



CEO AT 22

The Risks, Challenges, Success and
Failures of Starting up Young

SEAN SI

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Failures of Starting up Young

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CEO at 22 by Sean Si

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#CEOat22

*For Angelyn Hazel Si,
my love and my inspiration.*

YOU HAVE BEEN DECEIVED

There aren't so many years in our lives, really. The first twenty years is spent knowing who we are, knowing what we want, and waving a flag that says YOLO (You Only Live Once).

The next 30 years is spent working your ass off in a job or business that you either love, need, or hate.

The next 10 to 20 years is spent in what we call "retirement" which is not so fun when you're retiring on a budget.

Finally the last five to ten years of our lives is spent taking care of our bodies. By then, we're "running out of battery" so to speak.

Truth is, the first twenty years of your life is the foundation which will direct the rest of it. So how come there are so many people living life as if it's a downhill joyride?

You see it and you hear stories about how the first 20 years is the best, the next 30 is the hardest, the succeeding 20 is the most boring, and the last years are spent mostly in the hospital.

Life doesn't have to be that way. And if you believe that it does, well...

You have been deceived.

FOREWORD

Who Is (What Is) a CEO?

Suddenly, many acronyms pervaded the business world.

“CEO,” “COO,” “CTO,” “CMO,” etc. Just in case these acronyms do not make sense to you, CEO would mean “Chief Executive Officer.”

In our not-so-distant past, this term replaced the word “President” as the title for the person heading a company or a corporation. And then suddenly there was a shift of titles from SVP's—they have now all become “Chiefs.”

“Chief Operations Officer.” “Chief Technology Officer.” “Chief Marketing Officer.” (ad infinitum ad nauseum).

Perhaps the term “President” has long been associated with the image of a graying haired (or the loss of it) executive who has worked for the company a minimum of 30 or so years and is now handed the scepter of corporate leadership as was the old model of business structures during the last century.

Then Silicon Valley comes along and produces young entrepreneurs who are so young they have barely grown a beard inventing apps or programs and earning billions of dollars along the way. These young start-up entrepreneurs did not want to be carrying a title associated with the old images of the past.

Imagine calling an 18 or 19-year-old person—barely shedding the skin of adolescence carrying a backpack (instead of a suitcase), wearing hoodies (instead of an Italian suit), banging away on his laptop inside a coffee shop (instead of barking out orders to his or her secretary inside a wood-paneled executive office), and discussing the possibility of starting up the next multi-billion business deal? It's no wonder that nowadays, every person wants to carry the title: "CEO."

Others try to play creative with the term. Since they cannot own the business but is still fascinated with the title—they invent new meanings for the term.

They call themselves: "Chief Encouragement Officer." "Chief Engagement Officer." "Chief whatever-the-heck-is-going-on-just-think-of-a-word-that-starts-with-letter-E and attach 'officer' at the end".

However, the term "CEO" is not greatly revered in certain areas of society. Some random dude here and there would say the term "CEO" should also reflect the changing times. So these smart alecks (which is a polite substitute for other terms used to describe these kinds of people nowadays) have come up with some suggested possibilities for the new meaning of "CEO."

Here is a list of them:

- › Cannibalistic Evil Oppressor
- › Capitalist Engorging Opulence
- › Chieftain Endlessly Overstuffed
- › Chieftain Extremely Overpaid
- › Con-artist Expounding Obscenely
- › Class-conscious Economic Outlaw
- › Creep Eviscerating the Organization

There are many more obscene and colorful others that are not fit to be printed in a decent book like this one.

Well, Sean Si's book (that name in itself is unique) tells us his story and unique adventure of how he became the Chief Executive Officer of a company he started—showing us the convergence of factors that led him to where he is today.

You would have thought that an IT graduate and professional like Sean would churn out a boring technical book that would only excite the geeks and the techies—but you would be wrong. Sean's book presents a very balanced perspective of left-brain analytical insights but beautifully presented with the right brain elements of storytelling, visual arts and displays of empathy.

CEO at 22 at first glance may sound off as being boastful but it does not. In fact it presents life as it is with all the humps, dumps, and lumps of the journey of a person who does not only turn lemons into lemonade, but would actually set up a franchise out of it and earn from it. There are valuable lessons one can pick up from his story as long as one is willing to make the first step: to pick up this book and start reading away.

The author says he was not born with a silver spoon and has gone through various trials in life—many of which were self-designed and others as situations would present themselves but the real “Pearl of Great Price” one can learn from Sean’s book is that while he may not have been born with a silver spoon, he sure sees behind the clouds of adversity a silver lining. And he capitalized on it. That’s what makes a true CEO. And Sean is willing to share his journey and inspire us to do the same.

This is not a good book. Being an author of 19 books myself I would know. This is a great book. Once in a rare occasion would a good practical and inspiring book come to delight us.

This is one of them.

And one final thing—my own web page: *www.franciskong.com* is under Sean Si’s care and supervision.

Do you still have to wonder why?

FRANCIS KONG

Motivational speaker and writer

President, Success Options Publishing Company

President, FunWorks Inc.

INTRODUCTION

Age is a Sort of Time Limit

Let's face it, the reason why you're holding this book in your hands right now is because of the age.

I was 22 when I became CEO. And this book is all about how I did it before the buzzer.

Whether you like it or not, life has its buzzers.

Time limits.

When you reach 13 years old, people suddenly expect you to make your own decisions.

When you reach 18 years old, people suddenly tell you that you have to be independent.

As I write this book, I'm now 25 years old. People expect me to write a book in my thirties. I'm going beyond expectations.

I'm not going to let myself reach the expected time limit.

And so should you.

Who Should Read This Book?

This book isn't for everyone. I wrote this book keeping only specific people in mind. If you are:

- › A young individual who believes you can make something big enough that far exceeds your age.
- › An aspiring entrepreneur who is hoping that you don't have to have a lot of capital to start a business.
- › A person who has bought in to popular belief that hard work isn't necessary to be successful.
- › A college student who has a bleak outlook in life and who considers himself a failure.
- › An employee who doesn't really consider yourself passionate about the work you are doing and you're just 'trying to get by' with your salary.
- › An individual in your twenties who has been influenced by the media that things will 'just happen' for you someday so you don't need to try and figure it all out.

This book is for you.

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CHAPTER 1

The Heart Behind The Face

“People don’t care how much you know
until they know how much you care”

—JOHN MAXWELL

I wasn't really what you would call a good student. I had 28 units of failure in college. And if I remember correctly, a unit costs approximately 4,500 PHP during the time. If you do the math, that's 126,000 PHP worth of failing units. Not to mention I had to re-enroll and pay for miscellaneous and other fees along the way.

On top of my failing units, I was completely hooked on the ever-popular computer game named DOTA. Heck it wasn't even a stand-alone computer game. It was just a custom map in Warcraft III!

My parents were nothing short of furious with the path I was taking in life.

I've wasted all those years and money—and I have nothing to show for it.

So what happened?

How did I jump from being a computer game addict to becoming the CEO of one of the fastest growing companies in the Philippines today?



My mom and dad as they accompany me for my graduation ceremony

MIDDLE MIDDLE

I didn't come from a rich family. My family is what I would like to call a middle, middle class.

My Dad distributed hardware supplies to 'dirty hardwares' in far-flung provinces like Zambales, Batangas, Cavite, and so on. Don't get me wrong, I am very blessed with what I have—my own shoes, car, clothes, and home. By our world's current statistics, I'm already part of the richest 5% of Earth's population.

My Mom's mostly a housewife who sidelines as a Chinese tutor. She's a supermom to me and my two other siblings.

I worked for my Dad when I was in grade school. I was paid 20 pesos per hour lifting stuff from the warehouse to his delivery truck. I enjoyed doing that.

High school came and my Dad gave me some paperwork and IT problems in the office. It was something that I had less taste

for but I still did it during summer—again for 20 pesos an hour.

Then the college years came. I went out as a sales agent going from hardware store to hardware store all throughout Cavite. It is the job I'm least fond of because of the heat, sweat, grime and low pay-out—1% commission on my sales.

Imagine that!

I had to sell 1,000,000 pesos worth of items in order for me to bag 10,000 pesos at the end of the month. Needless to say, I was never really able to bag 10,000 PHP.

What kept me going was the knowledge that my dad was also doing this hard stuff week after week, after week.

So at a young age, I knew how it is to work hard for a meager amount of pay.

WASTED YEARS

The sad thing about our modern world is that the youth of today is implicitly taught that working smart is all there is. Sadly, this has resulted to a lazier workforce and whether we admit it or not, a lot of companies today are complaining about the millennial generation being the most uncommitted, lazy, and disloyal workforce to date.

In the past, young adults were mostly told to work hard, earn your keep, help your family and the community. That's no longer the case. The youth today are taught to be laid back, discover yourself, follow your heart, experience a lot of things,

travel the world, and so on.

Naturally, that's the outlook in life of most people my age and below. Hop from job to job—whichever pays better and has more perks. Loyalty is not really a virtue. Then travel the world and take as much photos and selfies as possible.

Just because technology has advanced by leaps and bounds doesn't mean that we're allowed to sit back and relax and work less hours than others. In fact, the opposite is true: because technology has improved and is now made available to the common individual, the playing field has levelled.

We are all able to use the same technology. Don't think you have the advantage of working less because you have technology on your side. On the contrary, technology is on everyone's side. So the advantage now has turned back to those who have the resilience and discipline to work hard.

A DILEMMA

The thing is, I really didn't like my course in college. I took up Information and Communications Technology Management (ICTM) which is a more sophisticated course name for Information Technology (IT). Like any naive, geeky teenager fresh out of high school, I thought it was something that would get me closer to creating my own computer game.

I was dead wrong.

The deeper I went into the years of studying IT, the more I

wanted to get out. It had nothing to do with computer games at all!

What I really wanted to do was to write. Yep. Writing is something I'm passionate about. But my parents discouraged me from going that route.

“There’s no money there,” they said.

Practically speaking, they were right. However, there was one thing we missed—the tech boom.

During my college years, Apple made iPads, iPhones, and written digital consumerism rose to new heights. The internet all over the Philippines improved. Mobile data came into play—and it completely changed the face of internet accessibility.

People had internet. People had access to written content online—the demand for searchable online information rose dramatically.

And I was about to miss it all, if not for my brother, Kevin.



The brothers Si of SEO Hacker

A LENDING HAND

You see, my brother studied Multimedia Arts at De La Salle—College of St. Benilde. He was, in fact, one of the better students in his batch.

One day, he came home and told me that he knew how to create a blog. I was ecstatic.

I was blogging in a now-defunct site called Multiply specifically because I had no idea where to start to create my own blog. And it was funny because as an IT student, you'd think that would be a piece of cake for me. But it turns out that I'm at a loss and I needed help.

So we went straight away to develop my very own blog.

It rolled on from there and I started the blog “God and You” (<http://b3sean.com>) where I transferred some of my old Multiply entries to. I spent hours and hours poring through themes, studying the plugins I can use, the layouts, and yes, even the code.

For the first time, I fell head over heels in love with code—or at least with what I could understand about it. I went through countless themes trying to get the ‘right one’ for my blog.

If I didn't understand something I would ask my brother. But then he would just look it up over the web. So I wisened up and asked Google straight.

I grew both in my knowledge of handling a blog, and in my style of writing. I wrote, and wrote, and wrote.

However, when I checked out my visitor (traffic) stats—I

found out that only three people were regularly reading my stuff. And yes, that's me, my mom and my brother, (who was forced to read because I always asked him what he thought of my entries). That pushed me to look for ways to get more people to read my stuff.

So I explored the World Wide Web on how to do just that.

520 HOURS

By this time, I was already taking up my on-the-job training (OJT). This was back in September 2009, when a one-stop shop internet marketing and programming company in Ortigas took me in. Unfortunately, that company went out of business a few years back so I'll save you the trouble and leave it unnamed.

I went in seeking a social media specialist role and they punched me through straight to SEO—which sounded funny at first. I had no idea what it was. It was actually the first time I had ever heard the term “SEO”.

So I went over to my direct manager to learn what I'm supposed to do. To my surprise, the SEO that my then-manager had me do was stupendously easy.

However, it was horribly tasking.

I had to post comments, add 'friends' and do forum posts for five accounts (which I later realized were a bunch of black hat spam tactics). For each account, there's supposed to be 20+ blog comments, 20+ forum posts and on top of that, I was supposed to add 100 'friends' too—all in a day's work.

Oh and the 100 friends were split—20 in Facebook (which had a captcha pop-up each time I tried to add a single friend), 20 in Multiply, 20 in MySpace, 20 in Twitter and 20 in LinkedIn.

I was stumped. I got this boatload of work and I had to finish it on a daily basis?!

If I was a chicken, it was like asking me to lay 200 eggs every 30 minutes—and then fly.

What was so important about these comments and friends anyway?

On I went, posting on numerous blogs and forums on the infinitely vast World Wide Web. Learning all about our clients to understand what it is to be in their shoes as I made each post. Relating to each and every unfortunate webmaster I stumbled along the way.

A week later, my direct manager left the company. Now I was even stumped some more. Was I supposed to keep doing what I was doing?

All the SEO workload was dumped on me—an OJT student just trying to meet the assigned 520 hours.

It was September when I started my OJT. So I had to work from 6 AM to 12 midnight just to be able to celebrate Christmas with my family without thinking of work.

After getting fed up with my mysterious job description, I typed that life-changing question in Google: “What is SEO?”

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Yeah, that's what it stands for. It's the art and science of ranking a website for its target keywords—which, in most cases will be the website's product or service or idea. It is nothing short of a super power in our world today. When you are able to rank something in Google, perhaps something you're selling, then people will find you and chances are, they will buy from you.

When you want to rank someone for something good, you can do that. Or if you want to clean someone's bad reputation in the search results, you can do so as well. What makes SEO so powerful is the fact that people search. It's part of our daily lives.

As of this writing, there are more than 32,000 searches happening each second. Imagine that!

People look for things—and in this consumer-driven world we live in, being found online brings you that much closer to a sale.

THE PAGERANK SYSTEM

Before I go on with my story, I want to tell you a little bit about the way Google works.

Google came up with a metric called PageRank. It's a Google-patented system that is meant to measure a website's quality and quantity of backlinks (links from other websites pointing back to your website). PageRank is a major metric we used in my 'early days' of doing SEO.

- › A PageRank of 0 means you're a new site or you have little to no backlinks at all.
- › A PageRank of 1 means that you're starting to get some links.
- › A PageRank of 2 is normal—we usually come across sites with this level of PageRank.
- › A PageRank of 3 means that you're doing a little SEO for your site.
- › A PageRank of 4 means that you have an above average approach to SEO. And so on and so forth.

The thing about PageRank is that it's exponential. These aren't the real numbers but here's a sample explanation:

A site with 0–10 links can mean a PageRank of 0. A site with 10–100 means a PageRank of 1. A site with 100–1000 means a PageRank of 2. And so on and so forth.

Disclaimer: This is not entirely accurate since the formula for PageRank has not been made public. However from my personal studies, this proves to be closer to the truth thus far.

THE BUSINESS IDEA

Working 18 hours a day was extremely tiring and draining for me. Even so, I went ahead and applied all the things I was learning about SEO to my “God and You” blog. I learned a lot—and as shocked as I was during the time, my efforts in increasing my blog's rankings were producing results.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the 'God and You' website. At the top left is a red banner with the text 'GOD AND YOU'. To the right is a profile picture of a man and the text 'h3sean.com You like this'. Below this is a dark navigation bar with links: HOME, ABOUT, CATEGORIES, MY LOVE STORY, SEMINARS, CONTACT, ARCHIVES. The main content area is divided into sections. The 'LATEST' section features a post titled 'Jesus or Hell: Why is Salvation Conditional?' with a black and white image of thorns. The text of the post begins: 'It's amazing how many people - yes, even Christians have this lingering question in their heads: "Why is salvation conditional?"'. Below the post is a 'Read More...' link. To the right is a section titled 'THE MAN BEHIND THE BLOG' with a photo of a man speaking at a podium. Below this is a bio: 'Blogger. Entrepreneur. Wedding Singer. SEO Specialist. Public Speaker. Soon-to-be Husband. Inbound Marketer. Servant of God. More about me'. The 'TESTIMONIES' section has a post titled 'I'm Getting Married!' with a photo of a couple and the text 'Almost 5 years ago, I started this blog. God'. The 'GOD AND YOU' section has a post titled 'Happy New Year God and You Readers!' with a red '2014' graphic and the text 'It's our incoming 5th'. At the bottom right are social media icons for Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, and RSS Feed.

