



The Power of Three

by
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Author's Note: Originally, I wrote this booklet as a favour to a friend in the hairdressing industry. Its contents apply equally to managing and recruiting for any kind of small business or small group endeavour—including your own personal career—but I've left it in its original form because we are all familiar with a hairdressing salon as a typical example of a small enterprise. So you will find it easy to draw parallels to your own situation.

The most talented hairdresser I've ever met, winner of many national awards, is truly hopeless at running a salon. So she has consistently failed to translate her excellent expertise into lasting commercial success—does that sound familiar?

Based on reputation alone, she should be a millionaire many times over, instead of avoiding her accountant's phone calls. The respect she commands from other hairdressers is huge, and yet her salon usually self-combusts when it grows beyond a dozen staff, and then she has to rebuild all over again.

Why? Because this paragon of hairdressing refuses to face up to her limitations in business. She keeps on thinking she can cover it all.

Well, she can't. No one can.

Conversely, I know a mediocre hairdresser—he admits it himself—who successfully built his business up from one salon to a comfortably profitable chain of five, in just seven years. Last time we talked he was making plans to expand interstate.

This person knows what he's good at—systems—but what's more important, he also knows what he's not good at. So he hires other

people to call the shots in his weak areas. He knows it is impossible to cover it all, not even as a full-time manager.

Ability leads Awareness

We all tend to think that other people think like we do. You soon learn in life that people have some very strange ways of looking at things, but in the hurly burly of making a living we tend to forget this and expect others to see things as we do. When they don't, our first reaction is to wonder what the heck is wrong with them! Can't they see the obvious?

Well, the truth is that nothing is obvious all by itself. It may be obvious to you, but that doesn't mean it's going to be obvious to the next person. *Your awareness follows your ability.* If you are good at something then you easily see opportunities to exercise that ability. If you're not good at something, then you will be blind to when that ability is needed. And then it will be others who are astonished that *you* don't see the obvious.

It is not difficult to know what you are bad at or what you don't enjoy doing. But you will not realise the extent of your blindness in those areas. Why? Because you are blind to it, of course!

So you must have people involved in your salon or assisting you in your career who can cover your blind spots. People who have different strengths and weaknesses to you—so they see what you can't see. And it has to be part of their job to *tell* you what needs to be attended to when it does. *And* you have to listen.

Inescapable Bias

No matter how good you are at hairdressing, no matter how experienced you are at running hairdressing salons, your personality inevitably causes you to focus on certain aspects of your business and to neglect others. However, because these choices arise so naturally out of the type of person you are, you won't be fully aware of the favouritism you are practicing.

Certainly, you may have some idea of what your strengths and weaknesses are, but right now you are psychologically unaware of how badly you are avoiding the areas you are weak on. And this avoidance results in neglect.

We all do this, we all rationalize and justify why it is "more important" to focus on the parts of our business we are passionate about. And we all kid ourselves that we are doing what is necessary on the stuff we don't enjoy—when the truth is that your neglect is probably holding back the growth of your business or the advancement of your career far, far more than you realise.

This applies to you even if you are working in someone else's salon. Every person's career is a mini-business of their own. You will be pushing your career ahead in the ways that feel right and comfortable to you, and you won't realise how you are undermining your ambitions by avoiding what doesn't come easily to you.

Also, employers tend to hire people with similar personalities to their own. It is natural to prefer to work with people who share your outlook and preferences. So, as an employee, you may be reinforcing your boss's inefficiencies and they'd be reinforcing yours too.

Your Biggest Mistake

Focusing on what you are "bad at" may seem like a negative way for me to introduce this subject. However, it is more important than identifying what you are good at—*because you are doing that anyway, whether you know what it is or not!*

Instinctively, human beings will always bring their strengths to bear on the job at hand, if they can find a way to do so. You can't stop yourself from at least *trying* to do what you're good at, even when it's not normally part of the job.

The famous story of Tom Sawyer comes to mind: the last thing he wanted to do was paint his Aunt Polly's fence, but she said he had to. And so, being a natural born salesman, he figured out how to get all his friends to do the job for him ... and he convinced them to *pay him* for the privilege!

We all naturally push our career or business ahead by attempting to exercise our strengths. Nobody has to tell us to do that, we all do it unconsciously. Being in a small business setting, however, whether as employer or employee, chances are you will be trying to cover your weak areas as well. There simply aren't enough resources, or enough profit in the salon, for those roles to be delegated to others—or at least that's how it will seem to you.

Well, this is the BIGGEST mistake of the salon owner—or any other small business proprietor. It is also the most common mistake. It's the main reason why small business owners seldom become bigger business owners.

You have to know what to get *other* people to take care of, those who will actually do a better job of it than you. And you have to know how to find the right people to do those things, people who *aren't* like you. (If you're not good at *recruiting*—or even just *seeking help*—then you will definitely have to get someone to help you with that too, no matter how hard it is for you to ask for it!)

Wasted Learning

No doubt, if you are a salon owner, you have read a book or two about how to build your business. Maybe you've attended some courses on this, watched some business training videos, that sort of thing. At the least, you're applying the lessons you learned while working for other salon owners. And maybe from time to time you ask for advice from experienced people you respect.

Well, you may think you are running your salon just like your favourite boss did, or how your favourite book says to do it ... *but you are not*. You are doing the parts your mind unconsciously emphasizes in your memory—and you are overlooking or playing down the other bits that don't come as easily.

If you could go back and examine that original salon or favourite book again, you would find this to be true. You would see all sorts of things you could be doing that you have forgotten about.

We all see the world through different coloured glasses, causing some things to stand out more than others. *Learning in life is a natural process of "picking the good bits" out of what we see others doing that we find easy to emulate.* This applies whether we are learning from observation and experience or from second-hand knowledge out of videos, books and courses. We take on what we can use comfortably and we use it.

What we don't realise is how much we are *not* taking on. You may think you have learned something so thoroughly you'll "never forget it", but if the task doesn't feel congenial to your personality—if it doesn't mesh with your natural strengths—it won't be long before you have allowed it to drop out of the picture, even while kidding yourself that you've still got it covered.

