

# 6 Secrets on Productivity from Branson

One of my by business idols is [Sir Richard Branson](#), whom I have had the pleasure of meeting. My close friend [Joe Hollingsworth](#) has spent a week with him on his private island in the Virgin Islands and heard many interesting stories. What makes him really stand out to me is that he has started over 400 businesses and has had great success with many of them. He also has dyslexia, which resonates with me because so do I. Some may see this as a handicap, but I see it as one of the reasons he has achieved much success. If you would like to understand more about why, read my [blog on my experience with dyslexia](#).



In a recent article, "[Richard Branson's Six Secrets to Productivity](#)," I found some important truths that I would like to share:

- 1) Exercise. It is key to having the energy to be productive. It is difficult to fight the good fight in your business life if you are not keeping yourself fit and energized.
- 2) Keep lists. He says, "I have always lived my life making lists: lists of people to call, lists of ideas, lists of companies to set up, lists of people that can make things happen." I love that last one! If you are around me at all, you will hear me say to my team, "Let's make things happen!"
- 3) Love what you do. This cannot be emphasized enough if you are going to be productive. You need the passion that only loving what you do will bring into your activities. Branson

says, "I don't think of work as work and play as play. It is all living."

4) Don't get the lawyers or accountants involved too early. It slows down the action. Make things happen and don't waste unnecessary time in this area until the vision and strategy are thought out, and things are moving forward. Figure out the details as you go.

5) Step back and delegate. Hands-off delegation is important to Branson because he wouldn't be able to handle all 400 companies and the details that go with them. He says, "I have to be good at helping people run the individual businesses and I have to be willing to step back."

6) Set up big audacious goals. This way, even if you fall a little short, you have accomplished significantly more than you would have otherwise. Also, pay attention and focus on the few things that make a real difference.

These all sound so simple, but they are really not that easy to implement. Think about just half of those points: Delegate, focus on a few things, and exercise. It's not easy to let go of things when you, as a gung-ho entrepreneur, really want to take control and push to make them happen on your own. Most of us business types have an attention deficit brain and find it hard to focus on just a few key things. We are all busy and know we need to exercise, but do we build a routine around making sure we actually do it?

Great thoughts! Now, we all need to just go Make It Happen!

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# Success Takes Time

We held our quarterly meeting this past week, and with it came some great discussions. Most of these conversations were centered on our direction and reaching our [Big Hairy Audacious Goal](#), as introduced by [Jim Collins](#). One major point that came up: How do we get where we want to go when we're consumed by our day-to-day work activities?

We also discussed the [Flywheel concept](#), as Collins examines in "[Good to Great!](#)" I realize that in business, we all want to get there and get there now! However, building a business is more like pushing on a huge 20 ton flywheel, 100 feet in diameter, and 10 feet thick. The flywheel represents your company, and it is at a standstill when you start out or maybe even when a big change hits you.

It takes a tremendous effort to get it to move an inch. With proper alignment as well as continuous effort and energy, you get it to spin one time, and then another and another. Then at some point, you break through with enough momentum that it spins around and around without any additional effort. This is the flywheel effect in action. It takes time to make it happen, but when it does, watch out!

There has been lots of buzz around the quick success of [Instagram](#), but this isn't

the norm. As the research from Collins pointed out, it takes about 25 years before before a good company begins the journey to turn into a great company. It's faster to connect to a marketplace today with the internet and social media than it has been in the past, but it still helps me to be reminded of this, and I guess it may help



you also.

A [Fast Company article](#) I read talks about the time it takes to achieve success. It shares a few stories, which remind us that pushing on the flywheel is harder than we might think. [Angry Birds](#) was not an overnight sensation, as you might think. It was the 52<sup>nd</sup> attempt by [Rovio](#), who wrote the software. 5,126 was the number of failed prototypes for [James Dyson](#) before he got the revolutionary vacuum cleaner right.

One of my favorites is the story of [WD-40](#), which got its name because the first 39 experiments failed, and on the 40<sup>th</sup> it worked! WD-40 literally stands for “Water Displacement–40<sup>th</sup> Attempt!” How cool is that!?

When we are pushing on the flywheel, and it seems too big, heavy, and colossal to move, these stories can give us the extra boost of energy we need to inch it forward or create one more turn. What are you doing to keep your flywheel spinning?