Screenshot of *God and You* (2014)

Sooner than I imagined, my site climbed up to PageRank 4. I thought to myself “Hey, maybe I could do SEO after all!” A little while longer and I was already planning to turn it into a part-time gig. If I could do it for my blog while working 18 hours for my OJT, I thought I could do it for another person’s website.

Lo and behold, not long after I finished OJT and was about to graduate from college, a man from our local church contacted me and said he was looking for an SEO specialist. Talk about timing!

We got together and chatted about the deal. I was getting a sweet \$500 (during that time, it was equivalent to 25,000php) per month for servicing this e-gaming website. Seeing as this can be my first stepping stone to starting an SEO company, I agreed.

My convictions from my faith got the best of me though—sooner than later, I was convinced that I shouldn’t be doing

this because it is not aligned with my personal beliefs. After all, some people do get hooked on e-games and lose their entire life savings there.

So I quit.

THE GOD PLAN

February of 2010, I finally graduated college. Ecstatic, my dad took me to a vacation trip to Hong Kong and Macau. It was my first time touring both countries. We had lots of fun staying in these nice, unbelievably big hotels and eating varieties of good food.

When we boarded the ferry ride from Hong Kong to Macau, I met a girl whose name was Angeli Ko. We talked.

Turns out she has an uncle in the Philippines who was looking for SEO. Her uncle was the founder and owner of Scuba World and Expedition Fleet—the biggest scuba diving and liveaboard fleet company in the country.

“Would you like me to recommend you to him?” She asked.

Of course without really thinking about it, I said “Sure, yeah, I could help him.”

We exchanged contact details and went on our way to enjoy the tour to Macau. But at the back of my head I was thinking “We’ll go home tired and exhausted, unpack our bags, and give out the gifts we bought. She’ll probably forget me.”

Turns out she didn’t.



Angeli Ko as we ride a boat during a tour

SECURING INCOME

My parents pushed me to apply for a job. A month after graduation, I found myself working in Hewlett Packard (HP). The first thing they asked from me during the job interview was my transcript of records—which showed 28 failing units.

“I’m screwed. There’s no way they’re going to hire a guy fresh out of college with 28 zeros.”

Needless to say, I was in for one of the biggest miracles of my life. I got hired and was set to work the week after.

It was unbelievable! If you bump into me today and ask me how I got hired with those scores, I still wouldn’t be able to give you an explanation anywhere near sensible.

HP was my dream company back when I was going through college. I got a whopping 25,000 PHP per month plus healthcare benefits that allowed me to make either my dad or my mom as beneficiary. Of course, after the tax, and ‘government benefits’ were removed from my salary, all that’s left is 19,000+ PHP.

That's not so bad. Plus it's sure-fire income that I receive month to month.



My team at Hewlett Packard

It was around this time that I had the chance to finally meet the owner and founder of Scuba World. Angeli really pushed through with what she said at Hong Kong.

I set out to present my small start-up, SEO business. During that time, SEO Hacker was far from impressive. I had not proceeded to register it as a company yet. I could also say that I had no real professional experience or certification yet. But what I'm really most ashamed of is the fact that I didn't even have a good-looking website!

The only thing I could show for was that I was able to increase my personal blog's PageRank to 4. Still, I went ahead and presented what I've got and what I think I could do for Scuba World.

FIRST SALE

I was blown out of my mind when the owner agreed to take me on. I got to close my first (and biggest) SEO contract! It was a whopping \$1,000 (back then a dollar was equivalent to 50 pesos so the contract was worth 50,000 PHP) per month for six months—or double my monthly gross salary from HP.

The best thing about it? I have to go scuba diving to understand the business and write natural, transparent articles for the company blog.

Today I'm a licensed advanced scuba diver—all for free because of that first SEO contract.

So I was a 21-year-old guy who was getting around 69,000 PHP on a monthly basis with the whole world ahead of me.

And that was only the beginning.



Scuba Diving with my buddy Richmond Ibasco

GOD, GUTS, AND HARD WORK

There are few people in this world who are as privileged as I was when starting out. Coupled with hard work, I was able to seize opportunities in my life. Learning SEO during OJT and being able to apply it to my blog hands-on, my first SEO gig, first SEO contract, and so on and so forth.

From this point of view, life seemed like an extremely lucky streak. However, there are factors that we need to consider as to how I got there.

1. God

It's just mind-blowing how I would've missed everything had I not started the 'God and You' blog. I told God, "Lord, I want to just write for you and glorify you online. Here's my last money, take it." And with that last 2,000 PHP in my pocket, I bought one gigabyte worth of webhosting and the domain name *h3sean.com*.

Had I not started that blog, I would not have sought how to increase my traffic. I would not have any place to test my knowledge in SEO. I would not have any website to show for when I presented to the owner of Scuba World.

On top of that, what are the chances that I would meet Angeli onboard a ferry towards Macau? What are the chances that she would remember me enough to really forward me to her uncle in the Philippines after we got back home?

What are the chances that I would be hired for a whopping \$1,000 with just a personal blog to show for?

There's only one person I credit this all to: God. There's a bigger purpose for all this than just an amazing luck-peppered story. I believe God was positioning me and my soon-to-be company, SEO Hacker for something great.

2. Guts

No one barges into the biggest scuba diving and liveaboard company in the Philippines and pitches a \$1,000 per month contract with nothing to show for but a personal blog. You could say I was a bit crazy—and I was, in fact afraid to go home with my tail between my legs.

But when I took time to really think about it, I had nothing to lose because I was at stage zero.

So I went to their office. Yes, I lost a little time and a little money commuting, but I would've lost a much bigger opportunity had I not taken that window.

Was I afraid of rejection? Hell, yeah! But that didn't, and shouldn't stop me from at least trying.

One of the greatest players in the NBA, Michael Jordan, once said: "I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

I would've missed too and failed—but not taking the shot in the first place means that I miss 100%.

3. Hard Work

You just can't beat the hours I initially put in *God and You's* SEO. I had to work 18 hours a day to be able to finish OJT early and celebrate Christmas with my family. All the hours I had as 'free time', I spent on reading blogs related to SEO and applied what I learned to "God and You".

This produced results that doubled as my initial portfolio as an SEO specialist. Of course, along with studying SEO, I was able to study more WordPress coding, plugins, themes, etc. This enhanced my technical understanding of websites and systems. Among other skills, that's where I usually trump competitors.

I put in hours of work in my proposal to Scuba World. It was nothing fancy—just a Microsoft Word printout worth a handful of pages. I also had to communicate to the client regularly—and of course, schedule scuba diving trips. While you may not consider it as hard work to go scuba diving, documenting each dive and making time to really learn the ropes took days from my work in HP.

I was juggling a day job and a micro business. And I had to do both as best as I can if I want to grow.

A lot of people nowadays want the shortcut. They buy the best tools, the best equipment, the best this and that.

Guitar gurus say, "Tone is in your fingers." And that's true!

You can buy the best guitar, effects pedals, and amplifiers. But when you play that rig, it's still going to sound like you.

Take the crappiest guitar you can find and put it in the hands of a master guitar player and it's still going to sound awesome. It's not the tools, it's not the equipment. Tone is in your fingers. Nothing can beat hard work.

Remember

01

God

02

Guts

03

Hard Work

CHAPTER 2

Myths and Signals

“Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.”

—HELEN KELLER

I worked in HP a month after I graduated. It was March 2010. My shift was 9 AM to 6 PM, however, I had to wait for a friend of mine whose shift was from 3 PM to 12 MN. So from 6 PM to 12 MN I worked on my then newly bought and developed SEO blog, SEO Hacker (<https://seo-hacker.com>).

I got the name from combining SEO with the term ‘Hacker’ which I got from a website I was following during the time: Lifehacker. I was fascinated that the word ‘Hacker’ had an uncommonly known meaning which was “Someone who is an expert in solving problems using computer systems and code.”

SEO Hacker became an online journal where I would write everything I learned about SEO. During the time, I didn't think it would be where my business will be centered on. For me, it was merely a blog.

During my off-hours, I would develop, write, research, apply, and test what I learned about SEO in the SEO Hacker blog. It was an unlocked passion of mine—and I could go on and on and on doing it.

To my utter surprise, the SEO Hacker blog got a lot of early traction. People started leaving comments, sharing my stuff across social media platforms, contacting me via email about how much they appreciated the content in the site, and so on.

It was fuel to the fire I had burning in me.

LOSING SECURITY

During one of my morning LRT rides to HP, I bumped into Harry Uy Jr., an old friend from college. We weren't really close so I thought it would be a short acquaintance type of chat.

We exchanged stories on what we were up to. He said he was doing videography and photography for events which was cool—since it's a tough, competitive industry to be in today. I mentioned that I was doing SEO on the side while working at HP. With which he responded, "SEO?! That's exactly what one of my aunts in Uratex is looking for. I'll refer you to her."

We exchanged numbers. Naturally, being simple acquaintances,

I was bent to thinking, “He’ll probably forget me after this.” After all, I was typically a nobody and my business wasn’t even officially established yet.

Months passed since my fateful meeting with Harry.

Not too long after that fateful event, I quit my job at HP.

Oh, did I mention it was my dream company?

It’s not because it wasn’t what I expected it to be. It wasn’t even because it’s a bad company. HP is a wonderful company—I would recommend it to any guy who’s looking to start his IT career.

The reason why I left was because my small startup which I was working on in my extra time, was starting to become a small business—and it demanded more of my time and commitment. I was only ever able to work on SEO Hacker and its clients after my working hours at HP.

I felt it was unfair to give SEO Hacker my leftover time since it was earning much more than what I was earning in HP.

It also didn’t make sense for me to commute from Parañaque all the way to Ortigas (around 35km) riding the tricycle, jeep, bus, and MRT respectively plus walking a good 20 minutes along the way—to get half the amount I’m getting from my business.

In HP, I had to work 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, eat lunch and, at times, dinner outside (which cost money), and commute extensively (which also costs money). With my SEO business, I work for my clients 3 hours a day, 3 days a week (sometimes including the scuba dive sessions) from the comfort of my home

or the scuba diving resort.

Best of all, I didn't have to spend anything for commute or food!

So after lots of excruciating contemplation, risk calculation, and prayers, I quit HP after just five months of working there. That's definitely not going to look good on my resume. My colleagues at HP also did not approve of me leaving with only a short stint of five months under my belt.

Which means if I'm unable to renew my contract with Scuba World, I'm screwed.

I kissed my financial security good-bye.



Harry Uy – Without him, I wouldn't have had a breakthrough deal with Uratex

GIVEN THE GO

“Hello? Yes, is this Uncle Ramon?”

I can almost feel my hands shaking as I held the phone. I can't believe I'm talking to my Dad's church leader—a man who is held in high esteem in our community.

“Yes, this is him speaking.”

“Hi Uncle Ramon this is Sean Si. I want to talk with you about my business plans.”

“Oh, Sean. Yes, your dad told me about your desire to quit your job. So what's your plan?”

“Well, I wanted to quit my job because I want to start my own business, I'm into doing SEO.”

“What's SEO?”

My Dad and I argued for months about my leaving HP. He wanted me to climb the corporate ladder—which is ironic because my dad's a businessman—and I wanted to quit and start my own business.

It turns out that it all boiled down to my dad and uncle Ramon wanting me to at least have a back-up plan before I left HP. After all, it's tough to have only five months worth of employment in your resume.

If your business fails and you don't have much professional experience, where are you going to go? The IT industry is tough—they get only the smartest and youngest of the bunch. If you're old and you weren't able to catch up with the technology,

it simply means you're not going to be able to find a job in a respectable IT company.

“So do you happen to have a plan if your business fails?”

“Well, Uncle Ramon, to tell you the truth, right now there's this company that wants to hire me for 50,000 PHP per month. I can show you the message through email if you'd like.”

True story. I forwarded him the email of the company trying to recruit me to become an SEO manager in their team.

“Okay, you have my go. I'll talk with your Dad.”

I put the phone down and walked straight to my dad's room.

THE TRADE-OFF

A few weeks after I quit HP, I was able to focus more on working for my clients at SEO Hacker and SEO Hacker growing its brand.

However, there was one thing that didn't play well for me. Scuba World decided they didn't want to renew their contract with me—since they're in the process of selling the business. At the same time, a consulting gig I was doing with a mobile marketing company (which was a sweet 25,000 PHP a month) also decided against renewing our engagement.

I was devastated.

JUST IN TIME

I went down on my knees and asked God “Lord, why? Why now? I know I quit because you gave me the ‘go’ signal through

my dad and Uncle Ramon, but why take away my last source of income?”

Then I realized that I shouldn't be worrying. God was in control. So without letting another moment pass by, I prayed again, “Lord, thank you for letting me leave. I know you have a purpose why this happened. I'll trust in you and just do what I can for the time being.”

A day after, Uratex called. They wanted a meeting.

Harry kept his word.

To keep the long story short, I presented my previous work and online portfolios to Uratex. They were impressed.

I got Uratex plus their sister company, Roberts AIPMC—the combined contract is worth more than my salary in HP and my first contracts combined. As of this writing, these two companies are still under the care and optimization of SEO Hacker.

That was all I needed to take off.

STARTING UP

I registered SEO Hacker with DTI on April 2011. It took just two days to finish filing my business registration at the DTI building in Makati. I took home the registration papers—and just like that, I had a whole new fledgling business in my hands.

CEO was not something I wanted to take on as a title. I wanted a more subtle, softer tone to my leadership role. So for the first year, I took on the title of “Managing Director”, which

was a very decent title for the company's size and revenue.

However as we grew (as I write this book, we are now 20 people working in-house for the company), I resorted to finally changing it to CEO and Founder.

SECURITY, HONOR AND HUMILITY

1. Security is a Myth

We think that the sweet, sure monthly income keeps us secure. After all, that paycheck will always come, right?

Wrong.

That paycheck can stop any minute. What's to stop a company from laying off people when push comes to shove?

Yes quitting entails risk, but don't think that just because you have a job right now and a paycheck at the end of the month, you're immune.

No one is immune. The only constant thing in our world is change, and risks come along with it whether you're passive or active, conservative or aggressive in your risk taking.

Here's something I think is true: The riskiest thing you can do is to stay where you are and pass up on the next opportunity that comes along your way. You won't realize the size and grandeur of an opportunity until you get your ass off your couch and get your hands dirty.

Real security can only come from three things: God, Guts, and Hard Work. It's the narrow, but sure-fire road to success.

2. Honor your Parents

I would never have come to where I am had I not honored my parents' request for me to apply for a job in HP. There are some things I've learned there about maintaining and improving the level of service we should give to our clients.

I also saw the culture first-hand. Flexi-time, work from home, and a service level agreement with the clients among other things. This helped me gauge the strategy for my company culture during my first years in starting up a services-centered business.

In the end, this verse proves true:

“Honor your father and mother— which is the first commandment with a promise— so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

—Ephesians 6:2-3

3. On your Knees

I have had lots of days when I am cornered and don't know what to do. Days when the bills and my team's salaries are stacked so high and the clients weren't able to pay on time. Days when I just don't know where to get the funds to keep the business alive

There are days when a client's rankings suddenly drop because of a Google dance and it's almost reporting period.

And there are just days when I am... well... “low.”

Going down on your knees helps you remember that things are in God's hands. You can't be in control all the time. There are things in this world that only a being greater than you can accomplish. I tell you the truth, there have been more than enough days when I'm brought very low and God comes through.

I remember some time in 2012 when all I had left in my bank account was a measly 10,000 PHP. The thing is, I haven't completely paid out all the bills and salaries yet. I was in deep distress. How am I supposed to handle my team's fast-approaching payday?