The only time you continue doing something that doesn't come naturally to your personality is when you have a strict obligation to other people to do so. Either your boss requires it of you, or your employees do (like doing the payroll even though you hate book-work), or your partner or the government, etc. Even then, you will probably leave it till the last minute.

So it is not enough to have good business models or advice to work from! You also have to understand how to fit this information to your *own* personality—and to the other people you find who actually *want* to cover the parts you don't. Otherwise, most of that precious knowhow will be wasted, even if it is coming from geniuses.

Simple Model

Ok, so you need to get clear on what your weaknesses really are. And you have to know where each of your staff is naturally weak or strong too. Otherwise, you won't know what human resources you have right under your nose.

Even if you are "merely" an employee, the better you know this about yourself and your team-mates, the better you will be able to work with them and increase your value to your employer. Also,

the better you will be able to develop your own career *in the direction of your strengths*.

It may sound like this is going to get complicated, but it's not. No more difficult than it is for an infant to choose which peg fits in the hole—round, square or triangular.

Certainly, we *could* get very complicated in cataloging your strengths and weaknesses if we wanted to. Nowadays serious educators measure no less than eight different types of intelligence. Eight! The most popular online “strength-finding” service breaks work down into 34 possible strengths and weaknesses. And I can show you a list of more than 220 transferable skills (useful in a broad range of jobs) you might or might not possess. But we don't have to go into all of that.

No, we can keep this simple by starting at the *work* end of the equation rather than the *worker* end. What are the basic functions of a business that must not be neglected? No matter how small your salon is to begin with, even if it is just you and one chair, what *has* to be done to enable your enterprise to survive and grow?

The answer is three indispensable things: *production, marketing* and *finance*. In business, you can't get simpler than that. You've got to a) produce a valued product or service, b) get people wanting to buy that and c) manage costs & income to end up with a profit.

As your business grows, you can get more complex, like separating marketing into advertising and sales, or adding legal and personnel management and so on: but for a small business all of those details can be squeezed to fit under one or another of the three basic functions for the time being.

However, you can't squeeze it further than that. You can't substitute one of these basic activities for another. If your passion is product quality, and you think you can forget about marketing as a separate activity because the world will beat a path to your door ... well, think again. You're kidding yourself—probably because you personally find promotion or persuasion difficult or uncongenial.

Conversely, if you're good at inspiring people, you may forget to allow enough time to deliver real *quality*: so you'll have to keep on promoting to make up for lack of repeat business. As word gets round that you don't deliver what you promise, your promotional activities will generate less and less response.

Or you may be such a bean counter that you economise your business right into the ground, not spending money on the advertising, equipment, quality of staff (wages good enough to keep them) or staff training that your salon really needs. This mistake is not as common in the hairdressing industry as the first two, but it does happen. In fact, financial management is the area most often neglected by salon owners because they would rather be cutting or talking. Sound familiar?

So, do you get the idea? No matter what type of personality you have, it will lead you to prefer one of these business-basic activities over the other two. To prosper, however, you must ensure all three get enough attention, even though you won't feel like doing so personally.

Yes, you *should* build your business around your strengths—the things you are passionate about and know you can do better than the competition. But you can't focus on them *at the expense of other essentials*. To avoid that vital mistake, you first need to know how your personality —your natural inclination—is affecting your willingness and ability to perform these three non-negotiable duties.

You can't neglect them and still have a profitable business. And yet you can't and won't do all of them well. If you try to, you will end up feeling plastered all over the universe.

Your Natural Work Footprint

There are plenty of aptitude-testing, strength-finding or personality-profiling instruments around that will teach you more about yourself, but you still have to figure out how to harness those insights to help you do your current job better. In my experience, very few people have actually figured out how to improve their careers as a result of obtaining this information about themselves.

Forty years of helping people to develop and harness their abilities has taught me that you have to walk before you can run with this. You have to start with very broad brush strokes and then gradually narrow down to a tighter focus on doing what you're best at.

The intrinsic nature of these three fundamental business activities—*production, marketing* and *finance*—require quite different skill sets. So it is not difficult to see which you are suited to and which you are not. You don't need some fancy profile to tell you this, you can work it out for yourself.

Which do you do best? Which do you do worst? Which turns you on and which turns you off? Which do you find challenging and which do you find threatening? It may be obvious already.

You are the "peg" and these are the three "hole shapes". Which do you easily fit into, which *can* you fit into and which bends you out of shape? That is all you need to know at this stage—to figure out which essentials others will do better than you, thus freeing you up to give your business the best of you. As your salon grows and more division of labour becomes possible, that's when you can get fancier about defining strengths and weaknesses in more detail if you still want to.

You may have some talent in all three of these areas, though you'd be a rare person if you do. Most of us mere mortals are only good at one or two of them. Even if *you can* be good at all three, you will *definitely not* be when trying to cover them all at the same time. The broader your focus, the less detail your mind is capable of identifying and remembering.

Looking back over your working life, you should be able to pick up the pattern that reveals which area comes most naturally. Do you instinctively gravitate to improving the quality of the product or production capacity, to making sure that the customer gets what they paid for—and then some?

Or do you most enjoy attracting people's attention and connecting with them—the more the merrier?

Or do you find yourself breaking things down systematically to measure and keep track of how well everything is going, are you drawn to read the stories that numbers can tell you?

In other words, these three most essential functions of any business—production, marketing and finance—easily translate into natural inclinations. Every personality will find one of these easier to perform, more congenial to one's nature, than the other two. So also will you find one difficult and less pleasant.

In assigning staff to particular roles, including yourself, it is not necessary to get any more complicated than this. In fact, I've found that trying to match strengths to jobs more precisely is usually counter-productive. Given a natural inclination that more or less matches the nature of the role assigned, it's better to leave room for the team member to adapt and evolve their own way of doing their job.

