

From *The Godfather* to *Young Frankenstein*: Lessons in
Leadership, Marketing, and Surviving the Workplace



THE BIG PICTURE

Essential
Business Lessons
from the
Movies

KEVIN COUPE
MICHAEL SANSOLO

“The connection between the movies and business wisdom has been there all along. It took Kevin and Michael to bring it into sharp, digital-age focus.”

Gerry Lopez, CEO, AMC Entertainment Inc.

“This wonderful book proves what I have always believed: Movies teach us everything we need to know in business if we would only listen.”

Beau Fraser, co-author, *Death to All Sacred Cows* and Managing Director, The Gate Worldwide

“*The Big Picture* updates the old adage that a (movie) picture is worth a thousand words. A very worthwhile book.”

Stu Upton, Executive Director, United States Bowling Congress

“Stew Leonard’s loves stories. We are a story telling organization. That’s why *The Big Picture* will be a staple in our management’s library at Stew’s. I loved it and it’s a must read!”

Stew Leonard Jr., CEO, Stew Leonard’s

“This is the kind of useful and enjoyable book business people like me need to share in our companies.”

Robert Phillips, President, California Tortilla Group, Inc.

“*The Big Picture* will open your mind about the power of storytelling, whether it’s for a speech, a business presentation, or a one-on-one with a business associate or a member of your family. Great job, Kevin and Michael. You have given me a new reason to go to the movies.”

Jim Donald, CEO, Haggen, Inc. and former CEO, Starbucks Coffee Company

“To enjoy a film is a treat! To add to that by learning a valuable business lesson from that film is a profit. To be steered to achieve both a treat and a profit by reading *The Big Picture* is a true adventure!”

Senator Feargal Quinn, founder of Superquinn and former President of EuroCommerce

“Michael and Kevin have written an informative and useful business book that’s also fun to read and easy to apply. What a creative approach to business.”

Thom Blischok, President, Consulting & Innovation, Information Resources, Inc.

The Power of the Movies

by Michael Sansolo

Far more than she wishes, Shelley Broader, the former president of both Michaels craft stores and Sweetbay Supermarkets, finds herself quoting Yoda, the Jedi Master of *Star Wars*.

It happens when she's counseling an employee who she sees drifting into bad habits. She sits the employee down and has a little talk about the Force. (If somehow you managed to miss all six *Star Wars* movies, the Force is the invisible power in the universe linking all objects together including space itself.)

Just as Yoda instructs his students, Broader says there are two paths to choose from: the light side, which requires discipline and commitment, but leads to happiness and peace; or the dark side, which leads to staggering problems in every *Star Wars* movie. Of course, the path to the dark side is always easiest.

With that metaphor, Broader teaches that the easy choice is the wrong one. Skills such as guiding people, building business, and serving customers all require the ability to make the tough but better choice.

To make her point, Broader echoes Yoda. And she's not alone in using a compelling story from a famous movie to motivate employees.

This book is about the business lessons found in movies. We hope that by reading our book you will look at movies in a new way. You'll appreciate that these great and compelling stories contain lessons that

can make an important contribution to your business life.

Bill McEwan, the CEO of Sobey's supermarkets in Canada, once told me he thinks every CEO must be a storyteller. The ability to share the story of success and goals helps us communicate to employees and customers who we are and what makes us special. Without a narrative, executives cannot create the image of goals the company must have.

Joe Gibbs, the Hall of Fame coach of the Washington Redskins and the owner of a successful NASCAR team, preaches a similar message. Gibbs talks about how a head coach needs to tell a story that helps bind all his players to the game plan. It was his way to help a 300-pound lineman understand the importance of spending 60 minutes charging full speed into an equally large man. In NASCAR, the narrative helps the team changing the tires understand the importance of their jobs relative to the more glamorous work of the driver.

Narratives and story telling make things work in far more critical cases. When Robert McNamara died in 2009, one newspaper talked about the importance of a narrative when it comes to war. A nation must understand the story of why it is at war and what the purpose of the bloody venture might be. In short, the paper concluded, McNamara neglected his narrative for the war in Vietnam.

