

“Read this book and you’ll have the tools for helping any business or organization more effectively fulfill its mission.” —*Les Parrott III*



RICH SOIL

TRANSFORMING YOUR
ORGANIZATION'S LANDSCAPE FOR
MAXIMUM EFFECTIVENESS

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JACK

The office was silent as I settled in for a night of work. I began paging through my flip charts in an attempt to identify each aspect of the business that needed attention. I tried to detail some action steps, but it all seemed so disjointed. As I struggled to piece my thoughts together, I felt a knot of anxiety forming in my stomach. I knew that unless my team understood what made our business distinct, any plan would break down quickly.

I stopped for a moment and reflected on how Joe & Chow's had changed from the time I led it independently. It was definitely a different company now, but I struggled to determine where to go from here. Some said we simply needed to take action in key problem areas. But I was convinced that even if I took action, the bigger questions would remain: Where was Joe & Chow's going? Why did we exist?

As the night went on and my frustration began to wear on me, my thoughts drifted back to the early days of Joe & Chow's. I missed George. I could have met him for lunch or a cup of coffee and told him what I was facing, and he would have cut through all the haze

and given me a piece of solid wisdom—wisdom that would provide me with a framework for moving forward.

Then the memory struck me. When I first talked with George about my ideas for Joe & Chow's, he had given me a document filled with miscellaneous thoughts and ideas about starting a business. I spun around to search my file drawer. Maybe reviewing his notes would help me recapture the inspiration for Joe & Chow's, as well as formulate a plan.

After looking through my files with no luck, I glanced at the clock to see that it was just past midnight. I took a break from searching for the notes, leaned back, and closed my eyes. I tried to imagine what George would do in this situation. What questions would he ask? What advice would he have given me for my meeting with Richard?

Suddenly, a crash jolted me awake (I had dozed off). I had thought I was the only one in the building. As I moved quietly to the door, I peered around the corner and saw a maintenance man sweeping up what appeared to be glass from the light fixture.

I stepped into the hall. "Hello?"

An old, weathered man looked up from behind the cart and gave me a gentle smile. "Oh, I didn't know anyone was here. I was working on this fixture when it fell. I'll get this cleaned up and be out of your way."

"It's no problem. I was in my office and wanted to come see what happened. I'm Will." I extended my hand.

"I'm Jack," he smiled. "Whatever you're working on must be important if you're going at it this late."

"I guess you could say my lifelong dream depends on it. So yeah, it's important. If you can tell me how to turn this business around, let me know, okay?" I laughed.

He looked at me intently. "I may not have the answer, but I can listen. Have a seat. Looks like you've been working hard." He motioned to one of the chairs in the lobby.

After a moment's hesitation, I sat down across from him. *What's there to lose?* I thought. At least it was an opportunity to talk things out.

For the next two hours I told Jack about how I founded the business, the sale to Charter/Keel, purchasing it back with Richard as my partner, and the challenges I had encountered with my attempts to turn the business around. All the while, Jack just listened.

"So," I finally concluded, "I had dinner with Richard tonight and promised him a plan by Wednesday. On top of that, I said we would turn a profit within three months. There, that's the story. Do you have any advice?" I smiled wryly. Even though I didn't expect answers from Jack, I found that recounting the story made me feel better.

Jack was silent for a moment, then looked me in the eye. "I don't know if I have any advice for you," he began. "But I do want to tell you a story that has some uncanny similarities."

He leaned forward in his seat. "There was man who grew up in the suburbs—he played sports, earned high marks in school, and, after finishing high school, did as was expected of him—he went off to college and chose a sensible major. After graduating with an accounting degree, he secured a position as an auditor at a prestigious public accounting firm. He passed his CPA exam on his first try, then began, by all appearances, an ideal career that would provide a stable life.

"But ever since he was a little boy, he had loved spending summers at his grandparents' farm. He loved getting his hands dirty, watching the cycles of growth in the fields, and seeing the difference the farm made in the lives of all those who benefited from it.

"Despite this passion, he played it safe and continued in his corporate career. He was quite successful: he became a partner at his firm before he was thirty, he married a beautiful woman, and soon he and she were expecting their first child. However, deep inside, he wasn't truly happy with his career. Finally, he confessed to his

wife his desire to become a farmer. She was supportive, and within a year, he had purchased a farm near where his grandparents lived.

“The first spring at the farm, he went out to sow seeds. As he drove a tractor through the fields, some seeds fell along the path. Because the soil was so hard, the seeds failed to take root. Some remained there, while others were eaten by birds.

“Later, other seeds fell in soil that was filled with rocks. Although some seeds found crevices to grow in, the land was so rocky that the roots couldn’t grow deep. The sun scorched the plants, and they withered and died. Still other seeds fell among some weeds. The weeds lived in healthy soil, but as the seeds grew, the weeds choked out the healthy plants.”

“However, some of the seeds fell in good soil. Because of this, the roots took hold in rich, nutritious earth and yielded a tremendous crop, a hundred times more than was sown.”

Suddenly Jack stopped, looked at me, and said, “If you listen, you will hear.”

“Rich Soil offers solid, actionable advice tying a leader’s heart to an organization’s success. These principles apply to leaders at all levels—from a family to a global institution.”

Richard Stearns
President of World Vision U.S.

What kind of soil is your business planted in? Is it the unyielding soil of rigid and narrow thinking? Or is it the rocky ground of false starts and empty promises?

In today’s fast-paced world, amid numerous competitors, leaders must know how to place their organizations in an environment that facilitates strategy, profitability, and ongoing success.

Rich Soil creatively demonstrates how this is done. Using a fictional story about a coffee house and its owner and incorporating Jesus’s parable of the sower, the author introduces eight valuable leadership principles.

This is an excellent addition to the library of any manager, CEO, or executive director. Leaders of all kinds will be refreshed, encouraged, and challenged by these insights.



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