As I said, we all instinctively bring our strengths to bear anyway, *without even being aware we are doing so!* So each staff member will find their own way to optimum effectiveness if you allow them to start off with their best foot forward in this way. They will, that is, IF you don't get in the way of the process.

But regardless of whether you agree with that approach to managing staff or not, one inescapable fact you *can* rely on is that every employee you ever employ will prefer one of these activities—**delivering value** (production), **connecting with people** (marketing) or **tracking & measuring with records & numbers** (finance/systems)—over the other two.

To help each do their best in your enterprise (or their own career) all you really need know is whether he or she is most: **Value-oriented**, **People-oriented** or **Numbers-oriented**? As long as the demands of their role is similarly oriented, they will naturally find ways to deliver what you want from them.

We use the first letters of the words **V**alue (production), **P**eople (marketing) and **N**umbers (**F**inance) to express a person's **Natural**

Work Profile. Your strongest will be your first letter, your weakest your last. Hence there are six possible instinctive working styles: **VPN, PNV, NVP, VNP, PVN and NPV.**

Very simple, and yet, once we know your natural profile, it tells us immediately how your talents can best be utilized in virtually *any* small business setting—and also what *not* to ask you to do.

In the same way, any role in any enterprise, large or small, can also be categorized according to the general nature of its most critical tasks and outcomes. Will they be best achieved through focusing on delivering **V** for value, connecting with **P** for People or tracking **N** for Numbers? And which is least involved in a given role?

Large companies put a lot of time and effort into closely defining the required “KSAs” (Knowledge, Skills & Abilities or Attitudes) for every position they hire for. However, there is very little evidence to indicate that these detailed specifications have actually made personnel placements more consistently successful.

We are by far the most adaptable species ever evolved. Put a human being in a box and he or she will immediately set to work reinventing that box to make it fit them, rather than vice versa. Smart bosses facilitate this process instead of trying to control it: as long as it doesn’t detract from obtaining the outcomes they want.

If basic orientation is aligned, then both job and jobholder naturally want the same outcomes. Thus every job in your business can and should also be assigned its Natural Work Profile requirement: so every “peg” you ever hire can slot easily into a matching role.

As I promised: child’s play.

Many “Threes”

These basic activities can be expressed in various ways, depending upon the setting you want to apply them to. Production, Marketing and Finance is the commercial way of looking at it. Translated into a psychological focus, they become Value, People and Numbers. At its most basic, this breaks business down to the WHAT, WHO and HOW of business respectively.

Other ways to express the same or similar divisions are:

- The three C's can be applied to just about any activity: *Contributing, Convincing* and *Calculating*.
- An easy to remember model is the "Three Pros": *Production, Promotion* and *Profit*.
- A broader way to look at the Numbers/Finance corner of the triangle is with three S's: *Service, Sales* and *Standards*.
- Or you can broaden it out even further with the three M's of Management: *Making, Motivating* and *Monitoring*.

The divisions between the three areas need not be sharp. They inevitably overlap: for example, a good atmosphere in your salon is partly the result of excellent hairdressing—a production activity—and partly the result of how well the customers and staff are treated as persons—an aspect of marketing.

Giving your staff a good incentives program—a financial activity—would also help to create the right atmosphere, *if* it is managed to motivate your team rather than drive them. Even if the incentives offered were non-financial, such as extra time off or other perks, I would still class it as a "financial" activity because it involves *monitoring* and *measuring* the activities you wish to encourage.

Though the edges may be blurred at times, these activities do require different types of talent to be supervised and performed as well as they could be. Using the simplest possible economic model, here's an example of how such natural inclinations can be combined to build an enterprise:

Do you remember playing marbles as a kid? Well, let's imagine a young boy receives a beautiful big bagful of marbles on his birthday.

However, this little fella knows from experience that he isn't particularly good at shooting marbles. So he decides not to squander his newfound wealth by playing in games he's unlikely to win. Instead, he puts them to use by forming a marble-playing team.

*First, he observes all the marble games being played during recess at school over a period of several days. Finally, when he's sure he's located the best marble-shooter in the school, he invites her to join his elite team. He explains to this **shooter** that he will **share** with her all the marbles she could ever want, provided she pools her winnings from each game with him.*

*Now, you might think that the Shooter, being as good as she is, would have won plenty of marbles already—but that's not how it usually works out in practice. Someone who is passionate about **producing** the desired result often ignores how well the “**profits**” (wealth – in this case, marbles) are accumulating. Heck, they'd be working at this even if they weren't getting paid for it!*

So, to develop her skills, the Shooter will have squandered many marbles trying out new techniques. She will have lost more when other players ganged up to beat her. And her natural passion for performance will lead her to play in the most competitive games.

So these two team up, the Shooter letting the Sharer spot the most profitable games to play in—and also pointing out when to pull out of a game that has ceased to be profitable. And so their partnership thrives.

But the Sharer sees they could be making even more marbles by running a game of their own—so they recruit the most popular kid in the playground. It becomes his job to attract more kids to play in their game.

*So he does what comes naturally and **shouts** all over the schoolyard how much fun it is to play in this particular marble game. When the game gets too crowded, they add another great shooter to the team to host a second game ... and then a third ... and so on.*

And so the Sharer, the Shooters and the Shouter live happily ever after—wealthy in marbles beyond their wildest dreams.

So what is your natural bent? *Shooting, Shouting or Sharing?* It may be obvious to you by now, but just in case it isn't, let's explore which talents draw a person to concentrate on which aspects of business ...

P for People-oriented (Marketing)

Inclinations naturally suiting a person to marketing-type activities are perhaps the most obvious, so let's have a look at them first:

Are you outgoing and personable?

Do you like to socialize?

Do you prefer working with lots of people rather than doing things by yourself?

Are you a natural persuader?

Do you find it easy to motivate people?

Is the telephone an extension of your arm?

Is variety the spice of life?

If this sounds like you then you are probably a natural marketer. In the hairdressing industry, good marketers may not be the best hairdressers, but they will end up being the best known hairdressers anyway. Simply because they most enjoy *attracting attention*.