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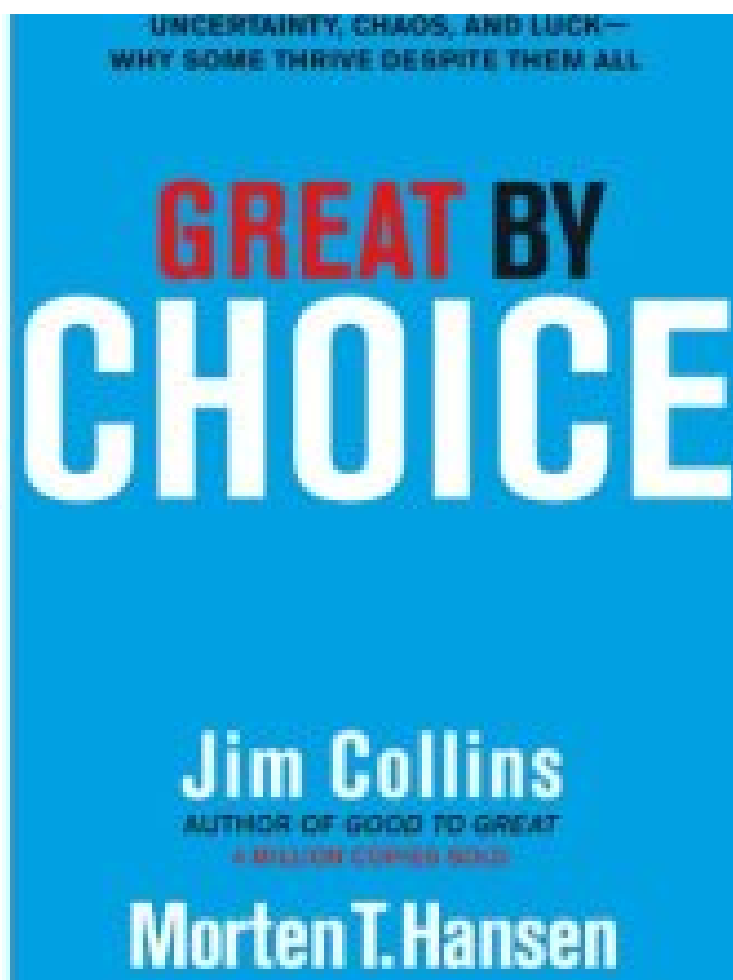
## [3 Keys to Business Greatness!](#)

If you asked me the business authors out there who I think provide the most value, I would have to say [Jim Collins](#) and [Peter Drucker](#). Both of these guys have provided huge insight to the business community on how to run a successful company. Like most businesses, we at Efficiencie are starting the year formulating strategies and goals to make forward progress

toward our destination, and reading Collins' and Drucker's material has always been good preparation.

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In [Great by Choice](#), Collins and Hansen set up an awareness of how three key areas acted as the common themes in the companies that have dealt with uncertainty, chaos, and luck as

well as why some companies thrive despite all this. What they found was very interesting and contradicts common thinking about great companies. They discovered what they call 10Xers (companies that have been beating the marketing and comparison firms by at least 10 times in stock market performance) were **not** more visionary, more bold, more risk taking, more innovative, or more creative than the comparison companies.

They were more of 3 things:

**1) More Disciplined**

**2) More Empirical**

**3) More Paranoid**

This book is very eye opening! When we think of a company that has had great success, we usually assume it has done so with a new break through idea, a new patent, or by taking a big risk that is paying off. However, this was not the case. Of course, to a point, these companies were innovative and creative, but they became really great by finding what works through empirical evidence, testing that out, and then being super disciplined to get it done. They also worried excessively about what was out there that could change the game for them.

I will discuss each in more detail in next week's blog. Happy New Year, and I wish you much success this year being worried about what is coming, gathering evidence that your ideas work, and implementing them with vigorous discipline.

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# 5 Steps to Execution

My experience has been that we are rarely lacking strategy and planning, they are abundant. What we do lack is [execution](#) around those plans, which is the major problem we face running a business.

We follow a 5 step process to gain execution on our strategies, and it's had a major impact on our business.

To set the stage, think of your goals this way: After creating your [BHAG \(Big Hairy Audacious Goal\)](#), you will usually set shorter term goals that create the path to reaching your BHAG.

Here at [Efficiencie](#), we have our [BHAG](#), 3 to 5 year Goals, 1 year Goals and then Quarterly Goals. Each goal is a stepping stone to the next goal. When we set our company Quarterly Goals, each person on the team is assigned individual Quarterly Goals that help work toward the company's Quarterly Goals. Every week we have a weekly team meeting where we review each person's progress, defined as Next Steps, towards reaching their quarterly goals.

Here are our 5 steps to Execution:

**1** Stop for a minute and plan what the next step is you can take towards reaching your short-term goal. For us, this has to be something achievable within the coming week.