Most of us don't have all the stories we need or can't tell them well enough. And that's where the movies can help. Consider Broader's story about the dark side. Now Broader is an excellent storyteller, but even she couldn't paint a picture as vivid as the dark side in *Star Wars*. With that simple story, everyone she talks to will instantly think the same thing—do I really want to be Darth Vader?

A movie can inspire a CEO as well as a company's employees. A few years back, Doug Rauch, then the president of Trader Joe's supermarkets, told me about *The Wave*, a movie about surfing. *The Wave*, Rauch said, is a wonderful metaphor for business.

To succeed at surfing, the surfer must pick the right wave at the right moment. And just as importantly, you need to know when to get off the wave and move on. Making the choice on either end—getting on or getting off—is anything but easy.

This one short metaphor explained why business success is so fleeting. All it took was a movie, and in this case, a movie that was pretty obscure and that I had never seen.

*(Note: This is a condensed version of *The Big Picture* introduction.)*



Denial is Never a Good Idea

L	LEADERSHIP
P	PLANNING
Suggested for all business audiences	

JAWS IS ONE OF THE BEST THRILLERS EVER MADE, but it also serves up an example of business behavior that is almost inevitably fatal: denial.

“I don’t think either one of you are aware of our problems,” Mayor Vaughn (Murray Hamilton) says to Chief of Police Martin Brody (Roy Scheider) and Matt Hooper (Richard Dreyfuss) at one point in the movie. “I’m only trying to say that Amity is a summer town. We need summer dollars. Now, if the people can’t swim here, they’ll be glad to swim at the beaches of Cape Cod, the Hamptons, Long Island...”

Sure, Amity needed summer dollars. But what Vaughn ignored was the fact that the town also needed tourists who weren’t worried about being torn limb from limb.

Vaughn’s reluctance to close the beach is an example of the type of short-term thinking that should be avoided in the business world. Vaughn is working under the premise that if the town of Amity closes the beaches because of concerns about shark attacks, it will scare away the tourists on which the town depends. Which is true. But Vaughn

ignores the cold reality that if tourists find out that there is a shark in the water and the town allowed people to go swimming, not only will they stay away in droves, they'll also lose trust in the town's management and never come back.

Businesses have to engender trust in their customers. Violate that sense of trust by ignoring the obvious facts—or even just the likely trends—and the repercussions can be both serious and long lasting.

Mayor Vaughn obviously never learned from the management at Johnson & Johnson, who, when faced with evidence that Tylenol had been tampered with in 1982, immediately pulled the product off the shelves. The Tylenol executives figured that they could survive the short-term hit, but would never survive the backlash if they denied the seriousness of the problem. When a new tamper-proof version of Tylenol came back to store shelves, there remained a sense of trust on the part of the consumers because Johnson & Johnson played it straight.

To be fair, although Mayor Vaughn generally is painted as the bad guy in *Jaws* because he ignores the sharp-toothed reality swimming just off shore, almost everybody is in some sort of denial. While this denial drives the plot forward, it also offers a primer on how to not deal with serious or even not-so-serious business situations.

Think about it. Quint, the great shark hunter played to crusty perfection by Robert Shaw, continues to chase the enormous great white shark with a small boat and just two crewmen. That's world-class denial.

Hooper, the oceanic expert with a passion for sharks, shows a sense of denial several times when he gets into the water with the shark. Sure, he's getting into an anti-shark cage, but the evidence is pretty strong that it isn't going to be nearly "anti" enough.

"You go inside the cage"? Quint asks. "Cage goes in the water, you go in the water. Shark's in the water. Our shark." And then he sings: "Farewell and adieu to you, fair Spanish ladies. Farewell and adieu, you ladies of Spain. For we've received orders for to sail back to Boston. And so nevermore shall we see you again."

