

CHAPTER

1

The Big Lie

I would sooner have you hate me for telling you the truth than adore me for telling you lies.¹

—Pietro Aretino, *Italian Author, Playwright, Poet, and Satirist*

Right now, billions of people throughout the world are playing The Business Game and doing their best to win. Some play as employees, some as owners, and others at various levels in between. Every month, thousands of newbie entrepreneurs start their own small businesses—on and off the Internet—with dreams of success, abundance, and freedom flowing from their efforts. The odds are that you're one of those people.

As the players begin playing The Business Game, they're taught the official rules and regulations and do their best to follow them (more about this in a minute). They're then guided to huge

¹ Pietro Aretino, in *Bits & Pieces* (Chicago: Ragan Communications, 2004).

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storehouses of advice, inside and outside of colleges and universities, within what I call “The Five Power Centers of Business”—sales, marketing, management, leadership, and finance—designed to help them succeed. Armed with the rules, regulations, and an always-expanding supply of theories, tools, techniques, and strategies, the players set off like warriors on the road to success and victory. The odds are that this describes you, too, either now or years ago when you first started playing The Business Game.

Yet despite the best of intentions, following the best of the best advice and investing tremendous amounts of time, energy, and money, every single player will ultimately fail to win The Business Game. Regardless of whether you’re aware of it consciously, whether you want to admit it, or whether you’ve reached that place in playing The Business Game yet, this applies to you, too—as you’ll soon see.

What do I mean by “fail to win The Business Game”? Here’s a quick summary of the seven most common failure scenarios:

1. As owners, they fail in the traditional business sense, meaning closing their doors and going out of business.
2. As owners, they keep their doors open, but despite huge investments of time, energy, and effort, they experience tremendous struggle and stress and are barely able to squeeze out a decent living from the business, thus experiencing severe limits and restrictions.
3. As owners, they succeed in the traditional business sense, in a small, big, or *huge* way, meaning creating a profitable business, making a good living, building wealth, and having a comfortable or even opulent lifestyle, but paying a huge Visible Price for their success in the form of unhappiness, stress, anxiety, pain, disillusionment, health issues, relationship issues, lack of free time, and so on.
4. As employees, they’re limited, restricted, and frustrated by job conditions controlled by others and never feel properly rewarded for their efforts or contributions to the company.

5. As employees, they give generously of their time, energy, and effort, perhaps over years or decades, only to be fired or demoted when new management steps in, downsized during tough times, passed over for promotions by people they feel are less qualified, and so on.
6. Both owners and employees may be compelled by internal or external forces to invest huge amounts of time doing things they don't like to do, tasks that aren't fun for them, activities that may even be painful, and so on.
7. As owners and employees, they'll work their butts off and create one degree of success or another, only to find it wiped out or compromised by fluctuations in the economy or stock market, shifts in industry trends, new technological innovations, a bold new assault from a competitor, and so on.

On and on it goes, with variations on the same basic themes of "It'll be different for me" or "It'll be different this time" being the familiar battle cry as such patterns repeat themselves endlessly through time. (I have tons of intimate experience with this myself).

Finally, as we'll be discussing in the chapters that follow, even if a player of The Business Game escapes one or more of the scenarios just listed, he or she will still pay a huge Invisible Price for playing it the old way.

I'm fond of using the metaphor of dog racing to describe the dynamics involved in playing The Business Game the old way. In each race, the dogs try as hard as they can to catch a mechanical rabbit, but they never catch it. It's always just out of reach. Why don't the dogs ever catch the rabbit at the track? Because the sport was designed, *intentionally*, so the dogs would forever be motivated to chase the rabbit but never actually catch it.

To continue the metaphor, the dogs may train hard, have the best diets in the world, get stronger and stronger, become faster and faster, win many races, earn lots of money for their owners (and for the people who place bets), live in fancier kennels, and wear fancier

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outfits on the track, but the bottom line is the dogs are still on the track and they're still racing to catch rabbits they'll *never* catch.

While it may shock and disturb you, and you may find it hard to accept—at first—the same thing is true for players of The Business Game. As we grow up, we're taught the rules and regulations for playing The Business Game. We're told we can win The Business Game. We're told about the many rabbits we can catch if we win. So, we get on the track and start chasing our rabbits, metaphorically, and once we do that, just like the dogs, we end up stuck on the track, going around and around in endless circles, running, running, running, but *never* catching our rabbits—no matter how fast, strong, rich, skilled, or powerful we get.