Aside from knowing your own Natural Profile, it also really helps to know this about your boss or your partners. It tells you why they make a fuss about some things and not about other things that may seem equally (or even more) important to you.

A people-oriented salon owner will tend to be someone who starts avalanches for fun. If they're also weak on delivering value, they'll fill up the joint with bodies and then remember to hire some hairdressers. I'm exaggerating, but you get my drift.

If they're weak on numbers then they may not charge enough for the service. You'll have lots of people moving through the salon, but will there be enough money to pay the staff at the end of the week? Or they may charge a proper price, but spend so much money on advertising there's little profit left over.

A people-oriented boss may promise a wonderful cut, but not charge enough to allow the time to produce it. Their credibility will suffer with their own staff. These are the sort of problems that may need to be brought to their attention—because, believe it or not, it won't be obvious to them.

N for Number-oriented (Finance/Systems)

Inclinations that naturally suit a person to “balancing the books” are perhaps the next easiest to recognise:

Are you a details person?

Do you like working with numbers and calculations?

Is it important to you to do things correctly?

Do you actually read the manual and follow instructions?

Do you achieve your goals by planning and following through?

Do you naturally apply measurements to keep track of how things are going?

Do you not like to be rushed?

Do people have to earn your respect before you open up to them?

If so, then you are probably be a natural at finance and similar recording and tracking activities. A numbers-oriented salon owner will be methodical and have good reporting systems. They'll usually know how much the salon is making on a daily—even hourly—basis and will carefully base hiring and firing decisions on cashflow and profitability.

But such bosses can also be inclined to be inflexible. Numbers are an abstraction of reality, not the actual thing, but they want life to be as orderly as their systems are. Hairdressers are not usually the most disciplined of staff, so there may be friction involved in

getting everyone reporting as they "should be", showing up on time, that sort of thing.

If connecting with people is also the salon owner's weakest area, then—I've got to say it—they may be boring to work for. Thus the atmosphere in their salon may suffer accordingly. In which case, even though they offer secure employment, they will regularly lose their best people to "greener pastures".

Alternatively, if delivering value is his or her weak area, then they may be penny-pinching about how long you're allowed with each customer. They may even be seen as selfish by their staff.

Working in such a salon, you may have to fight for the right to work to your highest standards—and also bond with your customers. And fight for this you should, because it won't be immediately obvious to your boss how vital this is.

V for Value-oriented (Production)

I've left this till last because there can be quite a difference in the types of personalities who naturally gravitate to this defining function of any business.

This includes people who are team-oriented, but also people who like to work on their own. It includes the innovator who will experiment on every head of hair they can get their hands on, including the occasional customer who didn't agree to it. But it also includes the excellent staff trainer, who sets standards and knows intuitively how to bring an apprentice along from one level of skill to the next, helping him or her develop into the best they can be.

So natural "producers" can be a mixed bag, but the main thing to look for is a passion about the *quality* of the service/product, pushing that higher or making it easier to produce, thus also raising the *quantity* in which it can be delivered "to the world":

Are you a good listener? Do you prefer to work one-on-one?

Do you enjoy cooperation more than competition?

Are you fussy about the standard of your work, even after everyone else is satisfied?

Do you like to solve problems?

Are you naturally inclined to find better ways to do things?

Are you sometimes too concerned over the needs of others?

Do you prefer not to work to deadlines, sometimes even miss them?

Do you judge people by the quality of their work?

'Yes' answers to some of these questions could point to *delivering value* being your natural penchant. A value-oriented salon owner will often have a reputation for excellence in hairdressing or consistency of quality (the customer getting what they expect time after time) or both. They are often hairdressing award-winners—though it's the marketing-oriented hairdressers who are more likely to *go after* awards because they revel in the fame and attention.

Value-oriented bosses will naturally be very aware of how much you are producing and to what standard. They will push for you to improve your skills continuously, and are more inclined to take time to teach you things whenever the opportunity presents itself, even if that could mess up scheduling a bit.

If handling numbers is their weakest area, then they may find it difficult to run the salon profitably. They might spend money they can't really afford to provide the best tools, or on travel for the team to stay abreast of the latest developments, things like that. The prices they feel comfortable charging may not reflect the high quality of their service. They will run the best salon for learning, but will not necessarily be the most secure of employers.

If connecting with people is their weakest area, they will expect the quality of service to promote itself. In other words, they'll rely on word of mouth to attract most of their business. If that doesn't seem to be working, they will tend to raise quality as a solution in preference to attending to essential marketing actions.

He or she may prevent their salon from growing beyond the point where they find it easy to control quality of service. They may do this unconsciously—while wondering why the world refuses to recognise and reward them according to their merit.

Vive la Difference

I provide these descriptions to help you tune into which approach most attracts you, which feels like the most comfortable fit. But if you don't recognise yourself in any of them—don't worry.

Remember, we don't have to get religious about these categories. I'm not saying there are only three types of people in the world.

What I *am* saying is that business boils down to these three activities in its most essential form. And it should not be boiled down any further than that. If you try to, you will lose the plot. I'm also saying that *any* job in the workaday world is likely to harness one of these preferences more effectively than the other two.

Whatever talents you happen to possess, it stands to reason that this will have a bearing on which of these three activities you prefer. In fact, the message underlying everything you read here is that you should pay attention to what you naturally focus on and honour that in your career choices. The way to do that successfully is by getting other essentials covered by *different* people who *prefer* to do them.

Over 50 years ago, Peter Drucker, the father of management practice, pointed out that it never works to try and make a person fit into an uncongenial job. Yet far more than 50% of the workforce today find themselves in exactly that situation, mainly because most people are completely out of touch with what they do prefer. Most are in the rut they're stuck in because they entered that career path for reasons which had nothing to do with personal inclination—and now they're too scared to jump out of it.

