ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Predictable Success
THE NUTSHELL

Greenleaf Book Group Press 2010

Predictable Success is a state reachable by any group of people—any organization, business, division, department, project, or team—in which they will consistently (and with relative ease) achieve their common goals.

PART 1: TAKING THE JOURNEY

Here's a brief "helicopter ride" through the Predictable Success growth cycle:

Early Struggle. It feels as if you're hacking through the jungle, fighting to keep your newborn organization alive. The two main challenges are (1) making sure there is enough cash to keep going, until (2) you've clearly established that there is a market for your product or service.

Fun. You've broken through the Early Struggle—you have cash (at least enough to take the pressure off) and an established market. It's time to have Fun! Now you're free to concentrate on getting your product or service into the market, so the key focus now moves from cash to sales.

Whitewater. The very success that you reaped in the Fun stage brings with it the seeds of Whitewater. Your organization becomes complex, and the key emphasis shifts once more, from sales to profitability. Achieving sustained, profitable growth requires you to put in place consistent processes, policies and systems. Unfortunately, putting

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those systems in place proves harder than you expected. Making the right decisions seems easy, but implementing decisions and making them stick is incredibly difficult. The organization seems to be going through an identity crisis, and you may even be doubting your leadership and management skills.

Predictable Success. You've developed a team that has successfully navigated your organization through Whitewater—congratulations! You have reached the prime stage in your organization's growth: Predictable Success. Here, you can set your goals and objectives with a consistent, predictable degree of success. Unlike Fun (when you were growing, but weren't quite sure how or why), in Predictable Success you know why you are successful, and you can use that information to sustain growth in the long term.

Treadmill. In principle, there is no reason for any organization to decline from the position of Predictable Success. In practice, many organizations begin to swing too far toward dependence on process and policies. Creativity, risk taking and initiative decline in response, and the organization becomes increasingly formulaic and arthritic. Good people start to leave—many of whom have been with the organization for some time. Even the entrepreneurial founder may become frustrated and threaten to leave.

The Big Rut. At this stage, process and administration have become more important than action and results. Worse, the organization loses its ability to be self-aware and cannot diagnose its own sickness and decline. When an organization reaches The Big Rut, it can stay there for a long time on a very gradual decline.

Death Rattle. Eventually, for all bureaucracies, there is a final attempt to resuscitate the organization, whether by the appointment of bankruptcy practitioners or by being acquired. Either way, the organization will not survive in its present form. After a brief Death Rattle (when illusory signs of life may be seen), the organization dies in its present form.

PART 2: ARRIVAL: GETTING TO PREDICTABLE SUCCESS—AND STAYING THERE
To achieve this Predictable Success, there are six primary areas into which systems and processes must be introduced to change how the organization makes decisions:

• First, it must redesign its organization chart into a machine for decision making.

• Second, managers must learn to relate laterally—to each other—in addition to retaining their existing "vertical" relationships to their boss and their direct reports.

• Third, the newly aligned managers must push alignment down through the whole organization, renewing and invigorating their employees' understanding of and commitment to the organization's mission, vision and values.

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- Fourth, management must implement and enforce cross-functional decision making throughout the organization.

- Fifth, the groups that are working cross-functionally must (over time) be empowered to assume more delegated authority and responsibility.

- Sixth, ownership and self-accountability will spontaneously re-emerge in the workforce as a result of the first five steps, providing the final push into Predictable Success.

New dynamic systems and processes that will counterbalance the more rigorous, mechanical systems and processes that can happen in Whitewater are also required.

- First, it must redesign its hiring process to ensure that it is hiring only those who will contribute to a return to Predictable Success, not those who will keep the organization in Treadmill.

- Second, the way in which employees are deployed must be changed to shake the organization out of its overdependence on systems and processes.

- Third, the performance assessment process must be revamped to focus on development and success, rather than on failure and compliance.

- Fourth, the corporate training function must be turned from an information delivery vehicle into a dynamic dialogue of exploration into how and why to do things better.

- Fifth, mentoring and coaching programs must be relieved of over-management and freed to allow experimentation and exploration of skills and attributes.

- Sixth, as a result of the first five steps, ownership and self-accountability will be redirected away from a focus on compliance and activity levels and toward outputs and real results, providing the final push back to Predictable Success.

Keeping the organization in Predictable Success involves installing, then actively maintaining the systems and processes outlined above. For the organization to maintain its position in Predictable Success over the long-term, one more thing needs to be accomplished. The organization must develop its own innate ability to innovate and take risks. Those are the entrepreneurial attributes that it has depended upon the founder/owners or individual members of senior management to deliver.