I had a few options. I could loan from a bank, a friend, or a relative. But those, to me, were bad options. I didn't want to take a loan because frankly, I have never loaned money from anyone before. And I did not plan to loan unless I really had no other choice.

Suddenly an email from a non-profit Australian organization shot through to my inbox. They found SEO Hacker through my high school classmate who referred me. They asked for a meeting. So we went and presented our proposal to them.

After two short weeks, they signed the biggest contract I've ever had. Not to mention the work they wanted done was the easiest in SEO Hacker's history.

It's just mind-boggling how God saw through to my needs. This verse has never been truer for me than when I had to go through those difficult times:

*“What is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?” —Psalm 8:4*

Going down on your knees is the best anxiety-prevention discipline there is since the beginning of time. It’s one of the lowest, and yet, the greatest times of my life.

Remember

01

Security
is a Myth

02

Honor your
Parents

03

Go down on
your knees

CHAPTER 3

Breaking Ground

“Great vision without great people
is irrelevant.”

—JIM COLLINS

I knew I couldn't do it all by myself. So I looked for help and talked to a friend who is part of my discipleship group in church, Austin Takahashi was willing to help me out. The thing is, he was still going through college. But that's alright, all I needed was some help in writing and editing articles I had for our clients. I also had a little help from my brother, Kevin, with all things design. But, like Austin, he was also still going through college.

The experience of two undergraduates helping me out made me very excited at the thought of having my own in-house team. So I shopped around for an office. I found one nearby inside BF Parañaque. It was located at the NUR building, walking distance from my parent's home and where I was living at that time. It costs 10,000 PHP a month to rent 38 squaremeters that had white wooden and cement walls, and had its own private restroom. Perfect for a startup with a small team.

The problem is, I had no idea how to hire people. All I know is there's a job interview that each applicant should go through. So I listed down some questions I thought should be asked. I asked help from my then-girlfriend (now my wife), who worked as an HR before for a few months. We came up with questions like these, to name a few:

- › What do you know about SEO Hacker?
- › How do you see yourself 5 years from now?
- › What do you do in your spare time?
- › What do you know about SEO?
- › How long are you willing to work?

So I tapped into my circle of influence looking for someone who could help me build the business. Naturally, in this age of social media, I first turned to Facebook to get the word out.

HOW I HIRED THE FIRST FEW PEOPLE—HOW IT WENT TERRIBLY WRONG

*'In my walks, every man I meet
is my superior in some way, and in that I learn from him.'*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Like a sailor who has set out in the sea for the first time dreaming of treasure and a grand adventure, I set out to build one of the best teams this world has ever seen.

I've read books on leadership and management and influencing people. I thought I was well equipped to handle people. I couldn't be more wrong.

Perhaps it's the way these books are written for another culture or perhaps it's just the way a Filipino employee thinks. The Philippines has the most emotional workforce, after all. The thing is, I didn't believe that.

I was too optimistic.

So I'll let you know how my real hiring process went.

- › Login to Facebook.
- › Post the job opening on Facebook.
- › Pray to God that someone good sees it and accept my job offer.
- › Hire that person.

This is a horrible strategy. I had no experience in hiring people, no experience in process-oriented training (in fact, I had zero processes then), no idea on the skill sets I needed whatsoever.

In short, I was running blind. And in a services business, running blind at the hiring stage is the worst thing you can do. The people you hire are the people who make or break the business—especially in the early stages.

I wasn't running completely blind though. In every person who applied, I looked for a small glimmer of three virtues:

- › Loyalty
- › Commitment
- › Hard Work

If the applicant shows hints of any of the three, it's a strong signal to me that I should hire him/her. If not, I still hired the person anyway—but I already know that it's going to be a short arrangement.

So the first full-time hires of SEO Hacker looked more like a ragtag group of individuals producing work that mattered in a highly ad hoc, chaotic way with low continuity. As bad as that may sound, we were able to make it work until we reached the next stage of the company's growth.

Unfortunately, I didn't know any better and still continued to execute this chaotic hiring process until we reached 20 people—which is somewhere in our third year in business. Big mistake. As a startup entrepreneur in the services industry, one thing I should never have neglected is improving our hiring process. I should have put these in place:

1. New hire onboarding – discussing protocols, values, mission/vision.
2. Training curve – ways of working, process documents.

3. Feedback loops – knowing issues and successes within the team on a regular basis.
4. Employee handbook – rules and regulations, and clarity of authority.
5. Team updates – Briefing everyone on where we are with every client.
6. Legal documents – Making sure our hiring, tenure and firing process were legally processed and is backed by the law 100%.

Sounds simple enough—but not having these in place produced hideous consequences:

1. Company culture became weaker. There were splinter groups that turned against the company and went all the way to slander my leadership and the company to the uninvolved public.
2. There were people who accepted our work offer, shook my hand, and pledged to start on a certain date—then wouldn't show up and wouldn't answer any of our messages anymore. Or the person would show up for a day or two then go *AWOL* indefinitely.
3. There were people who would work for SEO Hacker, learn the ropes and then leave without resigning and rendering 30 days to help with turnover, and would afterwards apply for a competitor.

4. Ultimately, the team felt like the company was a democracy and autonomy was generally acceptable—some even went so far as to create small mutinies within the company to defend their autonomous thinking and operation against changes that the company is putting in place to grow and succeed

This produced tremendous amounts of stress in my life. I wouldn't say it was unnecessary because as bitter tasting as these events were, it was much needed medicine to my ignorance of the hiring process as CEO.

We fixed all that. Right now, we have legal counsel on retainer, an employee onboarding process that every new hire goes through, legal documents for them to review and sign for their probationary and regular terms at work, and then some.

For team updates, we call it our 'Structured Meeting' and we do it on a weekly basis. It keeps everyone in the loop. You can check out the details of our Structured Meeting here: (<https://seo-hacker.com/structure-internal-seo-team-meetings/>)

The team is also no longer autonomous and democratic in nature, authority is back to the management, morale is at its highest, and the team is performing better than ever. It's tremendous what a few hours of time invested in the hiring process can do.

It's definitely one of the best investments I did with my time as CEO.

WHEN SEO HACKER GOT AN OFFICE

There are two reasons why I finally decided that renting an office is the best way to go:

- › Continuity
- › Legacy

I personally held off against getting an office for over a year. I imagined paying for the rent, electricity, water, internet bills and so on—and it didn't make sense to me. "I'd do it cheap and just run things home-based" I thought.

However when the work got a little too serious that continuity became extremely necessary, the decision became easier.



Whiteboard sessions are common in the office

You see, operating SEO Hacker as a remote team consisting of outsourced individuals meant that it was hard to ensure continuity. Outsourced individuals naturally have a high turnover rate.

Asking an outsourced individual to commit to your company is like asking a young, liberated individual with multiple concurrent relationships to commit to you as your girlfriend/boyfriend. It just doesn't make sense.

And if commitment is low then turnover is high, and if turnover is high then continuity is low. SEO Hacker's clients would feel uneasy that they were communicating with different individuals every quarter.

At the back of their minds they are most probably already thinking "SEO Hacker is in trouble—that's why they have different people handling my account every so often."

And I can't have my clients thinking that. SEO is a long term partnership between us and our clients. If our clients are starting to believe that SEO Hacker operates on a short-term basis with our team, they might feel threatened that it's also how we will operate with their business.

The other reason why I rented out an office is legacy.

I did not want to have a team that's just like "any other team". I wanted SEO Hacker to have the best team it can possibly have. And that means building a culture like no other, a camaraderie that is unbelievably tight, and a strong, leadership-driven upper management.

I don't see myself being the CEO of SEO Hacker twenty

years from now. By then, my vision is to be a venture capitalist and a public adviser and consultant to numerous start-ups and scale-ups. And if that vision were to ever come true, I would need to leave a very strong legacy—and the strongest legacy is the one carried out by the building blocks that make a company—the team.

Building the team meant having a place to cultivate the right culture that I wanted to have. What kind of culture? I didn't know for sure. All I know is, I want it to be fun, hard working, client- and success-oriented, value-driven and highly relational.

How to direct the culture in that way, I have no real, hard blueprint to follow or to give.

What I did know is that the company culture starts with a DNA—and the DNA almost always starts with the founder. That's me.

That DNA will be built based on how my core team perceives the:

1. way I work.
2. way I handle stress during crunch time.
3. way I communicate with the team.
4. way I prioritize our clients.
5. way I hire, fire, and train people.

Each individual in my core team has to perceive this in a way that will influence the company culture positively. Therefore I need to give my best during these times because my team is watching me constantly.

So if I wanted to leave a strong legacy in SEO Hacker, it would be carried on by how I build, strengthen, and lead my team. I didn't see it happen any other way than to finally build an internal, full-time team working in one place at the same time.

So I set out to hunt for our first office.

There really wasn't a lot of choices down at BF Parañaque so I went with an office that's closest to my home back then.

That's when we rented the 38sqm space at NUR building.

It's not much but that office saw through the first 11 hires of the SEO Hacker team. We stayed there until we could no longer fit.

Things went on from there—since then, we relocated to a bigger, better office twice.

SLOW BUT SURE

As the workload increased, we had to keep hiring people—making sure that we were not just getting more people but that we were getting the right people.

The new hires were put in teams. I personally trained each one of them and gave my team leaders, Rob and Vince, the chance to teach as well—after all, as American physicist Frank Oppenheimer realized, “The best way to learn is to teach.”

As the team grew, it was tougher for us to stay in the 38 square meter office. New clients were coming in and we had to train more people to be able to take in more work.

We were definitely not the best, biggest company to work for out there but being based in the south side of Metro Manila posed a very simple but critical benefit: We were able to get people who were from the south as well. They were fit for the job and happy to be working with us because it's nearer their place of residence—therefore they waste less time being stuck in traffic.

You see, the bigger corporate positions are based in Makati and Ortigas—the two biggest corporate districts of Metro Manila. Every fresh, young college graduate dream of working in a job that can often be found there. High pay grade, good benefits, beautiful and comfortable offices, you name it. But, considering the traffic, it's just too darn far when you live in Cavite, Laguna, Muntinlupa, BF Parañaque, or Las Piñas.

Realizing this, we focused on attracting talents from the south. People who wanted to work in some sort of corporate setting but didn't want to endure the long, stressful commute to Makati or Ortigas. We thought of marketing strategies to attract good team players.

Finally, we came up with a jobs page that I think looked cool and we applied SEO best practices to it so that it would rank for the keyword (and its variations), “SEO jobs Philippines”. The latest jobs page we have can be visited at (<https://seo-hacker.net/jobs>).

We weren't really into posting job ads at paid job listings – it's just too expensive—especially for us as we were just starting out. We stuck with our connections and with inbound strategies to

attract the right talent. As far as the early days of SEO Hacker is concerned, it worked, albeit scrappily.

SCALING THINGS UP

Through all these, I made sure to keep SEO Hacker's website in the best shape possible. I started with <http://seo-hacker.com> and then bought <http://seo-hacker.org> and <http://seo-hacker.net> because I felt that I will have some sort of use for it in the future.

When my brother, Kevin, joined the team full time, we immediately got to work. We went on to give SEO Hacker's website a facelift.



Screenshot of SEO Hacker website from 2011



Screenshot of SEO Hacker website from 2014

I believe that in order for us to serve our clients the way we want them to be served, we have to serve ourselves first and make sure we take care of our own rankings and website. This reminds me of the verse:

*“The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’
There is no commandment greater than these.”
—Mark 12:31*

The key to unlocking the wisdom in this verse is: If you don’t know how to love yourself, you won’t know how to love your neighbor as well.

If you don’t know how to take care of your own website and branding, you won’t know how to take care of your client’s website and branding. It’s just the way I want SEO Hacker to be. We’ve stuck with it since day one and we’ve stuck it out until today.

Of course, this came with the need to employ online tools and platforms. We’ve used tools to help us with email marketing, making noise and followers in social media, among other things. We’ve also been employing proxies, upgrading to bigger and badder servers, and so on and so forth. The expenses mounted up but it helped us automate, learn more, and be able to take on more clients.

Some tools really just helped us expand our skills and services vertically. My knowledge in email marketing deepened only when I built lists myself and studied strategies to increase my

open rates and make my subject lines more effective. The same goes for my knowledge in copywriting, analytics, click tracking, conversion rate optimization, and the list goes on.

CALL TO ACTION

A website can be so much more than just an online calling card—which is what a lot of people and companies use it for. A website should be something more than just your contact information and your products and services in a monitor screen.

A website should be the direct representation of your living, breathing, and growing company—online.

It should connect your company to your audience—either by getting them to engage with you through a comment, through a contact form or through a simple Facebook "Like". A website should allow you to gather leads through an email newsletter. A website should make you money by empowering you with the ability to sell and collect payments online.

A website is a tool to make your business grow in the digital space. As far as I'm concerned, it's the biggest space in the entire world today. When I started writing at SEO Hacker, there are three simple things people can do to engage—click on the Facebook Like button, leave a comment below the blog post, or put in their name and email address so they can receive our blog feeds as email newsletters.

These things are actions that I need the readers to take.

Consequently, there are buttons in my website for these actions. These buttons have to draw attention or else these people will never take action.

And as a webmaster, I want people to take action.

If you noticed, in the SEO Hacker blogsite (*seo-hacker.com*) there are specific buttons there that we want users to do. One is making our readers sign up for our Growth Hacks monthly newsletter. Another one is making them visit SEO Hacker School (which has its own Call to Action buttons to make people sign up). And so on and so forth.

Your website's call to action is very important. It's what makes your website different from an online calling card.

MOVING OUT

We stayed a full year in our office just to let the contract expire. Then we knew where we had to take the team. We had to move out to a bigger space. The thing is, I didn't have too much time to go scouting. I had very limited time because my contract with NUR's owner was expiring soon.

So I grabbed the nearest, most cost-effective place I could get. It was at BF NSHA. A 280sqm office for 20,000 PHP a month. The spaces were a bit tight and there was no huge place where the bulk of the team could work. Each team would be separated by a wall or some hindrance. I wasn't very fond of the office especially since the flooring was sort of uneven—as if

there's a small volcano waiting to pop out from underneath the cement and wooden tiles.

There were three rooms—small ones. I think two of them measured somewhere around 15sqm and the master's bedroom measured around 23 square meters with the comfort room included. I imagined the master's bedroom to be the studio where we would soon shoot our videos for SEO Hacker School. While the other two would be extra rooms for meetings and interviews.

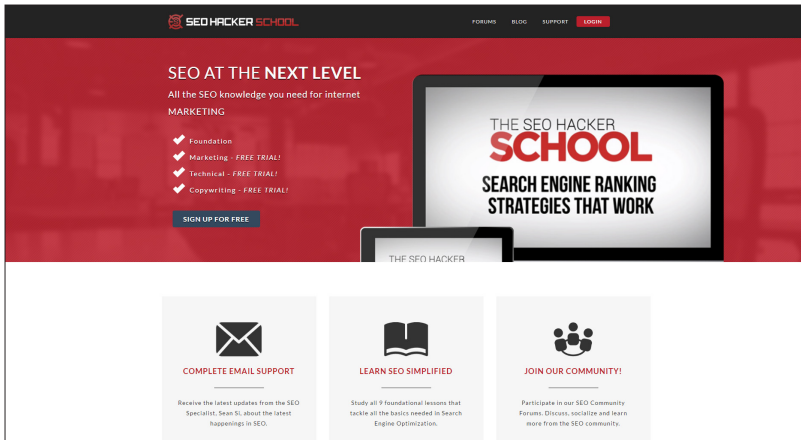
“It's not so bad,” I thought to myself, “Considering we're now twice as big as when we started.” Looking back, I couldn't be more wrong. I should've scouted for a much better place.

Perhaps God wanted me to learn a valuable lesson in diligence and patience.

SEO HACKER SCHOOL

During that time, I was teaching SEO online through an email marketing course I set up using *MailChimp*. So I figured “Why not make a membership site for this? We're doing it anyway—let's monetize it!”

I finally found a purpose for my *http://seo-hacker.org* domain name.



Screenshot of SEO Hacker School website (2017)

We set up a studio in our new office at NSHA to record videos for our online SEO School. We bought studio lights, a new DSLR camera with the proper lens, a new whiteboard, and lots of egg tray cartons for sound proofing.