To get the best performance, it's ALWAYS more effective to design the job around the person: so what comes naturally *is* their job and what doesn't is given to others. This is supposed to be the great

advantage of doing things in a group: being able to arrange things so one team member's strength covers another's weakness.

But very few workplaces are actually organized that way today. MAINLY BECAUSE MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO LIKE THEIR WORK—AND WILL DO IT BETTER IF THEY DO!!!

To create effective teams in this way, team-mates have to be aware of what they personally like. And that must start with the boss.

If you've lost motivation, perhaps you need to re-think how you run your salon or which job you are mainly doing in it. You could be wasting your talents trying to do what you've become convinced is unavoidable, instead of what is best suited to your nature.

As mentioned, employers unconsciously tend to employ people like themselves. So you may have recruited a team which is *unable* to cover your weak areas. This would make the running of a salon—or any small business—seem much more difficult than it actually is.

By teaching you to *appreciate* the differences in other people, rather than being irritated or nervous about them, this approach makes life so much easier for any business owner—and also for everyone who works for them.

With a bit of practice you'll learn to “manage by fit”—matching candidates to sympatico roles very quickly—ultimately ensuring that everybody gets to like doing what they're paid for. *Vive la difference* is absolutely the right approach for any employer, whether they are building a salon or any other type of business.

To make this even easier I have developed a 10-minute **Talent Tuneup Questionnaire**: designed to help people clarify which of these three types of jobs they do naturally prefer.

If you've gotten into a rut, and out of touch with what you do like, this handy tool will launch you onto a journey of self-discovery. Doing it more than once is also a good idea—as often as it continues to help you clarify what your natural inclinations really are.

(Available online at – www.teampower.com.au/talent – results will be returned within 48 hours. You can also plot them visually.)

The Power of Three

I hope you've got the point that there is nothing inherently wrong about running a salon to suit your personal style. You can be wildly successful running a value-oriented, a people-oriented or a numbers-oriented salon—or a dozen other variations on those themes. AS LONG AS YOU DON'T FORGET THE OTHER TWO CORNERS OF THIS ESSENTIAL BUSINESS TRIANGLE!

But forget them you will. Trust me, you *will*. Unless you have someone nagging at you about your weaker areas.

This was first pointed out to me by Ernesto Sirolli, a startup expert—he calls it “enterprise facilitation”—who maintains that any business plan prepared by only one person is probably worthless, for all the reasons I have been describing to you.

Sirolli insists that a good business plan—to have any real chance of succeeding—must be prepared by no less than three individuals, each specifically passionate about Production, Marketing and Finance. He calls this the Management Trinity approach. (For more info, see www.sirolli.com)

Sirolli's model fit perfectly with my own findings that our attitudes and inclinations colour reality in ways we're not aware of. Our brains build up a unique view of the world which is a product of our personality, not the whole reality, but that is the world we respond to—except when others are reminding us that there is more to it.

The whole idea of this Natural Approach is to help you concentrate on what you're good at *effectively*—without stunting the growth of your business (or career) in the process. As we have seen, Sirolli's Management Trinity concept can be seen to work at three levels:

1. It defines the minimum activities any business needs to cover in order to survive and prosper.
2. It points out that different people are passionate about different aspects of business, and should free themselves up to pursue that as early as possible,

instead of suppressing it in favour of “other duties”. This is what the legendary Peter Drucker calls the ‘principle of concentration’ as applied to the individual. You will always perform at your best when focusing on what you’re best at.

3. But most importantly, Sirolli points out that one person CANNOT competently plan and supervise any business alone. This was the principle revelation for me when I first came across his model.

On + In

In running a hairdressing salon or any other business, you’re always operating at two different levels: a) seeing what needs to be done, and b) doing it or getting it done by someone else. In other words: a) working *on* your business, and b) working *in* your business.

As business picks up, ‘a’ tends to drop out because of the increasing pressures of ‘b’. Getting too caught up in solving day-to-day problems brought on by increased traffic, you begin to lose sight of the bigger picture. This is usually where our personal psychology starts to seriously get in the way.

If you are a one-man or one-woman band—yes, you can do all three things yourself if you must. (Though it’s wisest to at least delegate your weakest area to a part-time helper asap.) But what you can’t do—ever—is trust yourself to do “a” above for all three areas.

No-one is psychologically capable of wearing all three hats at the same time; especially not when under pressure. Whichever is your passion will inevitably draw you to neglect the weaker areas.

So you must have someone else keeping an eye on those areas for you. If you can’t afford to hire someone to actually do the work, you MUST at least get someone else to *monitor* what’s needed—and then TELL YOU (not merely suggest) what must be done.

This advisor could be a spouse or key staff member who is secure enough to nag you as necessary. Or you could swap advisory roles with friends running their own salons or other business—each of

you advising the other in turn on your strongest area—so it needn't cost anything but time.

However you arrange it, you must at least assign responsibility for your weakest area to someone else, *someone naturally passionate about it*. Ideally you want two suitably passionate advisors ensuring no essentials ever get neglected. That's if you want your business to grow with a minimum of pain and effort.

Don't bother to do this and you doom your small business to staying small forever—and needing you to run it forever too. The fastest route to absentee ownership and ample passive income is through “pegging” the right people into your business and meeting with them weekly, not monthly.

As Above, So Below

This advice applies equally to every individual hairdresser—or anyone pursuing a career, for that matter. As an employee, not only should you be going for jobs that harness your strongest area; on your weakest, you should also at least be getting advice.

If weakest on finance, you could get someone else to negotiate with your employer for pay that reflects your true value—or coach you on how to ask for it. At the least, never agree to terms of employment without first running it past your advisor. And you'll end up much wealthier if you get someone you trust to manage your money for you.

If you are weakest on marketing, you will be ignoring opportunities that are just right for you. In which case, you'll be better off relying on recruitment agents to find the best gigs for you. At the least, you should be getting advice on all the options open to you, all the ways that you could be raising your profile and selling yourself better.

If you are weakest on production, you may be better off in a larger salon where your other talents can make the greatest contribution. Or perhaps you can make yourself indispensable by covering what your boss isn't good at.