We get stuck in that endless chasing-but-not-catching-the-rabbit loop because The Business Game was designed with that specific outcome in mind—for reasons I'll be showing you in the pages that follow. That's a bold claim, I know, but it's a claim I'm prepared to fully document and validate.

Now I'd like to go into more detail about the rules and regulations you were given for playing The Business Game and the beliefs that naturally flowed out from them into your conscious awareness. I call that entire package “The Big Lie.”

First, let's chat about games. If you're like most of the people I speak with, you may not currently look at business as a game. When I speak with people and ask them about it, many say something like this to me: “Business is definitely *not* a game. It's a serious endeavor, and the stakes are very high.”

The first step in The Busting Loose Process is to really understand that everything within the business dynamic—sales, marketing, leadership, management, information technology (IT), human resources, expenses, invoices, accounts receivable, accounts payable, profits, competition, the economy, the stock market, and so on—is part of an amazing, elaborate, gigantic, unique, and complex game that was created with specific goals in mind. Some of The Truth of this you already get, but additional layers and insights will be added in the next chapter.

If you take a close look, most games have rules, regulations, and a clear structure. Everyone who chooses to play a game agrees to follow the rules and regulations and observe that game's structure. This is required to make the game work.

For example, American football is played with a leather ball that's shaped, sized, and constructed to meet rigid specifications. The playing field is 100 yards long. You play four quarters lasting 15 minutes each. A touchdown is worth six points, kicking the ball through the goalposts after a touchdown is worth one point, a field goal is worth three points, and a safety is worth two points. A first down is 10 yards. You may only have a certain number of players on the field at any given time, and they must each play a specific position. There are rules about what players can and cannot do on the field, and if those rules are broken, the offending team is penalized. The team with the most points at the end of the four quarters (or overtime if the score is tied at the end of regulation time) wins the game.

Baseball is another example. It is played on a field that is a certain shape and size that's called a diamond. Only nine players per team are allowed on the diamond during play, and, like football, each player has a specific position. The game is played with bats, balls, and gloves that meet precise specifications. There are nine innings during which each team is allowed three outs. Batters get four balls or three strikes. The pitcher stands on an elevated mound that is a specific distance from home plate where the batter stands. The bases are specific distances from each other. When a player touches home plate after touching each of the other bases, he scores a run worth one point. The team with the most runs at the end of nine innings (or extra innings if the teams are tied) wins the game.

Golf is our final example. The golfer plays on a course. There are a certain number of holes, greens, and fairways on the course, along with (typically) roughs, sand traps, and water hazards. The player uses clubs with L-shaped metal ends to hit precisely constructed balls into small holes. There are specific rules as to what players can and cannot do while playing, and if the rules are broken, the player is

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penalized. The player with the lowest number of strokes at the end of the round wins.

If you take a close and objective look at football, baseball, and golf, you see that the rules, regulations, and structures appear completely arbitrary and don't make much sense. Consider this:

- *Football.* Throw a piece of leather filled with air from one person to another or run while holding a piece of leather filled with air as you try to cross a white line and score points. Or try to kick the piece of leather filled with air through two metal posts to score points.
- *Baseball.* Use a wooden stick to try to hit a round piece of leather-wrapped rubber that's coming at you at high speed. Then, if you hit it and no other player catches it with a big piece of leather wrapped around his or her hand, you run around trying to touch three square pieces of cloth placed on the ground before touching a final piece of rubber to earn a run.
- *Golf.* Try to hit a small spherical piece of plastic-wrapped rubber with an L-shaped piece of metal to get the spherical piece into a tiny, shallow hole hundreds of yards away with the fewest possible hits or strokes.

You see what appears to be the same sort of arbitrariness if you look at the rules, regulations, and structures of other popular games—bridge, Monopoly, pool, chess, checkers, blackjack, and so on.

You could easily ask yourself, "How did anyone ever think up such weird games with such odd rules, regulations, and structures?" In fact, if aliens visiting from another planet were to watch our games purely objectively, without any education about them, they might think we were all crazy for playing them! Although the rules, regulations, and structures appear arbitrary on initial examination, hidden from view are the intelligence, plan, and intent used to create them—and the joy that comes from the playing.

Players rarely question the origins of the games they play, or the arbitrary nature of the rules, regulations, and structures. They begin playing games that were invented long ago, and do exactly what they're told by the powers that be.

The same is true of The Business Game. When examined closely and objectively, the rules, regulations, and structure of The Business Game appear arbitrary and don't make much sense either, as you'll soon see. However, in later chapters in this book, you'll see there's an intelligence, plan, and intent behind the design of The Business Game, too, and as I said, when you find out what it is, it'll rock your world. It will also open the door to busting loose from The Business Game.