Our first shoots were very exciting and nerve-wracking at the same time. I practiced over and over again so we wouldn't have to re-shoot the videos. Until the time came when I could just wing it and let the mistakes flow even during the video shoot. It was a lot of fun.

It was also very time consuming.

So what we did was focus on a strategy that no other online SEO knowledge-based website was offering. We set up lessons in beautifully designed and easy to understand PowerPoint format. Every lesson we have in SEO Hacker School today is built by dedicated content and graphic specialists. We teach over 1,800 students online.

The school's membership is separated into two: Insider and Pro.

Insider members can access free SEO lessons that deal with fundamentals. This is for users to have a feel of what it's like inside the Pro membership account—which costs \$30/month. Having a Pro membership account simply means that you can access all the lessons in the entire site.

There is an existing demand for learning SEO right. However, I wasn't entirely sure of the product-market fit of SEO Hacker School. Even if there were some websites that had the same business model as SEO Hacker School, we couldn't seem to find ourselves in the right position to turn it into a profitable business. Right now, the school is not yet profitable, although it's not really that big of an issue because the cost of capitalization is considerably low.

SEO Hacker School is not yet at the stage where we can tell if it's a pass or fail—it's simply a project that's yet to fly. We haven't really given it the dedicated time and effort for us to tell yet. In any case, it's been a huge help since we use it internally to train and develop our new hires.

FOUR MONTHS TOO EARLY

The landlady of our NSHA office did not inform me early on whether we would be able to renew our contract with them because one of the landlady's relatives is thinking of moving in the house. This posed a problem for me because of the renovations

for sound proofing we did to the studio room for SEO Hacker School video shoots.

So I shopped around for another office. We were seven months in our contract with NSHA when my Mom got in touch with a friend who was renting out her house. It was at TDM in BF Parañaque—much nearer to my parents home than the current office.

One day, we finally arranged for a tour of the house. It was simply perfect. There was a huge hallway, around 60 square meters, which seemed like a town hall where I imagined the bulk of my team to work in. There were also two other rooms approximately 25sqm in size where I imagined the conference table and bean bags would be.

It was just perfect! I fell in love with the idea of moving in to TDM and living there. There was just one huge problem—wiring.

The house was really old and the electrical wiring was not done properly. We could risk the entire house burning down if we transferred all our air conditioning systems and ran it all at the same time.

The current wiring setup of the house wasn't anywhere near where I needed it to be. I was going to install around 6 air conditioners on top of all our laptops and desktop computers. It was simply a recipe for disaster when we'll have all of those running and the wiring system is too thin.

So I had it changed. I had help from my then-fiancee's company, Meiji Electric, to fix all of the things that were wrong

with the wiring. I also had to call up our local electric company, Meralco, to make sure that the new wiring setup was going to work, all the way down to the meter wire—which we also had to change. It was a huge hassle but I learned a lot along the way.

Once the wiring and electrical provisions were ready, we moved in. It was June 2013. We didn't have any working internet at first because PLDT was extremely delayed—which, sadly, is no real surprise in our country. We had to make do with everyone's mobile data—each of us contributing bandwidth. In fact there were a lot of times when I had to leave my device just for my unlimited data plan to be utilized by the entire team. It was a good thing Smart had a very loose Fair Use Policy (FUP) during that time regarding mobile data consumption.

INDEPENDENT LIVING

I moved in to the TDM home-office since I wanted to try living by myself before getting married. My room at my parent's house isn't really a room anyway—it's more of an attic. My cabinet is not in my room and I had to go down just to be able to use the restroom. It was getting uncomfortable for me especially when I'm on a roll with work. So I asked my parent's blessing to move out.

“Just remember, if you decide to do anything stupid, you will regret it in the end.” My dad kept repeating those words to me before I left. I heeded his advice.

Sooner than later, I invited my brother to stay over at my place—which he did. It gets quite lonely living alone in a 380sqm house with just my PC and an 8mbps DSL. Good for me that he was having a hard time getting good internet in my parent’s place so I had some leverage in enticing him to stay with me. He had to go all the way to the attic to be able to take advantage of the 3mbps connection I left there. At my place, we both shared the juicy internet speed to our heart’s desire.

For months to come, it was nothing short of an online paradise. Me and my brother would play a game called League of Legends almost every night after work. It was our bonding session. We would have tons of fun just adjusting to each other’s playing style together with three other friends or what we would come to call as “wild card players” as teammates. It’s a very popular game of two teams, with five players each, fighting against each other. In order to win, you have to have good team synergy, familiarity with your in-game character, and the controls, as well as quick wit and tactics.

TECH VICE

Playing computer games has always been a weakness. The 28 units of failure in college wouldn’t have happened if I wasn’t such a computer games junkie. The moment the game DOTA was introduced to me in college, my world started to revolve around it and around the friends I have who were in the same addictive solar system.

I would play hours and hours of DOTA.

I'd play at home before I left for school. Consequently, I leave home late almost all the time. Because of that, I would arrive at school late—so I thought I'd just forego the class and head straight to the computer shop. Looking back, it was a vicious cycle and a very miserable waste of time.

I didn't appreciate what my time was worth back then. All I cared about was to win, be praised by my teammates, and share stories about the game afterwards.

Needless to say, the addiction to DOTA evolved into other games such as DOTA 2 (duh!), Heroes of Newerth (HON), and League of Legends (LOL). My brother and I got really hooked on the latter.

We would play long hours and sleep late—going as far as 3 or 4 AM. And yes, since we slept at the office, my teammates would come in later that morning—and we'd wake up, open the door and find some of them already knee-deep at work. Talk about shame!

These computer games were very shallow passions to behold. However, I must admit that I picked up on a couple of lessons playing DOTA. There was team play, adjustment, strategy, the desire to win, and so on and so forth. It was not directly highlighted, as it was after all, just a computer game, however my brain registered all these things.

REHAB

To keep myself in check, I deleted League of Legends from my computer. I realized that there is no other way to discipline myself. If I'm addicted, I have to go cold turkey—there just isn't any other way. I tried lessening it down but whenever I'd win, I'd thirst for more. And whenever I'd lose, I wouldn't relent until I won.

It was an addictive vicious cycle.

Unfortunately, it didn't help that my brother was also addicted to the game and he wouldn't delete it whenever I would. Worse, I'd watch him play at times and cringe at the fact that I'm simply a spectator.

However, the times I sacrificed playing League of Legends, were the most productive times. Those were times when I was able to bring SEO Hacker forward. Times when I was able to blog more, innovate more, discover and employ more tools, reach out to other industry and thought leaders, and other important stuff like that.

Everyone has their own set of weaknesses. At least I got to identify mine at an early stage. I sometimes go back to playing League of Legends with my brother and online buddies—but I make it a point to delete it afterwards. Nowadays, it's more of a seasonal break rather than an addictive vice.

DELEGATION, CHANGE, FOCUS, AND DISCIPLINE

1. Delegate

You just won't be able to do it all. Delegation is one of the secrets of an effective manager. It's simply the process of replicating some of yourself—your values, your discipline, your principles, and your vision—and passing that on to someone else who can carry the ball at least 80% as well as you could, and run for you.

I make it a point to get people in my team who I know have the potential to change the game. People who are better than me in one aspect or another.

Dale Carnegie wrote his desired eulogy in his book 'How to Win Friends and Influence People': "Here lies one who knew how to get around with men who were cleverer than himself."

The fact of the matter is, if I hire people based on what they don't have that I have (hence, securing myself to be always needed and making them dispensable), I am not making my business any better. Hiring the right people is one of the best things you could do to influence your company culture and future.

Remember, your time is limited. So get your best people—your 'A' players with the most potential to take your company forward, and empower them through encouragement and praise. Equip them with the tools, authority and working environment they need. Then replicate in them the skills and knowledge that you can let go of so they can carry your load and free you up to do more important things.

2. Embrace Change

There will come a time when an event in your business' history will force you to take a look at the brutal facts of reality and reflect. Of course, this will entail a hard, gruelling change if you want your business to grow and succeed—but it is necessary.

There are lots of companies who don't reflect on the brutal facts as they grow—they become stagnant, and stagnant companies cannot expect the tides to turn in their favor. What will become of them?

A slow, painful, deteriorating death of all it stood for.

I used to live in the SEO Hacker office. It was a home-office that we love. Sometimes my teammates would sleep over and bond with each other. It was really cool.

I got married in February 2014. This has forced me to move to at least an hour and a half drive away from my office. I work remotely now—and so does two of our teammates. People have been more accountable, productive, and efficient. It has made us all aware of our work. It has pushed us all to grow more and more each week. Times are changing and the team is growing. We're now around 30 people working in-house and full-time. And our salaries can only go up.

If we are going to grow more, we need to have a standard of accountability, and personal growth. Of course this goes without saying that I've lost charisma with my team by implementing these things. One of my mentors once told me: "Not everyone in your team will like you" and it continues to ring in my ears until today.

And that's fine.

So long as we secure SEO Hacker's future and pivot to the right direction when confronted with the brutal facts to do so.

“You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.” —James Stockdale

And when you are confronted by those facts, only the act of embracing the changes you need to implement will be able to guide you to victory.

3. Focus

I love how Steve Jobs ingrained focus on Apple when he returned to the company. Here's an excerpt from his biography by Walter Isaacson

When Jobs returned to Apple in 1997, it was producing a random array of computers and peripherals, including a dozen different versions of the Macintosh. After a few weeks of product review sessions, he'd finally had enough. “Stop!” he shouted. “This is crazy.” He grabbed a Magic Marker, padded in his bare feet to a whiteboard, and drew a two-by-two grid. “Here's what we need,” he declared. Atop the two columns, he wrote “Consumer”

and “Pro.” He labelled the two rows “Desktop” and “Portable.” Their job, he told his team members, was to focus on four great products, one for each quadrant. All other products should be cancelled. There was a stunned silence. But by getting Apple to focus on making just four computers, he saved the company. “Deciding what not to do is as important as deciding what to do,” he told me. “That’s true for companies, and it’s true for products.”

After he righted the company, Jobs began taking his “top 100” people on a retreat each year. On the last day, he would stand in front of a whiteboard (he loved whiteboards, because they gave him complete control of a situation and they engendered focus) and ask, “What are the 10 things we should be doing next?” People would fight to get their suggestions on the list. Jobs would write them down—and then cross off the ones he decreed dumb. After much jockeying, the group would come up with a list of 10. Then Jobs would slash the bottom seven and announce, “We can only do three.”

Remember our whiteboard? Well, you can only write a few things here and there. Usually we’re limited to three to five major points in that whiteboard. If we discuss any more, it would look and feel messy. Hence, it will be remembered messily by the team after the discussion.

So we keep the discussion focused. Just three to five points. Anything more than that is considered secondary. And secondary points are eliminated or deferred.

Those three to five points are thought about, debated, and acted upon. The meeting will not end until there's some change that will happen and until the team agrees to do something about it. Throughout the week, we'll leave those points in the whiteboard so people will remember and act.

Eliminate or defer secondary priorities, know what your company should not be doing, and stop it. Focus saved Apple and made them the most valuable company in the world. There's no reason for you not to do the same.

4. Go Cold Turkey

Identify the distractions in your life. Then eliminate them completely.

There is no other way than to go cold turkey on things that take away your time. I never realized how much my time cost until I actually had the guts to put a price on it. I'm paid a little over \$500 per hour of my time in SEO consulting and public speaking. Knowing that, I deeply regretted all the hours I wasted playing computer games.

Don't let that happen to you. Your time is valuable.

Computer games did little to bring me to where I am today. It ate up a lot of my time and makes me hopelessly unproductive. It has always been like that—and I have categorized it as one

of the main distractions in my life.

Trimming it down doesn't work—I've tried it. There's only one way to go—and that's to kill it off completely.

Delete it. Throw it away.

I was hired for SEO consulting before—it was a completely strategy-based consulting work. I didn't need to do any hands-on legwork for the company. All I had to do was think, talk and send an analysis each month. I spent approximately 1 hour of my time per month doing this and got paid \$500 each month.

When I think about it, if I got paid as much per hour with all the hours I spent playing computer games, I would be a big-time millionaire today. It's crazy when you realize how much an hour of your time actually costs.

Identify the distractions in your life—whether it's major or minor. Do everything you can to size it down, or better yet, eliminate it completely.

Go cold turkey like I did.

Trust me, you'll get to your first million a lot faster without all that distracting baggage on your back.

Remember

01

Delegate

02

Embrace
Change

03

Focus

04

Go Cold
Turkey

CHAPTER 4

More About You

“You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.”

—DALE CARNEGIE

So now you know some things about me. But what about you? I want this book to be a tool which you can derive wisdom from. After all, learning from other people's experience is the best teacher. That's why the Bible is so good—because it's full of other people's experiences that we can learn from!

From here on, I will tell my story more to relate it to you than just for you to know more about me and what I've been through. You ready?

Okay, here we go.

CARRYING THE LOAD

Remember that time when I had all but 10,000 PHP in my bank account because of office concerns? Well, it was a time when I was completely devastated. “How am I going to pay my people?” I thought. “I’m doomed.”

I got down on my knees and prayed. I asked God “Lord, what now? You see where I am. You see my bank account and what’s left. Payday is coming soon. Please help me.” After that, I got up and resumed work. My shoulders slung low and my heart was heavy—but things have to go on.

I have to heave and push and move the company forward as best as I can. Through the heaviness I told myself, “The Lord will see me through. He started this company, He must have a plan. I won’t worry about it anymore.”

I kid you not, I felt like my heart was going to be torn apart. It’s the first time in my life that I faced having to take on a loan. You see, I didn’t grow up with the attitude of borrowing money. I almost never borrowed money from anyone—except, of course, my dad. And it would never be a big amount.

I hated borrowing money. Here’s why:

“The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender.” —Proverbs 22:7

I never wanted to be a slave. Don't get me wrong, I think there are some good situations when borrowing money is the wisest thing you can do. Rather, I want to be a financially free man. So I would never ever borrow unless it's extremely needed or if it would be financially sound.

At that moment, I felt like I extremely needed it.

Then a call came in. It was from an Australian non-profit organization. At the same time my classmate from high school emailed me about the same company. She mentioned that they were looking for SEO. As it happened, one of my people was already negotiating with them. So we went ahead and scheduled a meeting.

The company wanted to rank for their own brand—which is relatively easy to do. However, they have an acronym for a brand that other companies and organizations are also ranking for. “Not a problem,” I thought, “We can do this.” Seeing their office and their capability to pay, I pitched an unusually high amount—of course knowing that we will give them the best value for their money.

It was the biggest pitch I've ever made for a new client with a single website to work with. Within two weeks of negotiations and three simple meetings, they signed the contract and gave me their first check.

That check, I believe, is a saving investment from the Lord. It secured the future of SEO Hacker for years to come.

TAKING RISKS

My team didn't know what was happening in the background. They did not share my heavy heart and the risks I took during those times—and that's completely fine.

It wasn't their load to carry. It was mine.

God made me the main steward of SEO Hacker as a company.

As for you, you will also go through difficult times. Times that bring you down to your knees. Times that crumple you up. As an entrepreneur, it should be no surprise. We have to take risks, jump the job and career ship, and pilot an uncharted course to create business history.

When push comes to shove, it's your difficult and critical decisions that will make or break your company. Make the right critical decision and you're up for another bout. Make the wrong one, and you'll be on your way to one of the most devastating losses of your life.

I won't sugar coat it for you. Starting up a business can be likened to fighting a war. Don't expect things to be all flowers and fluff. It can get bloody real quick.

One wrong management decision and your blood pressure can shoot up the roof. And no one but you will know what's going on. Not your team, not your husband or wife, not even your parents.

It's just you and other direct business partners you may have.

When crunch time came for me, the first decision I made

is to go and humble myself to the Maker and Giver of all—God. Then I made the decision to carry on—keep doing what we’re doing and do it the best way we can. Then, when another opportunity came our way, I did my best to grab it and to grab it good—squeezing the income to be the best it can be so that SEO Hacker will live on to fight another day.

Going down on my knees is the single, most important strategy in my management playbook.