Also, if you want to keep the job you have, but you're sick of bending yourself out of shape trying to meet the conventional expectations of employers or other stakeholders, you *can* re-invent it to better fit your nature. For instance, a numbers-oriented schoolteacher—no matter what subject he or she is teaching—can be very effective at helping their students to get good marks, simply by more carefully tracking how each student is progressing with their studies.

Where a people-oriented teacher would find it easier to motivate their students ... and a value-oriented teacher will be more inclined to ensure their students can use what they learn, not just pass exams.

Many jobs can be adapted in this way to better fit the nature of the person who has to do them. Aside from their “natural habitat”, you'll find instinctive Value-people, People-people and Numbers-people in all sorts of exotic jobs. You'd be surprised at some of the unusual tasks you could successfully apply your talents to.

You'd think that a person in advertising should be a marketing type, wouldn't you? Well, not necessarily so. Early in my career I did very well in that field, even though I'm more naturally value-oriented than people-oriented. The ad campaigns I wrote worked, not because I had “the gift of the gab”, but because I could see which features would be important to buyers better than the flamboyant attention-attractors I worked with. So I naturally developed a reputation for being more down-to-earth.

However, I should have been paid much more than I was, but felt shy about asking for a raise—because numbers/finance was my weakest area. I could have paid an agent to re-negotiate for me on a regular basis—but it never occurred to me to do so.

By the way, your natural approach to work may have nothing to do with your training and experience. In fact, your schooling and later training may actually be hiding your true nature from you.

Because of my success in advertising, for a long time I thought of myself as a marketing type, even though I always felt like an outsider. So I kept on going for sales and marketing roles for 15 years, not realizing there were other pursuits that I would find more congenial.

Finally, the penny dropped when I launched a company installing closed-circuit advertising systems into hotels and other venues. Expecting to concentrate on marketing, instead I found myself spending much more time ensuring our customers got the value we promised them—and enjoying every minute of it.

In the process, I also found out I was good at training people to deliver that value. Putting those two together—improving the value of training in general—has become my passion and career ever since.

Some of the best salespeople I know are numbers-oriented more than people-oriented. This is especially true for insurance salespeople, business brokers, that sort of thing.

Often a people-oriented person succeeds as a salesperson, but then fails when promoted to sales manager—because sales managers *must* enjoy working with numbers all the time. Number of contacts, number of interviews, number of presentations, deals closed, discounts, sales volume, etc, etc, etc.

There's no telling where your strengths could lead you, regardless of what you are qualified for. A people-oriented marine biologist could end up being an announcer at Sea World. A numbers-oriented musician could end up being the largest retailer of musical instruments in the Southern Hemisphere. (Actual examples.)

But this only happens if you permit yourself to follow your natural inclinations—AND how to give yourself the space to flex your muscles in that direction by sharing your uncongenial tasks with others.

The point here is simply to look beneath the surface of any job or business. Dig deeper and see how to bring your real nature to bear on the task at hand, if there's compelling reasons for sticking with it. You may get quite innovative, finding new and more effective ways to get results that wouldn't have occurred to someone more conventionally suited to the task.

Either way, the message here is to raise your expectations—*expect* the job you are doing can be transformed into one you can enjoy. If that proves too difficult—then get out.

Life is too short. Find a job that honours your strengths, not makes you think of them as weaknesses. And find people to work with who agree with that approach.

The Right Fit

By this stage I hope you are seeing the value in not only knowing your own Natural Approach, but also that of everyone you work with ... and all the people who come to you for a job ... *plus* all the people you look to for advice in business or career. Knowing this about a person's makes it sssooo much easier to work with them: alerting you where to look for strength and warning you what not to rely on.

There is no such thing as independent success, that should be obvious to you by now. You need the able and willing support of others—and this simple model makes that much easier to harness than more complicated and expensive approaches.

It also allows you to make much more out of the human resources available to you—especially where you most need support. It often reveals unsuspected talent right under your nose who can give that help—or can readily learn how to.

It points out how to bring out a person's natural talents—with just a little on-the-job validation and guidance—which have been hiding in the shadows “all these years” due to indifferent employers. It could launch him or her into a much more successful career.

It also stops you from wasting your effort and money—and everyone else's time—training them on weak areas. Even if they “get it” they won't enjoy it.

It also reveals the value in your staff (or yourself) that is being wasted. Most managers want us to do it their way, but the smart ones get so much more from their team by empowering them to do it in their own way.

The Other Dimension

So you can do a lot with this model. But don't let me mislead you into thinking it is a panacea for solving all the problems you'll encounter in

getting staff to perform as you'd like them to. Or even making yourself perform as you'd like.

It does stop you from making the biggest mistakes of a) ignoring and wasting talent, and b) demoralizing yourself and your employee by demanding performance that can never be forthcoming. So it points you in the right direction: matching up *nature* with *necessity*.

In other words, it provides an essential *orientation* most businesses lack. But the next dimension—that must also be matched to achieve a perfect “fit”—is the *quality* of the person's natural aptitude: ***how well compared to others can they do what they're inclined to do?***

Certainly, everyone learns faster working at tasks suited to their nature than when forced to perform uncongenial duties. So the right orientation ensures new staff get “up to speed” faster than otherwise. “Rapid onboarding”, as the corporate world calls it, is only really possible when this requisite matchup is part of the hiring process.

But the question still remains: *just how good can he or she get at this?* This is where current personnel profiling instruments create more confusion than clarity: by mistaking *impact* for *inclination*.

Several attributes that are common to all high achievers, no matter what field they work in, are being mistaken for specific talents when they are really just signs of a higher level of competence. For example, let's take the “strength” called “execution” which often comes up in strength-finding profiles. Have you ever heard a successful person say: “*I'm not very good at getting things done.*” No, neither have I.