As we pass a certain age growing up, we become players in a Business Game that was set into motion long ago. Like athletes and other game players, we never question what we're taught about playing The Business Game. We just accept the rules, regulations, and structure we're taught and play as if it were all etched in stone and nonnegotiable.

Here are five of the primary rules we've been taught are real and etched in stone for playing The Business Game. There are actually dozens of other rules, but the following are the ones we're most familiar with and the ones that do the most damage, as you'll soon see:

1. You have a limited supply of money to play with (capital).
2. You have income (money flowing in).
3. You have expenses (money flowing out).
4. Your income must exceed your expenses (resulting in profits) or you lose the game.
5. You must maximize, grow, and sustain profits to win.

These rules seem obvious, don't they? There's not much to challenge or disagree with, right?

Wrong, as you'll soon see!

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There are numerous rules, regulations, and so-called magic formulas for success beneath the five basic rules in terms of how you're supposed to manage capital, generate income, reduce expenses, and grow profits. And there are boatloads of strategies for:

- Increasing sales.
- Improving marketing.
- Managing cash flow.
- Hiring, firing, motivating, and compensating employees.
- Minimizing employee turnover.
- Increasing employee morale, productivity, and efficiency.
- Effective time management.

In support of The Big Lie driving The Business Game, here are just a few common beliefs that have also been accepted as True:

- The tax authority is your enemy (to one degree or another).
- Your competition is your enemy (to one degree or another).
- You're vulnerable to the state of the international economy (boom times, recessions, and depressions).
- You're vulnerable to movements within the international stock and financial markets.
- Your freedom to make decisions and act is limited by bosses, stockholders, partners, board members, and investors.
- You're always vulnerable to new products, services, and technologies that can hurt your business (or job) or even make it obsolete in the blink of an eye.
- "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer."—Sun-tzu, *The Art of War*

All of these beliefs are what I call "power outside beliefs"—the significance of which you'll soon understand. Like the five basic

rules, they all seem to be True and an accurate description of the way it is. I'm here to tell you, however, that *none* of the rules, regulations, or beliefs I just shared, and the many subset rules, regulations, and beliefs that flow from them, are True. Not one. They're all completely made up, as are the rules of all games. You just accepted them as True and accurate on blind faith. You now have the opportunity to change that. You now have the opportunity to bust loose from the old Business Game and begin playing a New Business Game.

Here are two important points I want to repeat and then discuss in greater detail:

1. You can't *win* The Business Game.
2. The Business Game was specifically designed to create utter and total failure.

You can't win The Business Game because:

- *There's no clear definition of winning.* How do you know if you've won The Business Game? Did you ever ask yourself that question? Do you win when your business turns profitable? When you surpass a specific sales or profit goal you set for yourself? When you cash out through selling some or all of the business or go public? From my experience, while many people have financial goals they've set for themselves, few people have clear definitions of what winning The Business Game actually means. They just play with some sort of vague "I'm winning if I'm making money" sort of thought process. If you don't know what winning means to you, how can you possibly win or know when you've won? You can't!
- *Your money and success are notoriously unstable and always at risk.* No matter how much money you pile up in your business accounts, or appear to pile up in the value of your stock or stock options at any specific moment in time, it is always at risk. You can lose all or huge chunks of it through poor management,

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overspending, a stock market crash, bad investments, failed marketing campaigns, embezzlement, lawsuits, tough times, outright business failure, and so on. No matter how strong sales or profits are, how motivated your team is, or how efficiently your organization is running, history shows it can change on a dime and often without advance warning.

The stronger the numbers and whatever other benchmarks you judge your efficiency by, the greater the illusion of security. But the reality is that the stability of your business and the safety of your cash and other assets are never truly certain, no matter how much you have or what you do with it. Again, history is filled with stories of individuals and businesses that were once riding high, once seemed invincible, but later crashed and burned.

- *There's no official ending point.* When does The Business Game end? When you reach some milestone you set for yourself? That doesn't work, because even though you may temporarily reach or pass such a milestone, your cash, assets, and stability are always at risk, so you could slip backward and lose what you've created or accumulated. Does The Business Game end when you retire or cash out? Maybe, but your retirement income, cash, and assets are still at risk, so it hasn't really ended. When you die? Well, maybe The Business Game ends at that point, but what good does winning do for you then?