I hope you’ll consider it to be yours as well.

LOSING BIG TO WIN BIG

Risk is perhaps one of the most used terms in business.

“You have to take risks when you want to do business.” That’s what my dad told me. And it’s true. Taking risks is one of the things that—as Seth Godin so wonderfully put it—make the ‘Dip’. It’s why 90% of start-ups fail. It’s why most people quit before they make it. It’s why most people stay in their comfort zone as employees.

While I don’t think that everyone should be an entrepreneur (because God wired each one of us differently), I think that it’s pretty darn awesome to be on this side of the fence.

I started SEO Hacker by risking my career as an IT professional. While it’s true that I practiced IT for just five short months, I still traded that sweet, secure monthly income for the unknown.

THE THINGS I LOVE

I always considered myself someone who's fond of writing. Put me in a box, give me a pen and paper, and I would write the entire day. It's simply a passion of mine to put my ideas down into paper—a step closer to turning them to a reality.

As I started SEO Hacker, I realized I was very fond of marketing. And I did have a knack specifically for online marketing. I would try to learn the ropes of email marketing, analytics, social media, SEO, CRO, and the list goes on.

Somewhere along the way, I also realized that I was also fond of helpful immediate solutions—which involves code. I would learn PHP, Javascript, CSS, MySQL, and all sorts of coding language, albeit shallowly so.

What I didn't have was a natural love for operations management, accounting, legal, administrative work, and all things related to that.

I had to learn to love these things.

ROLLING THE DICE

So I took a risk. A sort of gamble.

I approached a good friend who I knew was a very able project manager. We went under negotiations of what it would take to get him in the team and lead the management roles. The stakes were high for me to be able to get him in.

After much prayer and counting the cost, I rolled the dice.

I hired him as managing director. Up to today, he is the most expensive person I've ever hired.

And then the tragedy came.

There was one big client that we had—a TV network behemoth here in the Philippines—who did not pay us for 10 months after our contract ended.

I lost big and the account beat our cash flow to a pulp. It was a very painful season in my life.

It was even more painful because my managing director's salary would sometimes be bigger than mine. That's because my 'salary' is what's actually left of our revenue after all the expenses have been taken out. And I thought to myself, "That's fine. So long as I can take the company forward and execute my vision, we're going to grow."

And man, did we grow!

FORGETTING THE 20%

I focused on all the things I love. My strengths. My passion. I worked on it ferociously without much burnout. I realized that if you're working on something you're not passionate about, you spend 80% of your energy getting through 20% of the task.

So if you needed to finish that task, it would essentially take 400% of your energy—and much, much more of your time.



However if you just focus on the things you love, you can finish 80% with just a measly 20% energy. The efficiency of finishing a task you love is incomparable to finishing the task you don't love.

Tasks you love ignite your passion. Passion is the great energy giver that fuels you to do more than usual.

So what I did was forget the 20% and left it to my managing director who had strengths in areas where I lacked passion.

I got to move—and I got to finish a whole lot of work with unbelievable efficiency—this time, fuelled by passion.

Without losing big by risking on hiring a managing director, I would never have won big and have taken SEO Hacker to where it is today.

SEO Hacker is now a company that's grossing more than \$25,000 in revenue on a monthly basis. I can honestly say that SEO Hacker has exceeded a lot of my expectations!

Of course, we're not really 'there' yet as most of our gross revenues are eaten up by expenses, new ventures and SEO Hacker's expansion and growth. The point of the matter is, oftentimes,

you need to lose big to win big.

I went through it. Chances are at some point, you will too.
Are you going to roll the dice or quit?

LATE PAYERS

Remember that TV network behemoth I was talking earlier about? Here's what happened.

We signed a contract with that company and we were happy with the contract value and with the work we've done for them. However, we were having problems with their payment practices. They were simply not paying up.

"That's alright, perhaps in a few weeks they'll pay up." I thought.

Then a few weeks passed by. "Perhaps they'll pay up next month." I kept sending the updated billing statement.

Then a few months passed by. "This is getting serious." So I huddled up with my team. One of my teammates pushed me to send a demand letter. As a peaceable person, I resorted not to do that. However, the contract has lapsed and they have yet to pay anything. They were even asking me for a renewal.

"We can't do business this way. I'm sorry." I opted not to renew the contract.

After 10 months of waiting, I drafted a demand letter and had a lawyer check it. I was ready to go to court.

After the demand letter was verified and approved, I went to the television company's head office and gave it to them.

In a matter of weeks, they paid the entire contract value.

Had I not drafted and given the contract, SEO Hacker would've gone through another grueling rut.

This is one of those times that I was discouraged to be in the business world. It was just our second year in operation as a company when we sent out that demand letter.

It never crossed my mind that I would have to take legal action against another company soon after just starting up. Then again, perhaps the Lord wanted me to go through this so I'll be able to toughen up and play in the big league.

Perhaps it's part of my growth as a businessman.

LAYING DOWN PRINCIPLES

One of the best and most valuable traits of an individual is his/her principles in life. Principles make life more efficient. When you have principles in place, you immediately have an answer for life's circumstances. For example: I have a principle against smoking. So when someone asks me if I want to have a smoke, I have a simple, immediate answer: 'No'.

No extra thinking done. No extra brain power used. And I never ever feel bad about turning down a cigarette even from a good friend.

Someone who has no principles to put his feet on will fall for any and every distraction in life: drugs, laziness, computer games, sexual immorality, gambling, and other fleshly vices available in our world today.

A person who has no principles in place is easily swayed. The result? Most of that person's life will go to waste.

I don't think I can ever justify the weight of how principles helped me in starting up SEO Hacker. I've said 'No' to a million things before I ended up where I am today. I said no to vacations, to travelling, to drinking out with friends, to concerts, to events, to gimmicks, and yes, even to computer games.

If you're tempted to imagine my life during those days, I want you to know that it was not at all boring—because I love what I did! Oh, and I did say yes to a lot of other fun stuff along the way—dates with my girlfriend, bonding with my siblings, movie dates with my family, working and finishing tasks for SEO Hacker, and other things that are important and dear to me.

Set your principles now. You will live a more efficient, focused, and value-driven life for years to come.

RESILIENCE, PRICING, AND PRINCIPLES

1) Toughen Up

Not everyone will know what you're going through and not everyone will play nice. Sometimes clients will stretch their payment terms as best as they can. In my case, a client paid 10 months late. It hit SEO Hacker hard. It meant that I had to take no salary for a very long time!

Every peso went straight to my people and to my business expenses. If I didn't send a demand letter, I may have lost SEO Hacker and we wouldn't be here today.

Once you step in as an entrepreneur, you have to realize that clients, whether big or small will ask for discounts, freebies, and whatever they can squeeze out of you. Most start-up business owners are weak-willed. I knew I was.

Don't let yourself be bullied into giving the cheapest price you can give. If you know what you're selling and you know it's not cheap then charge for what's right and what's profitable for your business.

Otherwise, it will turn into a vicious cycle. You don't want clients to spread word of mouth about you because you're cheap—that will mean more cheap business.

You want clients to spread word about your quality of service, your quality of product, your skill, your prowess, and other things that are profitable to you.

It starts with charging right for your product and making sure you get the value across to the prospective client before you sign a contract or close a deal.

2) Set your Principles Early

And stick to them. Principles cannot be negotiated with. Principles save you approximately 75% of time in making decisions. A person who has little to no principle in place in his life will find that 75% of the time he spends to make decisions is spent in indecision.

In short, a person who has little to no principles in place wastes 75% more time than a person who has them.

Knowing which things in life are negotiable and which ones are non-negotiable can be the difference between success and failure.

How do you know which principles are good and which ones will work for you?

Learn them in books, ask them from mentors, look at how the people you consider as your inspiration is living his life.

From the way a person lives, you can already tell what principles they have in place.

Remember

01

Toughen Up

02

**Set your Principles
Early**

CHAPTER 5

Making Connections

“There are exceptional people out there who are capable of starting epidemics. All you have to do is find them.”

—MALCOLM GLADWELL

I started SEO Hacker with an extremely small knowledge about internet marketing. I had no contacts in the business. I had no mentors. I had no funding. All I had with me was a little know-how and a lot of guts. I didn't even know if there were other SEO companies out there.

It was the year 2010 when I decided to make my mark in the world of SEO.

I connected with bloggers who inspired me. One of which was Liane Candelario. She's a blogger who, during that time, was creating buzz online at the extremely young age of 17.

I was in awe. I had to meet her—so I sent her a Tweet and we met up at Red Mango (a frozen yoghurt joint) in Trinoma. It was a very interesting exchange of thoughts. She cited more than a handful of bloggers who were making a lot of money in the online world—shamefully, I did not know any of them.

But it was a start. I wanted to keep in touch with Liane because she inspires me to be better in SEO and I wanted to learn from her advanced expertise in internet marketing.

Not long after that encounter, a random guy named Jason Acidre got in touch with me. He sent me this Tweet:



The fateful Tweet

That got my attention. So I tweeted him back. We got a conversation going. And soon, we were set to meet. Turns out he is the blogger of kaiserthesage.com—a growing blog on SEO and linkbuilding.

We decided to meet up.

The venue? Red Mango. But this time we met up in SM Megamall.

Liane was kind enough to join us. We exchanged words and ideas and sooner than later, I got Jason to do some off-page SEO work for me.

It was a time when Google wasn't too strict yet. A time when Google was still upgrading their algorithms to combat spam and other exploitative methods of unethical SEO practitioners.

So I worked with Jason for a while. However, he was around thirty kilometers away from me, and with the traffic here in the Philippines, that's already a very long commute. Plus, he does

not carry a mobile phone and that made it extremely hard for me to get reports and collaborate real-time with him.

This difficulty in reaching Jason made SEO Hacker's output for its clients a tad disappointing. And I couldn't bear disappointing. So we opted to part ways.

He would later co-found his own SEO company, *Xight Interactive*. And I, in turn, would continue to grow SEO Hacker

EVERGREEN DISCIPLINE

It's a wonder when you think that SEO Hacker started from a 2,000 PHP blog about God. It all rooted from there.

SEO has a lot to do with content. You see, a search engine deals with your website much like how a librarian will deal with a book. The more authoritative a book is, the more it will be recommended. With a website, the thicker your pages are, the more chances it will rank. After all, no one builds a website with sweat, knowledge, and hard work just to see it crash.

So it goes back to a very simple principle: writing. I cannot stress how important it is to keep writing. It's a discipline, science, and art rolled into one. The discipline part is having to write with a very specific time frame. In my case, I write every week—for four blogs at a time. That pushes me to write around four times a week. And I have to keep my pace because my readers are waiting for me to deliver.

The art behind writing is trying to hit that connection with the reader the moment he reads your headline. You have approximately two seconds in the internet to impress, intrigue or draw someone in with your headline or you lose them—probably forever—from reading your article. You could say that writing an effective headline is key to your blogging success.

The science behind it is testing which headline will win—and documenting each test so as to tweak the succeeding ones. You have the rest of your life to write. It makes sense to improve and improve and improve your writing starting from hook (which is the headline) to line (which is your body) to sinker (which is what we call your CTA or call-to-action).

When you want to be found online, writing is one of the main things you should be committed to doing.

WINNING FRIENDS

'If you so choose, even the unexpected setbacks can bring new and positive possibilities. If you so choose, you can find value and fulfillment in every circumstance.'

– Ralph Marston

My failures in college hurt my ego pretty darn bad. I never failed in high school. I never had to take summer classes. I never had to repeat a school year. Ever.

And yet, the moment I stepped in college, I failed in my very first term. What's worse is that I binged. "I already failed anyway, what does it matter if I fail again?"

It was one of the darkest times of my life.

It wasn't a surprise that I was going to graduate alongside the lower batch. My block mates were good people—but I couldn't relate well with them. They're the kind of people who love to go out, hang out, and have fun. I wasn't really the type. I'd rather be at home and play computer games. I know it sounds geeky, but that's just how I am.

In my course in college, if you didn't have a good group to do your thesis with, you will fail.

Guaranteed.

There's no such thing as a one man team. Someone has to do the documentation, someone has to go talk with the client and do the analysis and translate it into a system, someone has to code and design that system, and someone has to present it to the thesis panelists.

I went through three groups—failing thesis three times in each of those groups. I was losing all hope of ever graduating.

Until I joined my fourth group. It was the group.

I was assigned to be the analyst. I would go to the client, do an analysis of what they need and translate it to our programmers so they can translate it to code. Our job was to produce a system that is useful for the client.

I was the only upper batch in my group. And that's fine. This group was my only shot at graduation.

We complemented each other's strengths and weaknesses. But the coding requirements of our project extended beyond what my group mates could handle.

So we went ahead and sought help.

One of my group mates knew this guy named Richmond Ibasco. Turns out he was a programming freak. We decided to do sleepovers at his place—his dad was kind enough to accommodate us while working on our thesis.

I remember that at the same time, I had an overlapping problem with my last programming class, MOBICOM, which dealt with mobile Java programming. I was in a rut. I didn't know why my code wasn't working. I went over to Richmond and asked him for help.

All this time, I was no longer receiving allowance from my parents because I was doing really bad in my academics—and besides, I was long overdue for graduation. I had to look out for myself and figure out ways to buy my food.

Richmond agreed to help me out so I bunked in his place for a few days. Knowing I was staying in another person's place, I wanted to make myself useful and did not want to burden my hosts in any way. But there were times where I would come from school without having dinner. I never once asked him for food to eat but for some strange reason, he would always ask me if I had already eaten. Naturally, I'd say yes. Then he would ask "What

did you have?” Sometimes I’d laughingly ask him “Why do you care?” But every freaking time, he insists on asking.

Finally I would consent and tell him I had some Sky Flakes crackers—which cost a measly 18 pesos a pack and has nothing but bad carbs in it. It was enough to get me through the night though.

During that time I was thin. Perhaps I even looked a bit malnourished because all I had for food were Sky Flakes crackers.

Richmond would always be kind enough to go out, walk to the nearest Red Ribbon franchise, and treat me lunch or dinner there. I didn’t know why he did it since I seemed to be the kind of guy that had no future ahead of me. I had tons of failing marks in school as well as a destructive addiction to computer games.

Because of that, I realized that Richmond was a rare person. A real friend. Someone who didn’t expect anything in return for the good he has done in my life.

When I think through all the failures I’ve been through, this is the most important one. If I didn’t fail in college, I would never have met Richmond. And we wouldn’t be able to do the awesome projects that we’re doing today.

Failing in college wasn’t so bad after all.

INNOVATION

Considering that SEO Hacker is based in the Philippines and the entire company’s operations and financing was bootstrapped by a broke college failure, I’d say we’re doing pretty darn well.

However, working on client projects and marketing other companies' websites is just not what I want to do for life. It's great and it brings in the dough—for now. But being a tech start up means that what you're doing could easily change. New mobile phones come out each quarter, new innovations in the web roll out like hotcakes—new this, new that. It's crazy when you think about how fast the tech industry is changing.

Once you stop innovating, you're a sitting duck.

Sooner or later, you will be shot dead while you're comfortably swimming in your dirty green pond.

So what I did was I took the extra cash that SEO Hacker was making and I re-invested it. No, not on personal investments. I invested it in new projects that we would have full control on. I started with SEO Hacker School (<https://seo-hacker.org>)—and when that didn't work as fast as I'd hoped, I thought of new things to do. As I write this book, we're starting a new Software-as-a-Service company called Qeryz (you can check it out at <https://qeryz.com>). It's a simple customer survey for websites that is crazy easy to use.

I think that data-driven marketing and blog entries are what's really valued and shared today—across all industries. This tool enables you as a webmaster to be able to gather that data with ease and beauty—right inside your website. The data gathered can be used to create video marketing campaigns that your audience could relate with. It could also help you create content that answers your customers' most important and frequently

asked questions.

The data gathered can be used to pivot your products or services to other areas that you were blind-sided about because you were previously not hearing from your customers. The data can be used for so many things! And the best thing about this tool we're working on is that it's free!

I think that having your own product to sell is where the real money is. If SEO Hacker can do excellent SEO and help lots of businesses grow and earn millions online, why not do it for our own product? It makes a lot of sense, and that's where we're headed in the next few years.

