

# LIFE through the Arches

## Six Freedom Principles for Successful Entrepreneurs

BY

Ken Brown

True Freedom

I was fourteen years old when we were evicted from my uncle's ice cream store. My mother, sisters, and I had been living there, in the back room. But my uncle hadn't kept up with the rent, and we had to leave. By then, we had become experienced with moving on. We had already been evicted from several homes, and we had lived with several other relatives. We lived on welfare and struggled to live a normal life.

From my uncle's store, we walked down Seventy-Ninth Street, carrying our bags of clothing. Seventy-Ninth Street was not where you wanted to be. It was a place of seediness and crime. We trudged past liquor stores, pawnshops, and check-cashing centers. We walked along the broken concrete sidewalk where, later, gangs and drug dealers would claim their nighttime territory.

Our next stop in our nomadic life was the apartment of my uncle's girlfriend, Miss Pearl. She lived at the corner of Seventy-Ninth and Ashland Avenue, and she was kind enough to take

us in temporarily. She escorted us to her apartment and unlocked the metal security gate that protected her front door. Then she unlocked the door and let us in. Light shone into the apartment through the bars on her window. We piled our bags in a corner on her living room floor—the same floor that we later used for a bed. We had no home and no money, and I felt locked behind the bars of the window and the gate. I did not feel free. It felt like the end of the road.

But it wasn't the end. It was just the beginning. The beginning of great things to come.

Fast-forward twenty years. By then, I had graduated from college. I had enjoyed a successful career in the food industry, and I dreamed of opening my own restaurant. By following certain life principles, and through the love of supportive people, I overcame the poverty and obstacles of my youth. I was living in freedom!

In my last book, *LIFE: Living In Freedom Everyday*, I introduced those life principles. Through my experiences, I had formulated six vital principles that propelled me along the road of freedom. To achieve success, I had to have faith, vision, purpose, and passion. In addition, I had to take ownership of my life and associate with people who would lift me up and not keep me down. That was the only way I could escape from poverty.

Those principles worked for me—worked beyond my wildest dreams. By the time I was only thirty-four years old, I took ownership of two McDonald's restaurants. My entrepreneurial vision had come true. Although I had achieved success up to that point, there was no guarantee it would continue once I became an owner. It was my dream, but I would face many obstacles. In some ways, it was like living at Miss Pearl's again. At first, I didn't have much to call my own. I

had no staff, no employees, and no business plan. I had just moved to Michigan from Chicago, and my family had yet to join me. I knew very few people in the state. I was alone. I felt as vulnerable as I did sleeping on the floor of that apartment.

To succeed, I relied again on those six principles that had enabled me to overcome the challenges of my childhood.

Fast-forward nine more years. On an evening in December, I attended a party with a hundred other people—a room full of colleagues, employees (past and present), customers, family members, and friends. They were there to celebrate my retirement at the age of forty-three. They cheered and gave speeches and celebrated the success we had achieved together.

I had sold my two stores to the tune of \$4.4 million. I sold one of the stores for more money than any McDonald's in Michigan had ever sold for. I had dramatically increased the annual sales of both the restaurants to more than \$5 million. I had taken one old, underperforming restaurant, and one new restaurant with an inexperienced staff, and turned them into two of the highest performing restaurants in the region.

But my success wasn't just about money. Through entrepreneurship, I had been given the opportunity to make a difference in people's lives.

At the party, Kevin Butts, an entrepreneur in my network of fellow business owners, said, "Across the city of Detroit, Ken has had one of the most profound impacts on this community, especially among young African-American men and women."

Also, one of my managers, Robert Smith, said, "I've worked with many operators during my twenty-three years with McDonald's. But I've never worked with an owner who has such a pulse on the people. He is a man who always puts his people before his profits."

My vision had been to develop my business into a role model for outstanding restaurant operations. And I succeeded! But how did I achieve this success with my entrepreneurial dream? I didn't achieve it by getting a finance degree first. I didn't achieve it by ruthlessly driving my employees to succeed. And I didn't achieve it through a detailed knowledge of marketing. I did it by strictly adhering to the same six freedom principles of success.

Today, I've moved on to my next entrepreneurial vision. I am a life and business coach, speaking to large groups and working with people one-on-one to teach them how those principles can give us freedom. The freedom to live a full life every day. And the freedom to achieve our entrepreneurial dreams.