If there's no official ending point for the game, how can you possibly know if or when you've won? Can you say you've won a football game if you're ahead at the end of the third quarter? Can you say you've won a baseball game if you're ahead at the end of the seventh inning? Can you say you've won an 18-hole golf tournament if you have the fewest strokes after 12 holes? No!

- *You can't completely control the other people involved.* The Business Game is played with other people that we call customers and clients, partners, employees, stockholders, board members, vendors, accountants, bankers, and so on. In a perfect world, to

ensure your long-term business success, you'd be able to get all these people to do exactly what you want them to do, when and how you want them to do it, but since they're separate from you and have independent decision-making ability, that will never happen—no matter how good you are at communicating, motivating, compensating, selling, marketing, and negotiating. Other people can always, therefore, be a wild card or fly in the ointment.

- *There's always another level of success or efficiency above yours.* With only a few exceptions, there's a trap built into The Business Game that many players fall into at one point or another. The trap gets sprung when a company or player at a specific level of success gets compared to another company or player that appears to be doing better, which diminishes their perception of their own achievements.

For example, an owner, a partner, or an employee of a company with sales of X and profits of Y discovers that a competitor has sales of 2X and profits of 2Y. Or an owner, a partner, or an employee who was very happy earning X a year discovers that another employee at an equal level or his or her counterpart at a competitor is earning 2X, has more stock options, and so on. Or an executive who was traveling first class discovers that a friend or competitor just got a private jet. You get the idea. In these sorts of scenarios, even though you can say that a player is winning, in some respect, they won't feel like they are.

- *There's always a Visible Price and an Invisible Price to pay.* You also can't win The Business Game because, even if you seem to escape some or all of the "can't win" scenarios just described (or the many other variations on those themes I didn't mention), playing the game according to the traditional rules and regulations almost always leads to some form of stress, pressure, dissatisfaction, pain, or loss—especially when it comes to free time, health, and relationships. I'm sure you've experienced this

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yourself, or seen or known someone who succeeded in having a very successful company or career but ended up:

- Struggling with various illnesses, including serious ones.
- Lonely.
- Alienated from friends, family, and romantic partners.
- Dying young.
- Getting migraine headaches.
- An emotional basket case.
- Living in the lap of luxury but feeling empty inside and wondering, “Is this all there is?”
- On and on.

Imagine playing or watching any other game with rules, regulations, and a structure like I just described for The Business Game. Imagine playing or watching a game where there’s no way to know who’s winning, there’s no official ending point, you can influence but never control your fellow players, no matter how good you get there are always other teams or players better than you, and you ultimately end up losing (due to the Visible and Invisible Prices you had to pay) even if you think you’re winning.

Would anyone want to play or watch a game like that? No way! For the players, it would be an absolute nightmare. No one would volunteer to play a game like that. And no one would show up to watch, either. What would be the point?

Despite all of this, billions of people show up every day to play The Business Game, blinded to The Truth about what’s really going on. Many of those people—perhaps you, too—believe they’re winning The Business Game (or will one day), believe they’ve already won, or believe other people they see around them or in the media have won—but it’s all an illusion. In Chapter 9, I reveal an even bigger reason why you can’t win The Business Game. But first I have to provide you with a few more foundational pieces of the puzzle.

What you were never told is that The Business Game is very different from the other games we play. When it comes to The Business Game, nothing is etched in stone and absolutely *everything* is negotiable. You don't need to accept the traditional rules, regulations, structures, and beliefs associated with The Business Game. You don't need to be vulnerable to the forces and influences appearing to be outside of you and beyond your control. You actually have an alternative!

Since there's no way to win The Business Game, you have only two choices:

1. Continue playing according to the traditional rules, regulations, structures, and associated beliefs, knowing you'll lose and pay a big Visible and/or Invisible Price, no matter what you do.
2. Bust loose from the old Business Game entirely, create a New Business Game for yourself, choose your own rules and regulations, and transform your relationship with business *forever*.

However crazy or pie-in-the-sky this might sound to you, I guarantee that once you finish this book you'll be empowered to take the second option and bust loose from The Business Game entirely.

Returning to the dog racing metaphor, this book will support you in stopping the endless racing, getting off the track entirely, and playing a New Business Game that allows you to achieve all your True Goals (more about these later) and all the Hypnotic Goals you still want. However, you may be surprised to discover how few of your Hypnotic Goals you still want at that point!

To continue your journey, discover three questions that have haunted you your entire life, and learn how to answer them in a way that empowers you to bust loose from The Business Game, turn the page and continue on to Chapter 2.