Innovation is the only way for us to move forward.

PERSONAL GROWTH

If someone asked me what keeps me going in business, it's this: personal growth. Yes, SEO is my passion, yes I'm the owner, but if I dig deep and really look what keeps my fire burning, it's the growth. All the things I'm learning and experiencing are going to be personally mine—for life!

Personal growth can be developed in a lot of avenues. To keep it simple, I will share with you just two. And these are the major avenues I focus on for my own personal growth.

Book Worm

My favourite avenue is reading. I read everything from self-help books, blogs, industry news, biographies, and fantasy fiction.

Of course, I pick the books I want to read and learn from. I'm a slow reader—I finish a 300 page book in a span of 3–5 months. It depends on how much of the book I can apply in my life. The more applications I can relate with, the slower I usually finish the book.

My learning style from books is: read, reflect, adapt, and practice. When I read something that triggers an idea or a change I want to undertake, I immediately stop reading. I reflect on what I've read, write something about it, adapt it in one or two applicable events in my life, and then practice it consistently to form a habit.

For example: I read about the 'Curse of Charisma' in the book "Good to Great" by Jim Collins. My initial reaction was "This is exactly what I'm experiencing!" Then I went ahead and opened one of my blogs and wrote my reflection. Here's what I wrote:

"You're a really good salesman, I'll give you that."

Chris shook my hand as we were wrapping up our meeting.

He was trying to get SEO for his company. I was trying to pitch it to him at a good deal.

I walked out with a smile from that pitch.

Charisma can be such an ass-kisser.

However, there's another side to it that is considered a

course by Jim Collins in his book “Good to Great”

You see, Steve Jobs wasn’t really an engineer. He wasn’t really a programmer either. In fact, compared to his team, he knew very little.

He was a non-technical founder of Apple. He was also a super, duper, mega salesman.

A man who can inspire, push, and even hurt other people because he knew how to read them. He knew how to be admired. He knew how to... manipulate.

In all, Steve Jobs was a man who had charisma under his command. But there’s a downside to it. In order to be a manager, he had to KILL his charisma.

Taking it from Walter Isaacson’s biography, Steve Jobs was nothing short of an asshole when it came to managing people and making them produce.

He would shout. He would call other people’s work as “shit.” He would throw his temper when people are not producing well.

If that’s the case, how then can such a man so radically change the world in so short a time?

Because he has a very strong command of charisma.

He could easily make people do what he wants. He could easily pass on his vision to someone else. He could easily make people whisper, “Wow.”

And you know what?

Charisma is something I believe I have a good amount of. The thing is, I couldn't seem to find it in myself to manage people like Steve Jobs does.

I can't seem to shout. Can't seem to get angry. Can't seem to call some output as “shit.”

Because I think it's disrespectful.

I know, I know. Only a wuss is like that, right?

As I write this, I lead a team of almost 30 people and I can't even get myself to manage them right—because I'd be killing my charisma.

Perhaps I love my charisma too much. Perhaps I hold it too dear.

However I think it's time to take off the curse of charisma and start managing my team. Otherwise things might get worse and company policy might be completely disrespected.

I probably won't go so far as to disrespect people. There

has to be some other way.

But I think I should start putting my charisma on the line.

One of my mentors once told me: “Not everyone in your team will like you.”

I guess I could finally say he was right.

Charisma isn't such an ass-kisser after all.

There was an upcoming town hall meeting with me and my entire team that Monday so, with the curse of charisma in mind, I wrote my message to them and printed it out. During that meeting, I was able to practice going beyond my curse of charisma and implemented the changes I wanted to happen in my team. In effect, just by being aware of the curse of charisma, made me go beyond that.

Personal growth is of vital importance to me. It reminds me of Jesus' parable about talents.

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went

and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the

worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” —Matthew 25:14-30

We are given an initial set of talents. And you know what? We are called to cultivate them—to invest them in something that will make them grow. Keeping your talents dormant and stale is a sin—and a huge waste.

Easy Route

Another avenue of personal growth is taking on a mentor. This is arguably the easiest avenue. I told myself that I’m young and I don’t know it all—and it would be extremely arrogant and careless of me to think that I can make it on my own. So I prayed and asked God for a list of mentors who will be able to help me grow in the different aspects of my life.

Today, I have mentors who specialize at what they do and I can tap into their wisdom any time. My mentors help me with financial intelligence, public speaking prowess, book writing and publishing, process documentation, people management, and spiritual accountability.

It’s the highway to personal growth because mentors are rich with the wisdom and experience of their own victories and failures. Of course, make sure to take on a mentor who is good at teaching and instruction. You don’t want to have a mentor who has a difficult time relaying his wisdom to you—that will take up unnecessary time for both of you. Most importantly, choose

a mentor who has the same faith and principles in life as you do.

Doing otherwise will lead you to a broken and confusing path and you'll be worse off than when you started.

DRAFTING FOR MENTORS

You may be wondering how I asked my mentors to help me out. It's quite simple actually.

Remember the mentor who told me "Not everyone in your team will like you."?

The guy who taught me that is David Bonifacio. He is the Managing Director of New Leaf Ventures. You know how I got in touch with him? I sent him a message in Facebook.

"That's it Sean? A message in Facebook?"

Yeah. That's just about it. Don't believe me? Here's what I said in verbatim (it's the real screenshot!):



Sean Patrick Si

David

1/16, 1:50pm

Would it be alright if I ask for 1 hour of your time some time this month?

I would love to buy you lunch

I see him post some very smart things about management and entrepreneurship in Facebook about management and I thought "I'd love to spend an hour with this guy just so some of that stuff can rub off on me."

So I waited for his response which went:



David Bonifacio

Sure! No need to buy me lunch. Let's do Thursday next week.

1/16, 7:54pm

We agreed to meet dinner time instead at the Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf. He even saved me a few bucks because when I arrived at our meeting place, he was already having dinner. David is a strong influence to me in terms of managing my team. He has his own services company and his own team so we're pretty much on the same page on how our team is growing and the things we're doing to make sure our company grows right.

That short phrase that he left me with about some people in my team not liking me as a person or as a boss shed a lot of light.

I realized that if you aren't going to do that which will make you, at times disfavorable, then you are risking your entire company to drown and die. And that's a lot worse for you—you will be hated because your people will lose their jobs, their working environment, and ultimately, their future with your company.

That's an extremely important management lesson I kept close to heart even until today.

And that's just one simple lesson that I learned from one mentor.

It's not so difficult to draft mentors to help you grow. It can be something as easy as buying a potential mentor lunch or dinner. Though I would like to stress out a very important point once more: make sure that your potential mentor has similar sets of values and principles on the things you want to be mentored on.

If you want to be mentored on business and taxes, make sure that your mentor has the same values as you do. If you want to

be mentored on managing people, make sure your mentor has the same values as you have.

After completing your set of mentors, make the extra effort of reaching out to them at least once every other month. I have a total of six men in my life whom I consider to be my mentors for different aspects. For their help, I have done what I can to repay what they have taught me—such as building their websites and implementing SEO best practices in them.

These mentors have all helped me grow as a person. And in turn, I pass it on to my team. Ultimately, all of these things have contributed to the growth and development of the company.

BE INTENTIONAL IN YOUR GROWTH

People think that just by living this life, you grow. Physically, that only happens until you're 18 to 21 years old. In the emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and financial aspects of life, growth has to be intentional. You can't expect to grow in those areas just because you're living and breathing, and walking this Earth.

I personally read an approximate of 25 blogs per week to keep up my SEO and digital marketing knowledge. And that's on top of all the books I read too.

I'm very intentional with my personal growth and I push my people to do the same. In fact, it's in their daily things to do in the office. I allow my people to use office hours just to make

sure that they grow where they are. People who are driven to become better will find your challenge of personal growth to be helpful rather than just see it as more work to be done. If you have people who find personal growth as ‘more work’, you better think twice about keeping them in the team.

A tree never stops growing. Physically it may stay the same but on the inside, it’s still developing. Just like a tree—the moment you stop growing is the day you die.

My advice: Don’t keep a dead tree in the team.

CHAPTER 6

Hiring, Growing, and Developing the Dream Team

“A great dream with a bad team is nothing more than a nightmare.”

—JOHN C. MAXWELL

Hiring people is perhaps one of the most difficult and critical things in starting up a company. You don't simply hire people regardless of their skill-set, character, and so on—to relieve your team of pressure. That would be foolish. No, you hire the right people.

Why?

Because the right people are self-motivated, driven, and love working with the like-minded people. The right people hate working with the wrong people. You don't want to dilute your team with the wrong people.

This is perhaps one of the most perplexing questions I've ever asked myself when I was starting out. "How do I know if I'm hiring the right people?"

As our clients grew, so did our need for people to help us do the job. My hiring strategy started out as posts in Facebook. I had more than 2,500 friends there and they would refer people they knew to SEO Hacker. Which is completely fine—at least it came from a connection somewhere—until we've exhausted that strategy. And we didn't exhaust just my Facebook—we exhausted all my current team's Facebook connections.

So we got all the people we could from Facebook connections and referrals. There were some whom I had to lay off. There were some who just suddenly up and left and never came back. There were some who politely said their good-bye. In all, we've had a number of people come and go in our early years.

Of course, as the founder of the company and the main leader, it breaks my heart to see people leave—in whichever way. We spent time together, had fun, learned a lot, but now had to part ways. That's just how it is in business and career. You can't really stop people from leaving. But you don't have to wait until people tell you they're leaving until you do something.

So we finally consented to getting job ad packages from websites like Jobstreet—in hopes of getting the right people. We have hiring processes and strategies in place. But how do you know if the person is the right fit?

Three things: **Character, Commitment and Skill.**

Character is something you can never trade nor largely develop. It is something that has been mostly intact within a person

since the day they became conscious of their personality and environment. It's heavily difficult to affect character in terms of work ethics, camaraderie, integrity, and overall values. I place a heavy weight on a person's character. Someone who I think does not have the right character for the job will not make it to the team. That person may well just affect the team chemistry negatively.

Commitment deals with a person's drive and loyalty to the company. How far do you think will this person run for you when push comes to shove? How long will he or she stay and help build your company's dream and vision? Yes, long-term commitment is rewarded but it is first sought in the hiring process. I continually ask applicants "How do you see yourself with SEO Hacker 5 years from now?" I'll have a good idea of their level of commitment from their answer right there and then.

Skill is one of the last, but not the least attributes of a person I weigh in the hiring process. That's because skill can be taught. It can be shaped, affected and improved by processes, environment and tools. However, a person with little to no skill to start with has no place in SEO Hacker. We are a team that is looking to help us build a great, lasting company, not someone who will slow us down. We don't spoon feed anything in our team. In fact, we make sure that every new hire hits the ground running. With shoes, of course.

One of the most effective ways to ensure low churn rate in your team is to sell them a dream. A vision. Something that you know you're honestly headed to. Something that you're trying to attain even now—with little goals every day. I sell my people a dream. And not just any dream. A dream that will come true—and I myself will die trying to reach it.

One of the things I love to tell my people is that we're going to have our own campus someday. A place where we'll have our own sports complex, our own dormitory, research and development lab, support center, and so on and so forth. This is something that may be quite far from where we are today—but it is something that I'm definitely shooting for as the owner and founder. And since we're growing, it's looking truer and truer each day.

One step at a time.

GROWTH, NOT LUXURY

Cultivating growth is making sure that you have the right tools, environment, and people for growth to happen. You see, for a plant to grow it requires certain things: good fertilized soil, water that contains natural nutrients, and the sun. Without these things, the plant will never grow—it will simply wither and die.

Just like how a plant requires certain things for it to grow, your team requires certain things as well. In my team, these things come in the form of an air conditioned office to work in, their own space, smart and hardworking teammates, a leader who

leads from the front, their own personal computer or laptop, good, consistent internet, and so on and so forth.

Of course, this is my opinion—and it is working well thus far. Aside from the office and tools, they need time—and not too much work so that they have time to read, discuss, write and apply what they're learning. My team has all these.

However things can get out of hand real quick. Just like how my team wanted the office to have a maintenance staff to help clean it—and I consented. Yeah, maintenance staff sounds awesome and we can always tell ourselves that it saves time and such but is it really necessary?

Not really. In fact, in our team history, it caused more harm than good. We would debate what the maintenance staff's responsibilities extended to, and whether the company would partially or completely subsidize her salary. Just like how it would be nice if the plant had the wind to blow at it from time to time—but is the wind necessary for the plant's growth? No. It's a luxury. The problem with luxury is that we often grow accustomed to it. When in fact, it shouldn't be the case.

Make sure you have an environment that cultivates growth, not luxuries.

SHAPING THE COMPANY CULTURE

I've been hearing a lot about company culture even before I started. I loved the idea. I saw the culture when I worked for

my dad, I saw the culture in my OJT, I saw the culture when I went into HP. In all, they were extremely different cultures. I was excited about the idea of trying to create my own company's culture—naturally, it would stem from my DNA as the founder.

I believe there are four things that shape a company's culture.

Value, vision, the team, and goals.

Value is what you instill in the team in terms of what's principally important to them as a person. In SEO Hacker, we instill Christian values such as integrity, honesty, accountability, discipline, trust, and so on. To give you a clearer picture, here is the actual SEO Hacker company values. We call it the SEO Hacker creed which has the acronym of **RIBEE**:

R ESPECT FOR WORK

This embodies punctuality, a drive that requires no supervision, and the courage to confront indiscipline in yourself and in your teammates—all in one. When you respect your work, you will honor it and do your best to perform excellently.

I NTEGRITY

Know that God is watching everything you do at work. "*Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.*" —*Ephesians 6:7 (NLT)*

This is counter-intuitive with all the social media posts about

work and passion, and leaving your job if you don't feel good doing it.

However, there is deep wisdom in that verse. When you work for the Lord, you do your best, you keep your character in check, and you do the right thing.

Always.

B EYOND TECHNOLOGY

We know technology is great BUT then there's the fact that everyone has access to it. Don't think technology gives you an edge. It doesn't.

Hard work does.

So go beyond the temptation to be lazy because of technology and work your ass off to be valuable.

Technology is common. Hard work is rare.

E MPATHY

Always put yourself in the client's shoes. Is the article you are about to publish going to be appreciated by the client? Is the design you've just let out going to be admired?

Put yourself in your teammate's shoes—do they appreciate you taking a leave with the heavy workload at hand?

Or put yourself in the management's shoes—are you going to appreciate it when the management is not confronted with issues in the team and we talk about it amongst ourselves?

Without empathy, our team will be cold—all brains, no heart.

E XPERIMENTATION

Innovation may be too a daunting term. You don't have to 'create something new'. Learning by experimentation is enough.

Using whatever theoretical lessons you learned and applying it hands on—whether you succeed or not, whether you break your website or not, we appreciate that. And above all, you get to keep what you learned.

For a lifetime.

RIBEE helps to dictate how the SEO Hacker team should act and react under any circumstance. It also helps dictate the team's moral efficiency by giving them a default response when it comes to laziness, procrastination, doing personal things on company hours, and other things that are not consistent with our values.

Vision – The problem with vision is not the vision itself. It's how we cast it to our team. If you keep on casting the destination, your people will miss the twists and turns along the road. I figured out that the right way of casting vision is to cast the vision in light of the tasks they have at hand.

Here's SEO Hacker's Vision statement: *To be the best SEO and Internet Marketing Services Company in the Philippines and other English-speaking Asian countries.*

You don't go driving towards Baguio with your eyes on the top of the mountain. That's dangerous. You see the huge mountain landscape of Baguio from afar, you drive towards Baguio, but

you fix your eyes on the road. Whatever the next turn brings you, that's where your eyes and mind should be—even if you already know where you're headed. Vision gives people hope, direction and a 'big picture perspective'. This is very important because it helps the whole team know that you are going somewhere—and you're going to get there soon.

The team drives the company culture. It's common sense that the team chemistry will change minutely or adversely whenever there's a new hire or there's someone leaving. Primarily, the team consisted of me, Vince, Rob, Kevin, and Austin. Five guys who had a very relaxed and flexible set-up. Work from home was an option. We practically had unlimited vacation leaves, sick leaves, and emergency leaves. And we had little work to worry about. Life was easy. And so the company culture we started with was very relaxed and slow paced.