**2** Write it down and make it visible for your peers to see. This can be posting it on a bulletin board, posting it online, sending an email...just so long as it's visible to more than just you.

**3** Put it in your calendar: this means setting a specific date and time to work on your Next Step.

4 Tell your peers what you are going to do. This works best if you have a rhythmic meeting schedule, such as weekly, where you can share it with everyone, and then flow right into number...

5 Meet with your peers once more and tell them if you completed your task. As stated, this works best with a rhythmic meeting schedule, where every meeting you tell your peers what you did/didn't do the previous week, and what your next step is for the upcoming week.

As humans we come standard with egos, and none of us like to look bad in front of others. Knowing that we're being held accountable by our peers drives us to do what we say we're going to do.

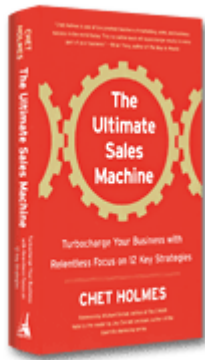
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## Proactive Vs. Reactive

I've written a lot about execution and getting things done. A few years back we created a software program (FlockGPS) to help us execute on our strategic plan by knocking out quarterly goals on the way to reaching our longterm [BHAG](#), or [Bug Hairy Audacious Goal](#) (as coined by [Jim Collins](#), author of Good to Great).

Another aspect to execution is in the day to day – how to manage your time effectively and have productive days that add up to your longer term goals. We all struggle with getting tied up in so many things we must be reactive to, and not making time for those things where we must be proactive.





In [Chet Holmes'](#) book "[The Ultimate Sales Machine](#)" he discusses time management secrets. The first chapter digs into an effective [daily routine](#) that will increase your productivity several times over. The first step is to make a list of the top 6 things you need to get done. Maybe you already make a list, I know I do, but the key here is to pull from your regular to do list and only focus on the top 6 things.

Next you take those [6 things](#) and figure the amount of time each task will take. The total should not exceed 6.5 hours because you want to leave time for the "unscheduled stuff" – time to be reactive. The last step is to prioritize...putting the most important items at the top to be completed earlier in the day when you have the most time and energy. His process forces the majority of your day to be proactive, and less reactive, thus getting more done. I'm trying it right now and so far, so good!! How much of your day is spent being reactive, instead of proactive?

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## [Designing Your Life at E0 Barcelona](#)

I've attended [E0](#) Universities for several years now, but this year was unlike any I've ever attended. I went for the first

time to Barcelona, Spain. The theme of the University was “Design Your Life”. The idea was to focus on what you really want out of life, and what you’re doing to get there. It’s like choosing a personal BHAG – your very own [Big Hairy Audacious Goal](#).

As entrepreneurs, we set goals all the time, but experience has taught me that we tend to view business goals and life goals as one in the same; that by reaching our business goals we receive all we want out of life. Shouldn’t our businesses really be the means to our personal goals and the life legacies we want to create? This isn’t the case, in that, more often than not we let our businesses consume our lives and distract us from our families, spousal relationships, and our own personal paths.

While there I attended programs on knowing your limits, and designing your personal life plan. [Verne Harnish](#) introduced the personal one page plan, or the ME page. We discussed things like, “How important is money?” and “How much is enough?” Social entrepreneurs were a common topic, as well as finding strength in all the challenges of life and business.

A fellow entrepreneur, [Nando Parrado](#), gave a testimonial on the [Miracle in the Andes](#), his story of surviving 72 days when they knew no one was coming. Nando and one of his Rugby mates inspired us with strength and courage with their fight against the cold and mountains. They hiked over 40 miles of nasty terrain to find help and see the team they left behind get rescued. On a scale of 1 to 10, this story was a 15...and is to be continued in a later blog.

I began working on my own BHAG on this trip, and I made a commitment to create 3 very deep relationships that will help me grow and be a strong resource for me in good and bad times. [Keith Farrazzi](#) talks about this in his new book, [who’s got your back](#). Working on personal goals has been eye opening

for me and has allowed me to combine my thoughts about my life with the success of my business in a way that brings more meaning and satisfaction to all that I do!

Whether you are just starting out, or you've already achieved success in your business, have you thought about the major accomplishments you want above all else in your life? Look at it like this: If you were a big ship leaving behind a wake that rippled through all those you pass by, one day when you looked back at that wake, how do you want to have affected those you've passed? How do you want them to remember that wake?

The people (it is always mostly about the people) and the speakers in this beautiful city of Barcelona, caused me to stop and have some serious contemplation about my future.