About the only main character who doesn't seem to be in denial is Chief Brody, and even he has a moment of self-delusion when he's asked why, if he is scared of the water, he lives on an island. "It's only an island when you look at it from the water," he says.

Yeah, right.

But it also is Brody who has the movie's primal moment of clarity. It's when he's shoveling bait into the water and gets his first close-up look at the shark's massive body, black eyes, and very, very sharp teeth.

"I think we're going to need a bigger boat," he says.

Truer words never have been spoken.

In business, as in *Jaws*, denial can get you eaten for lunch.

BABE (1995)



Be Different

RB	RULE BREAKERS
Suggested for all business audiences	

THERE IS A PHRASE THAT SHOULD NEVER BE UTTERED in business. It consists of the seven forbidden words:

“That’s the way we’ve always done it!”

You know you have heard the phrase and it is possible that you have even said it. The cumulative impact of the phrase is a non-stop assault on creativity, innovation, and rule breaking—the very activities virtually every company should encourage.

There is a cure for this unbridled corporate conservatism in the form of the delightful movie *Babe*. Every time the phrase “*That’s the way we’ve always done it!*” is uttered, force that person to watch *Babe*. In fact, watch it yourself. It’s worth it.

On the surface, *Babe* appears to be a child’s movie. It isn’t, although it is great for children, too. It’s the story of a pig, Babe, who is the runt of the litter destined for the slaughterhouse. Babe is saved from this fate when he is given to a local fair to be handed out as a prize, which is won by taciturn farmer Arthur Hoggett, wonderfully played by James Cromwell.

Once at Hoggett’s farm, Babe does something unusual: he stops

behaving like a pig, for the simple reason that he doesn't know he's a pig. He consorts with all manner of animals like Ma the old sheep, Ferdinand the duck, and the litter of sheepdogs living in the barn. With his polite manners and naïve ways, Babe becomes a friend to all the animals, many of whom do not get along and clearly do not respect each other. (Hmmm, sounds more like an office with each passing moment.)

Farmer Hoggett begins to notice Babe's social abilities when Babe divides all the chickens in the yard into groups of similar colors. Soon, Farmer Hoggett gives Babe a chance to show his stuff at the most important animal job on the farm, herding the sheep.

That's where Babe the pig and *Babe* the movie shine. By breaking all the rules—"the way things are," as the animals remind him—Babe becomes an outstanding herder. Although the dogs consider the sheep too dumb to understand anything other than a nasty approach and the sheep consider the dogs too stupid to talk with, Babe bridges the divide with friendship and manners. Slowly but surely, even the most reluctant animals begin to understand the wisdom of Babe.

Babe is a simple story, but it contains an important lesson. Think of how many businesses have stuck to the way things always are and completely missed the opportunity to become something entirely new, bigger, and better. Some have taken those opportunities:

- MTV didn't invent video or records, but pulled them together into an entirely new cable channel. CBS, in contrast, owned a television network and a record company, but missed the chance.
- Barack Obama did not discover social networking, but his advanced use of the concept of Internet connections helped his fundraising and campaigning. John McCain's presence on YouTube or Facebook was a fraction of Obama's.
- Google wasn't the first company to offer a search engine for the Internet, but its speed and efficiency helped create a cyberspace dynamo that dwarfs AltaVista, Yahoo, or even Microsoft.

MTV, the Obama campaign, and Google all had their *Babe* moments. They ignored “the way things are always done” and built astounding success by identifying possibilities and filling them with a value proposition that viewers, listeners, and shoppers learned to love.

Babe connects on many levels. The parallel of animal and human behavior has been shown often in the movies, from *Charlotte’s Web* to *Animal Farm*. But *Babe* delivered a winning story told in a creative style and with a lesson that could stand the test of time. In fact, the movie was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture, an uncommon honor for a “children’s” movie.

Be on the lookout for those seven deadly words of business, those seven words that limit your horizons and suck the creativity and spirit out of your people. When someone says, “*That’s the way we’ve always done it!*” launch a counter-attack with the story of a pig that refused to accept things the way they were.