A person who scores high on “cooperation” must be a people-person right? Wrong! The richest man in the world, Warren Buffett, is very good at getting people to cooperate with him, so was Ted Turner (founder of CNN), but neither likes to attract attention to himself. In fact, they both studiously avoid the limelight.

(The tales you hear about highly successful but uncooperative stars and divas are not told by the real pros who work well with them, but by the jealous also-rans who couldn't live up to their standards.)

General capabilities like “execution”, “cooperation”, “focus”, “self-assurance” and “strategic” end up being incorrectly classified as traits of personality because they correlate strongly with success. People who are happy in their careers usually display them.

But they are not actually aptitudes: they are *qualities* that come along with high aptitude in any field. The real trick that elevates career guidance and staff utilization to the truly professional level is being able to distinguish the difference between *capability* and *inclination*: which no questionnaire can do by itself.

Levels of Aptitude

In everyday language, we speak of people being endowed with high or low aptitude, of being talented or untalented. This is the *other* dimension which must also be measured and matched to make sure a candidate not only has the necessary penchant for the task but is also *personally capable enough* to actually pull it off.

Not only do they prefer this kind of work, but are they also talented enough to perform at the level required? Is their level of aptitude high enough to meet the demands of the role?

I have also been researching this dimension over the past 30 years: a much bigger job than investigating simple job preference. While this lies beyond the scope of this booklet, you are welcome to learn more about it on the Great Instincts Blog (see [Library webpage](#)).

Perhaps the following excerpt from my article, *Lifting Your Game*, may whet your appetite to find out how to do just that:

The natural inclinations of aptitude comprise not only a special ability, but also a special awareness of where that ability will be useful. So, when a situation calls for your highest aptitude, it is also most obvious to you what is needed; and you are astonished it's not obvious to others.

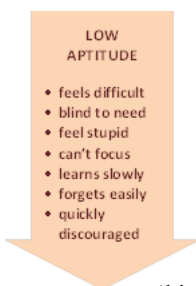
But when aptitudes you don't possess are what is needed, *you're* the one who is oblivious to what the situation really calls for and that blindness astonishes others.

So you exhibit the most intelligence where your aptitude is highest; and the least where it's lowest. You find it easiest to concentrate when employing your highest aptitudes—and concentrate for longer; while attention span is shortest where aptitude is lowest.

Your memory works best with regard to your highest aptitude; and worst with your lowest. You make the least mistakes where aptitude is high; and the most where it's low. Most important of all, you find it easiest to learn and improve your performance where your aptitude is highest; and most difficult to improve where it is lowest.



Aptitude could be likened to the instinctive horsepower you bring to a task: the output of its motor being the main thing that determines a vehicle's performance. Yes, changing other things in a vehicle can make it perform better—just as knowhow and other factors can be improved to affect human performance—but the underlying capacity of the motor itself is always the base one builds upon.



Clearly, it is harder to sustain motivation for things you find it difficult to do. And, of course, it's easier to stay motivated about things that come easily to you. This is the real reason why most attitude-change benefits don't last: they fail to affect the preferences controlled by one's instinctive aptitudes.

In the short term, it's possible to find the motivation to do just about anything, no matter how difficult it feels—even sacrifice your own life for a 'higher' cause—but only if it doesn't take too long. It's virtually impossible to keep on acting against your instinctive inclination. (Except when someone else is dominating your will and controlling your actions.)

Conversely, your performance "sweet spot"—where you find it easiest to get into 'the zone' and stay there—is when passion (motivation) and talent (aptitude) join hands. Then suddenly you find yourself accomplishing things you didn't even know you were capable of.

My Final Word

As an employer, you are in a position to not only provide material support to your employees, but also to transform their self-esteem and self-image with the tools I've introduced you to here. And you will profit greatly from doing so.

Take a little extra time to recognize everyone who works for you, not only for who they are, but also who they can become. You will transform their lives by doing so—and your own at the same time.

APPENDIX ONE – NOTES ON FAMILIAR FACES & ROLES

Natural Work Profiles of Famous People

(These are “educated guesses” based on interviews and other information in the public domain.)

- VPN** Steve Jobs, Steven Spielberg, Lionel Murphy, Peter Jackson, Angelina Jolie
- PNV** Rupert Murdoch, Ronald Reagon, Donald Trump
- NVP** Warren Buffett, Ted Turner, John Sculley
- VNP** Elon Musk, Henry Ford
- PVN** Richard Branson, Oprah Winfrey, Mikhail Gorbachev, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Tom Hanks, Goldie Hawn, George Clooney
- NPV** Paul Keating, Jimmy Wales (co-founder of Wikipedia)
- PPP** My dog Bailey

Leadership

There is no one right way to lead, so there is no optimum work profile for leading—despite all those books that claim to know exactly what effective leadership consists of. However, there are more natural and fitting ways to run some types of businesses than others—and this can also change as the enterprise develops through different phases.

Richard Branson, who is clearly a people-oriented leader, made his start with Virgin Records, which grew and overtook its competitors because it was more in touch with what music people wanted to hear. I can’t imagine a record company that wouldn’t do better under the leadership of someone who is naturally drawn to connect with their customers.

However, I doubt that a people-oriented leader would do nearly as well in charge of a company that manufactures the hi-tech hi-fidelity equipment that *plays* music. No, it was value-sophisticated professional

buyers that put Fender and Bose on the map long before the broader public jumped on their bandwagons.

Perhaps when you get to be as big and diversified as Sony or General Electric it might be helpful to have a natural marketer or a natural numbers guy at the helm, but any company that needs to build a reputation for quality first will achieve that more efficiently under a value-oriented leader.

The famous conflict between Steve Jobs and John Sculley at Apple Computers was caused by the natural priorities of a value-oriented leader coming up against those of a number-oriented one. Sculley, who had come to Apple from Pepsi, knew well how to win in the well-established commoditized soft-drink industry, but radically different dynamics were at play in the emerging computing industry.