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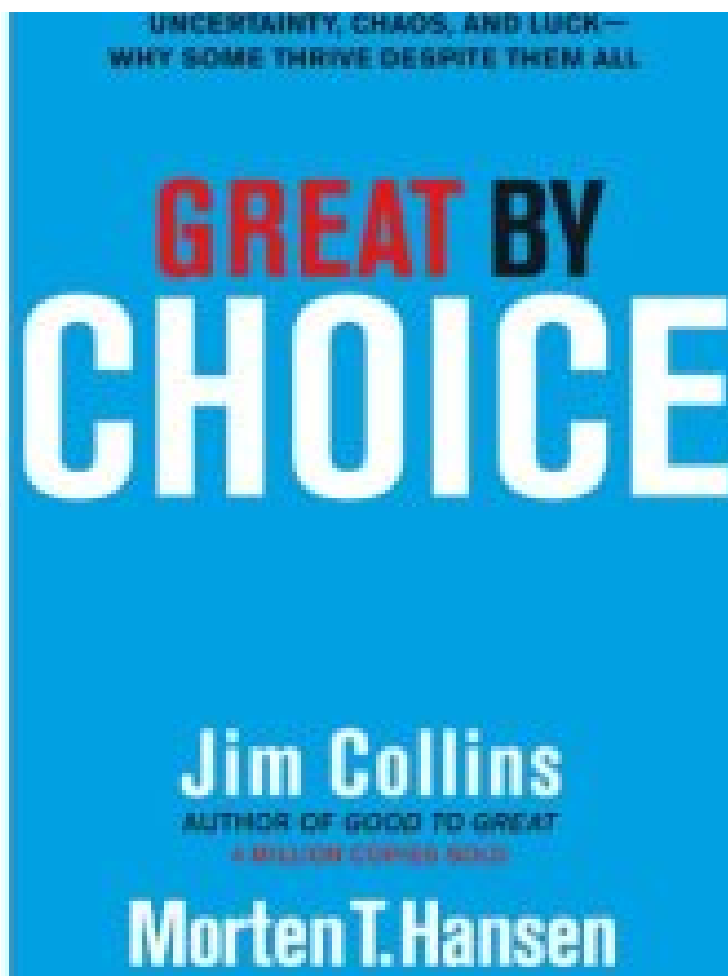
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**Choose to be Great with These  
3 Behaviors!**

In last week's [blog](#), I introduced the three core behaviors for business greatness as researched by [Jim Collins](#) in his new book "[Great by Choice](#)." These behaviors include fanatical discipline, empirical creativity, and productive paranoia. Let's take a deeper look at each of these, so we can have a better understanding of how to apply them in our own businesses.



In the core behavior of fanatical discipline, Collins discusses how these companies had a relentless approach in implementing their processes and strategy. Collins describes "relentless" as "consistency of action, consistency of values, consistency with long term goals, consistency with performance standards, consistency of method, and consistency over time." He then adds, "For a 10Xer the only legitimate form of discipline is self-discipline, having the inner will to do whatever it takes to create a great outcome, no matter how difficult." These 10Xer companies operated on a completely different level of discipline than the average or even the comparison companies. They were fanatics about it!

In regards to the core behavior of empirical creativity, Collins shows that 10Xers would try things in the marketplace, get feedback, make changes, and get more feedback. They relied on this practice to make bold moves with less risk. He says, "By empirical, we mean relying upon direct observations,

conducting practical experiments, and / or engaging directly with evidence rather than relying upon opinion, whim, conventional wisdom, or untested ideas.” I really relate to Collins analogy of firing bullets instead of cannonballs. Fire the bullets and make adjustments to be sure you zero in on the target. When you have a lock on the target, then you fire your cannonball.

When observing the core behavior of productive paranoia, the 10Xers displayed a sense of constant worry in regards to what could cause their demise in good times as well as bad. They worried, like [Gates](#), that the guy in the garage would come out with something that would sink them. Like me, you may remember [Andy Grove](#) of Intel, a 10X company, coming out of the cover of Fortune with the title [Only the Paranoid Survive](#).” Collins says, “They (10Xers) believe that conditions will – absolutely, with 100 percent certainty – turn against them without warning, at some unpredictable point in time, at some highly inconvenient moment. And they’d better be prepared.”

I have discussed many times in these writings how [Efficiency](#) is working toward its BHAG by creating many products in the marketplace and observing the evidence of what works. Those are our bullets, and when the empirical evidence comes in, we will fire a cannonball. I expected this to be a core behavior, but the other two behaviors of discipline and paranoia found in the 10Xers surprised me. We will be working hard to step up to our discipline and paranoia going forward. How will you use these behaviors to be great?