “I can’t.” We must replace those stories that prevent us from pushing forward and owning what we do—and especially who we are. If you don’t know who the hell you are, how can you tell a story that sells you and connect it to something bigger? If you’re not real, how can you expect to get real results and responses back from your team and your customers? How can you or your business stand for something? We must be the same authentic and genuine person in every part of our lives 24 hours a day.

- Own your story and be yourself in everything you do, and you’ll be successful as yourself, not telling a story that is essentially a lie.
- When someone says you must do this or that to be successful, tell those people to shut up: You’re writing your own story.
- If you have to answer something or do something that your team should be able to answer or do themselves, then why do you need them?

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- Empower your people to create and own their stories; share yours; and understand how those stories fit together to support you, your teams, and your customers.

The point is not to get the people who work with and for us to own our stories but for our people to learn, understand, and create their own stories and fit them in with ours. Having mutually compatible, complementary, and diverse stories that serve the interests of your business and its goals allows our people to take the tools we give them, engage the work, and own what they do to win—as themselves.