While Jobs, seeing the vast untapped value inherent in the microchip, could not agree to slow down his realizing of it. Apple benefitted financially at first by firing Jobs, but eventually it became obvious that Sculley had no idea how to keep on adding value by leaps and bounds, something that he would never have been expected to do in the soft-drink industry. So Jobs returned to Apple and the rest is history.

It's also clear that Jobs was more naturally value-oriented than people-oriented because he continued to exceed the public's expectations, not just stay in touch with them: much like Henry Ford did 70 years earlier.

The difference between these two business legends is also instructive. Jobs also loved showmanship, suggesting his natural profile would be: **VPN** (preferring people before numbers). Where Ford was passionate about systems and improving them to drive down the price at which he could deliver his value: sometimes even rebating back to customers *part of what they had already paid* when he found out a price was higher than it needed to be! So his natural profile would be: **VNP** (preferring numbers before people).

Richard Branson's natural profile would most likely be **PVN** because, on top of his incredible ability to engage with people and motivate them, most of his success after Virgin Records has been built upon giving

customers more bang (value) for their buck in a succession of industries (air travel, phone services, etc). He is famous for recognizing the essentials that people do want, rather than wasting money on the frills they do not want. His staff will also tell you he does as little office work as possible: he relies on others to implement and maintain the systems.

Oprah Winfrey's natural profile would also most likely be **PVN**. Like Richard, she is an attention-attractor par excellence. But it is the value in other people's accomplishments that she most likes drawing our attention to—plus ways to realize our own potential value.

As with record companies, some industries clearly favour one type of leader over another. It's hard to imagine an accounting firm that wouldn't benefit from the direction of a managing partner who is naturally numbers-oriented. But breaking the mold sometimes gives a competitive advantage; at least temporarily. It took people-oriented Lee Iacocca to turn around the massive Chrysler Corporation, a brave choice for a company already on the financial ropes.

I use famous examples here so that you can recognise the personalities I refer to, but all of this applies equally to the corner shop or service station—and also to any stage of a person's career. When the time comes for my flamboyant outgoing grandson to get his first part-time job, I will not be recommending Maccas. He'd do better selling tickets and ice cream at the local cinema; where he's more likely to be asked what movie is good. His systematic sister, however, would probably enjoy Maccas—at least for a while—learning how a business can be made to purr like a machine with excellent tracking systems.

Startups need a value-oriented founder who can figure out their viable business model as quickly as possible, but they also need a people-oriented motivator to keep everyone engaged—and the stability and credibility of their money manager may be essential to attracting investment. As Sirolli recommends, the surest formula is to make sure all three are covered and give each priority as appropriate.

Yes, a good leader must trust their own viewpoint—but he or she must also possess the wisdom to recognize their limitations—knowing when to give way to other expertise.

Motivation

A people-oriented boss is likely to motivate others through encouragement and excitement and sheer force of personality. They will try to shine things right.

Where a numbers-oriented boss will be more inclined to do it through scores (measures) and incentives and similar orderly ways of going about it, including gamifying the activity.

A value-oriented boss is more of a slow-burn motivator: naturally seeking to instill a sense of purpose and improvement and a quest for excellence in each employee.

Communication

If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. That's what a number-oriented manager would remind you, and he or she would be right. Most people think of communication in terms of words and pictures, but without the numbers—accurately kept **Key Performance Indicators** (KPIs) and financial records—it can be very difficult to know *what* information to rely on or not.

In their words and actions, people-oriented persons are more inclined to colour life how they want it to be rather than how it is. This may seem exaggerated and even dishonest to a value-oriented person because to create value it is necessary to “stick to the facts”. But that very “colouring-in” may bring about the reality faster than the time it takes to complain about it.

Then who is telling the truth? Lots of successful people recommend faking it until you make it.

The value-oriented person tends to become preoccupied with what they are making or improving, thus neglecting to communicate what is really going on. This can be just as inefficient as bending the facts, but they will tend to overlook that.

The only way the true picture can be appreciated fully is when a matched trinity of people are freely comparing notes and then doing what is obviously necessary to each individually.

Research

The differences are so obvious here that it barely requires comment. *“I have researched this”* will mean something completely different depending upon the orientation of the person saying it.

To the people-oriented it could mean anything from, *“I’ve bounced this off a few people and they all love the idea”* to *“I’ve already sold this to 100 people so you better hurry up and produce it before they ask for their money back.”*

To the value-oriented it will mean they have looked into the issue to the point of understanding and possibly even mastery of it. They may have already prototyped it and are looking at how to scale up production.

The number-oriented person will show you the spreadsheets they have worked up on the subject and what impact the proposed change is likely to have on cashflow, profitability, staffing requirements, etc, etc.

Prioritization

Clearly, the orientation of a person will affect what he or she considers to be priority. And they are likely to be right at least a third of the time.

This is where a true Management Trinity can really shine if they are committed to combining their individual realities—like the three primary colours—into a realistically balanced “full colour” synthesis of what is happening and what needs to be done about it.

At any given stage of development, one corner of this triangle will always require a little more attention (or a lot more) than the other two. Or its needs will take precedence over the other two.

So “balance” in a dynamic human activity is never that of the scales, hanging in equilibrium, but rather that of the pendulum: where the priority of each factor gives way to each other, similar to the way that the seasons of the year wax and wane.

It is up to the three experts in charge of “working on” the enterprise to agree (preferably weekly) on: a) which requires emphasis at present, and b) which comes next in priority. Inevitably, one factor will get the

least attention for the time being: but this must always be a thoroughly discussed choice, never the consequence of unwitting neglect.

Thus no factor gets overlooked due to psychological avoidance. At the least, those responsible for it can be preparing to address future needs in the meantime. This sequence of predicted priorities—and the preparations made for them—can thus provide the backbone for all future planning.

Planning which neglects to take all three factors into account is unlikely to be useful—and may in fact turn out very wasteful.

Security

People-oriented: *“There’s safety in numbers.”*

Number-oriented: *“We must accumulate reserves to get us through the hard times.”*

Value-oriented: *“We must adapt to changing conditions – and predict them so we can prepare.”*