Today, the team consists of over 20 people and we are still rapidly growing. The clients are piling up fast. So everything's pretty much agile. We need this and that and we need it fast. People need to keep up. The culture, as we knew it when we were starting out, has drastically changed. Work from home was minimized, vacation leaves, sick leaves, and emergency leaves are limited, and the overall current set-up is much tighter in the sense that we have weekly meetings to keep each other updated and on track.

In all, the team has influenced (and will continue to influence)

our culture like no other. However it's dangerous to think that the team is the culture. It's not. The team embodies the company culture. But ultimately, company culture is the combination of the things you make it out to be. It often starts with the founder and the principles you lay in place.

Lastly, **goals** help shape company culture because of its next-step nature. The goals I'm talking about is not the big, colossal goals of your company—that's most probably your vision, which we discussed earlier. I'm talking about the little, minute goals you have. Take your marketing team for example, one of the goals you may have is to have an event by this year or to finish this number of blog entries in three months. It really depends on what little steps you have outlined in order for you to meet your vision someday.

One of the goals we have as a company is to organize a yearly event for SEO specialists all over the Philippines to come and learn and connect. We were finally able to achieve this on June 21, 2014. We entitled the event *SEO Summit 2014* and we made its debut a blast with the top Filipino SEO personalities—Benj Arriola and Jason Acidre. It's always been one of my goals as SEO Hacker's marketing guy. The event, as far as my company and I are concerned, is a huge success. All by God's great grace. You could check out the event coverage in our website (<http://seo-hacker.com/happened-seo-summit-2014/>). *SEO Summit* has since turned out to be a regular annual event.

Little goals like these affect the company culture by letting everyone see the next corner on the way to the big vision. It keeps the company going. It gives everyone momentum. It fuels your vision in the subtlest but most effective way.

DEVELOPING THE TEAM

Here I was, CEO of a company with a team that I didn't know how to lead. Everything I knew about leadership mainly stemmed from the books of John Maxwell and Dale Carnegie. I knew that there will come a time when the team will grow bigger and I will need leaders to rise up from within to help me lead a bigger team. While there are natural leaders in my team who can pick up my leadership style just by observing how I am with the team, there are others who cannot.

I found out that developing leaders has to be intentional. You can't simply expect people to become leaders just by having them watch you lead. While it is a great thing to model leadership, I learned that there are some aspects in leadership development where intentional mentoring is a must.

The first thing I do to be able to mentor and develop someone is to gain that person's trust. And the best way to do that is by modeling discipline and hard work. If your team can see that you work harder than anyone else in the team, they will begin to respect you. There is nothing better for your people than to see you leading from the frontline. You see, leaders who lead from

behind are the types to issue commands, and whip their team to push forward, all while sitting comfortably by the sidelines and raking in the profits. That's not much of a leader. When push comes to shove, people will give their lives for leaders who lead from the frontline.

A leader who leads from the frontline is a leader who is willing to get his hands dirty. I personally still write at the SEO Hacker blog, I read the latest industry news, I develop and code for my own website and for client websites, I push myself to grow and share to the team what I'm reading, I still personally meet clients, take calls, close deals, all while developing and managing the team.

When your people respect you, trust comes naturally—consequently, it's easier for them to open up to you, and receive your instruction and leadership. They also develop a desire to learn from you as they follow you. When this happens, the next step is to identify your potential leaders.

It shouldn't be the case that when someone has spent more years in a company, he/she is naturally the next best leader. I refuse to accept that as the norm. Leaders need to have more than just years spent in a company. Leaders need to have skill, discipline, commitment, influence, knowledge, tact, principles, and time management among other things.

I believe the highest form of leadership depends on a person's spiritual discipline and faith. When I'm able to identify a potential leader through these things, I make sure to spend one-on-one

time with them. I get to know what makes them tick, what they're passionate about, how they're doing at home and what they think the company will be in the near future. These things help me align with who they are as a person. As John Maxwell so truthfully put it "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." A potential leader will only let himself be holistically developed when he knows that you care for him as a person and not simply as a colleague.

After spending personal time with them, I make sure to cast the vision to them—vision for what the company would become someday and where they would fit in. Vision continually leaks until it dries up—so I regularly cast this vision whenever I can and I make sure I do all the little things to keep momentum. A vision for the company shouldn't be kept stale. As a leader, it's your responsibility to make all the right decisions and do all that it takes to steer the company towards that vision. When a potential leader begins to embrace that vision, then I ask that person to push forward with me.

My style of pushing a person to leadership is giving him/her a way to grow personally. Often times, it's through reading and then writing a blog entry on what they learned. Everyone in my team is given a blog—where they can write out their thoughts, design the template, learn a little code here and there, and ultimately be proud of their work. I grew in my craft significantly because of my first blog: "God and You"—so I know that by giving each of my team members their own blog, and asking them to cultivate

it, it's the best way they can grow too.

Of course, this comes with deadlines and proper monitoring. My team is asked to blog at least once a week (I personally blog approximately four times a week in different blogs). I would read their blog entries and see how much they're growing. This also cultivates camaraderie as they help each other out in designing, editing, and commenting on each other's blog entry. Pushing people to grow can be tough—and they may not like you for it. But someday, after the heave and ho has been done, they'll look back and realize that you've made them a better person.

And that's enough thanks for me.

BURNING OUT

There is a universal, absolute truth in our lives that we cannot change. And that is: we all have 24 hours in a day—no more, no less. You will not have a second more that I don't have. We are all equal when it comes to time.

The difference, therefore, lies in how we use it.

At the SEO Hacker office, people used to have unlimited free time. They could take a break whenever they want, make noise whenever they want, go to lunch and come back whenever they want—there is no accountability with time, and no accountability on when they'll be back on their desk.

None whatsoever. Because of that, work time was being used up for other things. Maybe because we're all still in our twenties,

we love to mingle and talk and laugh.

So what my team does to catch up is through overtime at the office or at home.

Instead of working hours being working hours, it became fun hours. And when everyone has left and gone home, those who have work to finish will stay and start to do real work.

Of course, this is not true for everyone but it has been a prevalent culture with my team.

So we made some changes.

We implemented time management through accountability by using software tools.

Two of those tools are Skype and Hubstaff which I will be discussing further in *Chapter 7: Remote Work*.

To make the long story short, the software tools we implemented and the rules we created around them managed our time and accountability in ways that are leagues away from what we had. People in the team would know the time-in and time-out of other team members transparently, know the breaks anyone in the team would take and how long it would go for, know the activity of anyone in the team in any specific working hour.

The team, in fact, became extremely accountable for the work we were all doing.

Of course, this did not come without any resistance. I was already expecting myself to be frowned upon with these changes. However, the numbers speak clearly.

Things weren't going well when accountability was shrugged

off. So we tested this new approach. As expected, our productivity skyrocketed as soon as we implemented it.

The best thing that can come out of all the changes that need to be done is not really the output—it's the discipline. The real problem is: our 'A' players are burning their asses off because they unconsciously waste time bonding with others in our team.

Then at the end of the day, they'll stress themselves out catching up with their quota and other work requirements.

It's simply a recipe for burnout.

| | URGENT | NOT URGENT |
|----------------------|---|--|
| IMPORTANT | <p>Necessity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crises • Pressing problems • Emergency meetings • Last minute changes • Deadline projects | <p>Extraordinary Productivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation & Planning • Prevention • Proactive effort • High-impact goals |
| NOT IMPORTANT | <p>Distraction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needless interruptions • Most emails • Irrelevant meetings | <p>Waste</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivial work • Busy work • Avoidance activities • Internet, TV |

Another thing that needs to be checked to prevent burnout is task management.

Tasks must be prioritized. I think an hour a day to do this will make a person at least 50% more efficient.

Knowing which tasks you **NEED** to do and do **NOW** should be on top of the list. List it down on a piece of paper that's always in front of you. Then list other tasks that are less urgent and less important in decreasing order. It's amazing what this can do to save time—and thus, save you the stress.

In any case, I think burnout in a small start-up like ours should be actively prevented.

People with good time and task management skills in your team will turn out to be your best, most consistent players.

Say goodbye to burnout.

TURNING OFF HERO MODE

I've had encounters in managing the SEO Hacker team wherein someone would suddenly turn on what I'd like to call 'Hero Mode'. That person would just burn hours working through the night, foregoing sleep and rest and just force his way into doing what needs to be done.

You may be wondering, "Well that's a good thing isn't it?"

Hell no.

When someone turns on "Hero Mode" he's burning more than just his physical strength, endurance, creativity and brain cells, he's burning his will and his soul. Just like an airplane flying on empty will crash and burn, your people who try to wing it on 'Hero Mode' will sooner than later crash and burn out.

Yeah it feels so damn good when you're the hero. I know

because I've been there. It feels like you're flying—like everyone's cheering you on. Shouting "You can do it Sean! Save us! Save our team!"

It may feel that way but the reality of it all is that you're running on less than 30% of your creativity, focus, willpower, and discipline. In short, you're being paid 70% more than what you are delivering.

And the worst thing about Hero Mode is it sticks.

You think that you've flown miles and miles and you deserve recognition and praise. You think your name and face should be plastered on the walls of the office when the truth is, you haven't gone that far.

In fact, it would've been better for you to juice up with a good night's sleep and use 100% of your creativity for work! Chances are, when you're running full steam, you need only 10% of your time to create a smart way to finish the task.

Apart from losing most of your professional assets as you burn your body out in hero mode, you become stubborn, irate, and demoralized. You develop attitudes that are going to negatively affect the rest of the team.

So the next time you think of putting on that cape and mask and head down the bat cave, remember that you're not going to impress anyone.

In fact, it may just come back to bite you in the ass.

LEAD FROM THE FRONTLINE

Lots of movies, TV shows and series portray the boss as someone who calls the shots—while bumming his ass around in the office. In truth, majority of real-world ‘bosses’ are people who carry the load. They are the one who takes most of the risks. They are the guys accountable for most of the things happening in the organizations that they run.

The sad thing about this is that our culture and generation has caught up with the idea that a boss leads from behind. He’s the guy in the desk barking orders at people who are pulling the weight of the company. He’s the guy everyone should gossip and slander about. He’s the guy who’s done nothing but push his weight around his poor, poor employees.

Don’t bite into that thinking. Take off that picture of a boss from your head and take on the image of a leader. Someone who is in front pulling most of the weight of the company. Someone who doesn’t expect from his team that which he does not expect from himself.

When I was starting out I told myself I would never be a boss who barks orders from behind. I would lead from the front. And that’s exactly what I try to stick to everyday.

I blog and read more than my team. I go out to the field to win clients and close deals. I edit articles in the SEO Hacker blog myself. I publish them. I connect with other thought leaders. I manage changes in the team and ensure that growth is

prioritized. I do all sorts of things to show my team that what I expect from them is not unreasonable because I myself practice what I preach.

There is nothing better for a team player than to see the leader himself play his heart out for the team.

CHAPTER 7

Managing the Manager

“Bad decisions made with good intentions,
are still bad decisions.”

—JIM COLLINS



Me during my elementary years

I have always loved and embraced leadership. When I was younger, pastor Dennis Sy, a good friend and mentor of mine once looked me in the eye and told me “Sean, you are a leader.”

Few, yet life-changing words. You see from elementary to high school, I’ve always been the bullied, weird, fat nerd who was at the bottom of everyone’s friend list.

I’ve gone through all the harsh things a young man could possibly go through. I’ve been called “pig”, “weird”, “yucky”, “gay”, “hypocrite”, “gross”, “moron”, and all sorts of undesirable adjectives you could imagine. And this was when I was from grade 3 all the way until I graduated high school.

The sad thing about my growing up years is that the school I studied in only had two sections—A and B—with around 25–30 students each. We were shuffled in Kindergarten—and never again. So the classmates I had from grade 1 were the classmates I had until I graduated high school. And when you're on the bad end of bullying, you're on the bad end all the way until you finish.

Sucks, right?

Because of this, I grew up extremely insecure. I craved to be accepted, embraced, and ultimately followed by people. And that's exactly what happened in college. No one knew who I was so I had a fresh start. I was given a handful of leadership roles in some of our projects.

I've always wanted to be the leader but never the manager.

I hate managing people. And that's because management pushes you to deal with tasks. Which pushes you to push people. This can consequently make you look bad with the people you lead. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, changes must happen to move a company forward. But no one wants to be the one to implement those changes. The natural order of things is when it comes to change is simple: people don't like it.

Leadership deals with having to carry the load, setting an example, and mentoring and replicating yourself in others. It's identifying potential and cultivating it. It is something very different from management.

Management is knowing when and who to hire, fire, and

promote. It's knowing how to make your people more efficient. It's measuring numbers. It's making changes so that results are sure to be delivered. Everybody loves a leader. Few people learn to love a manager.

NO GLAMOR

While it's true that I do talks and seminars for SEO, digital marketing, motivational and leadership topics, I find my job to have no real glamor because of the burden I have to carry on a daily basis. Don't get me wrong, by God's great grace, SEO Hacker has always been positive in terms of revenue since day 1. We technically never saw a month turn red. However, there's always that lingering thought of "What if a client won't renew?"

You see, our business deals a lot with client contracts. If we lose a contract, we lose big. So our main goal when we have on-boarded a client is to make sure the relationship lasts—for a very, very long time. Contract renewals are a high priority in our team—we would do anything in our power to make sure that contract renewals happen. But sometimes you just can't predict the future. There will be clients who will unexpectedly not renew, and you can't do anything about it.

So I would always go out and propose to new clients, try to close deals, channel efforts to other business models, and so on and so forth. All of which costs money, effort and time. Things that are getting scarcer and scarcer every day.

I won't lie to you, there is some glimmer of light in what I do. You see, being in the limelight as SEO Hacker's CEO has its pros and cons. The pros deal with being able to inspire the team, cast the vision effectively, market SEO Hacker easily, grab ex-deals with Software as a service (SaaS) tools that will help us become more efficient, and more.

The cons deal a lot with my heart. Is it going to my head? Am I throwing my weight around? Do I still check what I'm about to post in Facebook or tweet in Twitter? Am I making the wisest choice in light of the current situation of the company?

Glory can very easily get into someone's head and blur the critical decisions that a person has to make. I have to constantly remind myself each day that SEO Hacker is the Lord's and I'm merely a steward of this great blessing. I'm always grateful and content where I am. I have it much, much better than most people—and I have nothing to complain about. I'm extremely happy with my life.

Glamor isn't something I'm concerned with.

What I'm really concerned with is my heart and my effort in leading, managing, and growing the SEO Hacker team.

COMPANY SURVEY

I once asked my team to take an anonymous survey because I very much hope to improve my leadership and management skills and I needed to know where I stood with the team. I wasn't expecting a good or bad answer. Just honest.

Here are some of the questions I asked:

- › Is there anything you would like me to improve as your leader?
- › Is there anything you'd want me to keep doing that I haven't done lately?
- › Is there anything I haven't done that you think I should do?
- › On a scale of 1–10, how well have I been treating you as my teammate?
- › On a scale of 1–10, how am I doing as your leader?

Needless to say, the answers were a bittersweet mix of stinging and soothing. Some of the answers felt like a sharp stab in the gut. At first, I couldn't believe the things that were said about me. These were the thoughts running through my mind: “Is this how they see it?”, “What the heck does this mean?”, “Where is the gratitude?”, and other things besides.

It was uncomfortable, painful, and downright frustrating. I had to cool off.

So I let the weekend pass before confronting the whole team with the answers—some of which I had no clue where to begin. I asked them what they meant, how I can improve, and what I need to do moving forward. It was a very productive time for us. After the meeting, some of the people in my team told me how much they appreciated having the chance to speak their mind about me. Looking back, the changes helped me become a better leader. I was able to apply most, if not all, of the things

they were concerned about.

Handing out company surveys may not be the best thing you can do if you know you can't handle criticism—especially criticism you may not understand. But it is extremely valuable for you to know your blindspots as a leader and manager. There are things that only your team can tell you because only they see it clearly from their perspective.

REFILLING THE EMOTIONAL TANK

As a business owner, team leader and overall manager, you reach a point when you think you have given your team your all. A nice, air conditioned, and comfortable working environment, their own work tables and chairs, a maintenance person in the office, a pantry, hot and cold water dispenser, even cooking gas and utensils. But it just isn't enough. They need benefits, they need this, they need that. Sometimes it makes you think about those dirty offices with a poorly maintained air conditioning unit that isn't nearly enough to cool the space, and you wonder what it's like for those poor employees who work there to come work for you.

“They would most probably be overjoyed.” I think to myself. Then again, human nature dictates that it's “always greener on the other side.”

There were more than enough times that I felt down and out in terms of my emotional tank. I felt empty. All I hear are

complaints on this and that, problems here and there—and not a word of thanks or appreciation for things you’ve done right.

It’s draining.

How I refill my emotional tank varies—sometimes I go out for a good walk or for a massage or even for good comfort food. I would, however, advise against the latter as I have gained undesired weight from it. My favourite way to fill up my emotional tank is to go and meet up with some of my business mentors and ask them what they did when they faced a similar problem. It makes me feel accompanied in my journey as an entrepreneur. It also helps me see things in a different light.

Refilling the emotional tank is important because if you’re running on empty, you’ll soon bust the engine and burn out. You don’t want that to happen. Regularly check your emotional tank to keep it filled up for the next bout.

REMOTE WORK

I’ve always loved the idea of a home-office. I lived in the SEO Hacker headquarters for eight months before I got married. It was one of the richest experiences of my journey as an entrepreneur. To see my team immediately after opening the doors of my bedroom gives an amazing feeling of comfort and efficiency.

I got married last February 2014. Things changed after that. I had to move north—an hour and a half away from my home-office. These days, I go to the SEO Hacker headquarters just

once every week. The rest of the week is spent on meetings and working from home to keep my efficiency on legwork the way it is.

It's an arrangement that most managers will not be comfortable with. As (I believe) the best management style in a growing company is still through a daily face-to-face exchange of ideas. Days went by and our output as a team dwindled. I became concerned about how to get the team back on its feet again.

Even before moving out, we've had a problem of accountability. Not everyone was really making an effort to be accountable with their work to their team leaders. I didn't know what was happening.

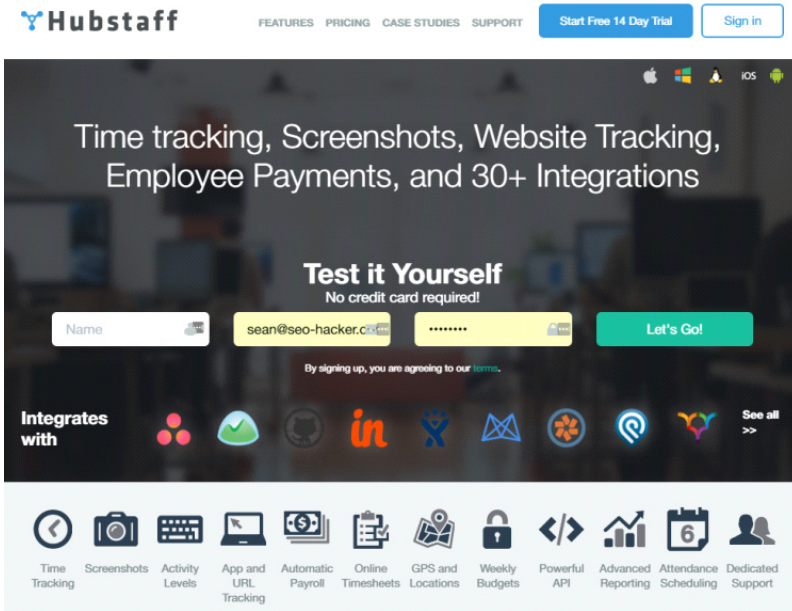
All I knew was that our numbers looked terrible. And I wasn't at all happy about it.

Here are some of the subtle, underlying problems:

1. People are habitually coming in late.
2. People in the team are not intentional in their personal growth.
3. Output, quota, and menial tasks are not respected by some people in the team.
4. There is a silent managerial problem: the leaders in the team are not voicing out and are not solving the quota and menial task problems—which could be easily solved.

So we made a few changes. Namely, daily reporting via Email, Intentional Blogging, Skype, and Hubstaff:

1. The daily reports have to be a summarized report that team leaders can immediately understand the moment we open them.
2. I have found blogging to be the best way to grow in our field. You blog about the things you love—causing you to grow personally. At the same time, you realize you need to learn about blogging and how to make your blog look beautiful—making you grow in your taste and technical skills. Then you realize you want people to read your stuff—making you grow in digital marketing in general. This goes without saying that the blogs of our team are all sponsored by SEO Hacker—domain name, hosting and WP set-up down to the paid themes.
3. There has to be log-in and log-out on Skype for coming in and out of the office, lunch breaks and our 15-minute breaks.
4. Hubstaff is pretty much a no-brainer. It's a clever software that tracks the hours of everyone in the team (including me!) and everyone who falls short of at least seven hours should put a note as to why. It also takes three random screenshots within 10 minutes—which I admittedly rarely check but it keeps us all on our feet.



Screenshot of *Hubstaff* from 2014

Implementing these four things have improved our team visibility and accountability almost overnight!

The result? Less stress for me to manage remotely, and naturally, more productivity and efficiency from each of us in the team. I immediately began to see the people in my team who were not producing as much as they should, as well as appreciate the ones who go the extra mile.

Great team players will appreciate the fact that their work is being seen—because they do great work. It's only the players who have something to hide who will naturally not appreciate a tool such as Hubstaff.

Even with these tools and new processes in place, remote work is still a challenge. These tools help out—a lot, but nothing can really replace face-to-face leadership and management so I still have to make sure that my ass is in the office at least once a week, doing meetings and casting the vision to the SEO Hacker team.

Even if you don't believe in working remotely, it's growing to be the more practical way to go. Not just in the Philippines where the traffic is extremely bad, but in the rest of the world too. It's just plain inefficient to spend 2 or more hours travelling to and from work, when you can do work the moment you get out of bed and start running and gunning it throughout the day. The talents you need to start up a business is getting more and more diversified. My SaaS arm is based in Manila, my internal team is in Parañaque and I'm located at Quezon City. Each of these places are at least an hour apart from each other because of the traffic. It's crazy just imagining how I would go to each location and spend an hour per transit just to get our heads together.

Remote work also demands a huge amount of discipline. It's so easy for me to just bunk off in bed or go out and do things that aren't work related like go to the mall or the beach—hey, no one's around to check on me and I could always say I own 100% of the company. But that's just not going to make it work! If you want to grow your business and you're faced with doing remote work, you have to have the discipline to pull it off.

Say no to things that are not related to work during working hours! That's one reason why I allowed all the rules of our Skype

log-ins and Hubstaff to apply to myself—because I want to lead from the frontlines and because I want to push myself to be disciplined while working remotely.

BLOCKING OFF INTERRUPTIONS

Whenever the phone is ringing, I answer. Regardless of what it's about. That's my job as the team's one and only sales person. I'm also the CEO, marketing manager, internal accountant, and financier among other things.

You could say that I have my 'modes'. Come Monday, I'm in my CEO mode. The entire Monday I'll be in the office (which is a more than 25km drive from my home) presiding meetings—unable to do any legwork. Tuesdays and Wednesdays are field days—I'm usually out learning from mentors, or meeting with clients, or giving a talk somewhere. Fridays are flexible—sometimes I have meetings on Fridays, otherwise I spend time doing legwork.

Thursday is my one and only day for full time legwork. Even then, I can't avoid the fact that my phone rings and I get distracted with urgent work.

Interruptions can be such a bummer.

Don't get me wrong, these calls are important and I do have to take them. But what about you? Sometimes the interruptions we experience are not important. A colleague wants to chat, or someone sends you a message in Facebook, or you get called to a meeting you think is not directly relevant to you, etc.

80% of interruptions at work
are considered **trivial**

Have you ever noticed that the most productive parts of your day is either early in the morning or late at night—when no one is able to interrupt what you’re doing? 2 PM is supposed to be the highlight of your working day—and yet it’s often the most unproductive.

The book *Rework* by Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson of Basecamp, formerly known as 37signals, puts interruptions in a very interesting light:

“Interruptions break your workday into a series of work moments. Forty-five minutes and then you have a call. Fifteen minutes and then you have lunch. An hour later, you have an afternoon meeting. Before you know it, it’s five o’clock, and you’ve only had a couple uninterrupted hours to get your work done. You can’t get meaningful things done when you’re constantly going start, stop, start, stop.”

Instead, you should get in the alone zone. Long stretches of alone time when you’re most productive. When you don’t have to mind-shift between various tasks, you get

a boatload done. (Ever notice how much work you get done on a plane since you're offline and there are zero outside distractions?)

Getting into that zone takes time and requires avoiding interruptions. It's like REM sleep: You don't just go directly into REM sleep. You got to sleep first then make your way to REM. Any interruptions force you to start over. And just as REM is when the real sleep magic happens, the alone zone is where the real productivity magic happens.”

I love how they likened productivity momentum and ‘magic’ to REM sleep. It's quite true. You unleash your most creative juices when you've been left alone to work your magic for a good, focused amount of time.

I know it's true with me.

So the next time you get a tap on your shoulders from a colleague or a random message from Facebook or nudge from Skype, have the discipline to say ‘no’. If necessary, shut out all notifications from any communication device you have during your ‘alone zone’.

Stop participating in unnecessary interruptions. Build that momentum to attain productivity REM.

Make magic happen.

TRIM IT DOWN

If you look at your business today, there's not a lot of places that you need to peek into in order for you to know where you're making money. There's just one main focus point in your business that's carrying the load of most of your revenues. Perhaps around 90%.

While it's good to innovate, diversify and create by-products in your business, keep in mind that your main cash cow is what you should always take care of. That's the one main thing you're sure you're doing right. Keep it close to your heart and keep it going. People are loving what you do!

There are some successful start-up businesses that push themselves on creating by-products and forget that there was this one thing they were doing that was working perfectly. The excitement of a new by-product just overtakes everything that they were doing right!

When I started SEO Hacker School, I made sure that the main thing SEO Hacker was doing right will keep on going. So I split the team to two—our SEO Services team and our SEO School team. I put a services director in charge to replace me on the day-to-day client conversations and team output monitoring. This enabled me to focus on a new by-product while making sure that the right thing we're doing is still going strong.

I wanted to do a lot of other things besides SEO School such as starting our own SaaS business. However, during the time

when SEO Hacker was still in critical stages of growth, I just couldn't start my SaaS idea without sacrificing my responsibilities in our SEO Services team and SEO School team. So I boxed the idea and set it aside until I was sure that things will keep going in SEO Hacker even without me. Sometimes delegating work that you own can make the growth of your company much faster.

CHAPTER 7 LESSONS

1. Discipline is Vital

I started SEO Hacker with a model company in mind—Google. They had a company culture and discipline that I want to replicate in my own business. Almost everyone I know wants to work at Google—at least for some time in their lives. Who doesn't? They have free food, free flowing coffee, free sleeping pods, free and flexible working hours, it's unbelievable!

The thing is they only hire the best of the best—self-motivated and disciplined people. People who you don't need to look out for. People who you know will work their heart out whether you push them or not. People who seem like they naturally have what it takes to bring your company forward even without you asking them.

We didn't have free food, free coffee, or free sleeping pods when SEO Hacker started out. What we did have is flexible working hours and work-from-home days. That worked for a good while. Then we got a little bit bigger and some people

were taking advantage of the perks. Since we don't generate lucrative amounts of revenue like Google, we immediately felt the implications of having unaccounted flexible hours and work-from-home days.

There are two things we could do to solve this problem. One, we could eliminate work-from-home and flexible hours altogether. Two, we could implement a system that will make sure that these will still be available for the entire team as perks but they will be accounted for even at home. As it turns out, it's not one or the other. It's first removing the perks altogether, then building and testing a system that will ensure that these perks could work in our company.

Case in point, without the right work discipline, we immediately felt that we were going to lose the business. Things weren't getting done well and on time and that's very important to us. Sometimes people don't report at all when they're working from home. It was really frustrating. To a start-up company, discipline is vital.

2. Remote Work can Work!

I never thought I could make it happen but remote work can really work. Sure, the bulk of the team is still in one place but our output is consistent in terms of quantity and quality. We're able to track what each other is up to and we're all accountable for our time. Sometimes business owners are hesitant about this because traditional management wisdom tells us that person to person interaction is best. Having everyone present in one place

means that there are few communication barriers, and people can get the point across faster.

That's true. However let's also consider the downsides of having to commute or drive all the way to the office—shedding off precious time, energy and money. It's an entirely different feeling to have to get up, go to your work station at home, login and report for work.

Think about it.

Remember

01

Discipline is Vital

02

**Remote Work
can Work!**

EPILOGUE

Starting up my own company at 22 was definitely a journey to behold. There were lots of unexpected events – and it made life all the more enjoyable and tough at the same time. I'm a 25-year-old man now. This book is a compilation of three years of experience starting up in one of the most exciting industries today.

People keep on telling me: “You're so young!”

You know what? I believe that we are all at individual, independent points in life that we can never return to again. Here I am in this point in life and I consider myself fortunate to have lived life the way I want to. Whether I live it again will no longer be in the equation – because it has already passed me by.

Age is relative. Life is a gift. Death is absolute. I can look at myself as young but that's not the whole truth. Youth is something you can never go back to. Hence, being young is a one way ticket. There is no reason to waste it.

I only get to live once. Better live it right.

I have nothing much more to say since I think I've already said so many things for you to think about. What I want to leave you with is that everything starts with the Lord. That is true for me and that will be true for you. Secondly, nothing happens without guts. You have to take risks. Roll the dice. The sooner you do so, the sooner you can win in life. Thirdly, the fundamental truths of hard work will always apply in any and every industry. People who know how to work hard sooner find themselves in a much better position than those who don't.

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The SEO Hacker Team – You are the backbone of my vision. I will always be grateful and thankful to the Lord that I have met each and every one of you. I'm thrilled that we are working together to bring SEO to new heights here in the Philippines and other English speaking countries.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sean Si is a serial entrepreneur who has founded four companies namely:

- › SEO Hacker (*seo-hacker.net*)
- › Qeryz (*qeryz.com*)
- › Sigil Digital Marketing (*sigilbrand.com*)
- › WorkPlays (*workplays.ph*)

All four companies were founded before Sean turned 29 years old.

Sean loves to start things up, implement systems to make things grow, and involve people in order to unleash their potential and passions in the work required. He has done consulting work for numerous companies and has often changed the way those businesses worked.

His prowess in systems, solutions, and leadership has piqued the attention of numerous business owners and executives who are working with him to improve their own teams and processes.

He is also a sought-after public speaker in the areas of entrepreneurship, sales, digital marketing, SEO, youth empowerment, lean startup, team building, leadership, email marketing, and business management and development. He has done numerous talks to various industries.

A business-minded, God-fearing, Bible-believing Filipino-Chinese, Sean is also a proud father to two beautiful boys, Leo and Sage, and a loving husband to his wife, Angelyn.

MESSAGE TO THE READER

THANK YOU, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you so much for reading my first book! I hope and pray that you learned valuable lessons that will help you accelerate towards your goals in building your first business and scaling it up.

Not one human being has ever perfected the art of walking the very first time they tried. I believe the same goes with writing a book. This work is far from perfect and you might have felt me wobble and fall at some point when you were reading this—but you read on.

And now you're here at the end of this book and you're reading my message to you.

The truth is, you're also going to go through much of the same wobbling that I experienced as I wrote and edited this book. You might stumble and fall—and you're going to feel bad at first. But those times of failure are subtle but vast opportunities for learning.

Each time a baby falls while trying to walk, our muscle memory and our subconscious—two extremely powerful assets of the human mind and body—works together to improve and achieve success.

Failure is necessary but success is elusive. Only when you learn from your failures with every cell of your body - can success be inevitable.

Keep on wobbling. Keep on falling.

Then walk.

One. Step. At. A. Time.