Are you ready to experience the freedom of entrepreneurship? Would you like to open a business or buy an existing one? Would you like to turn your passion into profits, but you are nervous about starting? Or are you already an entrepreneur, but you'd like to take your venture to the next level? Do you still have that burning desire to be a successful entrepreneur, but you don't yet have all the know-how and the mindset to pull it off? Then keep reading. This book will provide a road map to get to that next level.

Many people go into business ownership because they desire greater freedom. They want to be their own boss. But then the responsibilities of ownership overwhelm them. Or they want financial independence. But then the desire for financial independence morphs into

obsessive micro-management and putting profits first. For many entrepreneurs, true freedom is elusive.

Many budding entrepreneurs miss the need for having a freedom plan to achieve success. Financial wealth alone does not provide freedom—just look at the many wealthy people who live unhappy lives. In order for entrepreneurs to find happiness, they must live their life and run their business a certain way.

Within these pages, I will not cover the intricate details of writing a business plan. I will not walk you through how to get an SBA loan. I will not compare and contrast the most effective marketing techniques. Those are important things to know, and there are many great books that discuss the finer mechanics of running a business. But this book is different.

This book will discuss things rarely taught in business schools, yet things that are absolutely essential to achieving success and happiness. Things ignored too often by entrepreneurs who fail. Or, just as bad, ignored by entrepreneurs who grow rich but at too high a cost to themselves, their employees, and their families. Within these pages, you'll read about my life through the Golden Arches of McDonald's and how I specifically applied those principles to achieve incredible success. And you'll read how those principles can be applied to any business venture. Through faith, vision, purpose, passion, ownership, and associations, you will succeed.

## Faith

The first requirement for successful business ownership is faith. Entrepreneurs must have faith in themselves, in their employees, and most important, faith in the Lord. God

designed each of us to be creative beings, and He has given us everything we need to be successful. Unfortunately, fear often constrains many entrepreneurs.

As a business owner, you will enjoy wonderful mountaintop experiences. But you will also face obstacles and challenging valley experiences. Fear will trap you in those valleys. But an unyielding belief in God and yourself will help you walk through them so you can arrive at the next mountain.

Faith directs us to creative solutions. It keeps us targeted on our goals. It gives us joy and allows us to live a life without regrets.

## Vision

What does your future business look like to you? Or have you crystallized a vision of the future of your current business? Do you know where you are headed?

Knowing where you are going—having a picture in your mind—allows you to dream big and act boldly. As entrepreneurs, we must visualize our business just like a track and field athlete visualizes winning the race. A large profit is not a vision—an athlete doesn't visualize standing with the trophy, but he visualizes the race. Likewise, successful entrepreneurs develop a detailed vision of what their dream looks like, and profit becomes the fruit of following that vision.

Without a vision, the Bible says, people will perish.<sup>1</sup> And so will a business. As a business coach, I have witnessed too many aimless businesses driven to the brink of failure due to a lack of visual imagination.

## Purpose

Just as it is with vision, making a profit is not the purpose of an entrepreneur. Our purpose isn't even to build a successful business.

Our purpose is to follow God's calling on our lives and to make a difference. Impact drives income! We are called to live a life of significance and provide a valuable experience or product to our customers.

We need to make a difference in the lives of our external customers—the ones buying our products or services. The typical company loses half of its customers every five years. Customer service, in general, is in terrible shape right now. People want to be treated right. And they want their lives improved (even in small ways) by spending money on what you offer.

We also need to make a difference in the lives of our internal customers—our employees—the people delivering what we sell. Our employees are our greatest asset, and we need to develop them and improve their lives.

## Passion

When we are in sync with our God-given gifts, we get a fire in the belly that drives us to succeed. The desire to be our own boss, or the longing to get out of a bad job situation, doesn't

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 29:18, all scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

provide us with lasting passion. Nor is passion found by following the latest business trend in The Wall Street Journal. Passion is found inside of us.

When people stick with jobs or follow business ventures that don't align with their gifts, they fall victim to indifference and procrastination—two of the most potent business killers. Passion and a lack of passion are both contagious. Customers and employees sense when there's no energy and optimism in a business, and they will eventually turn away from it. But passionate entrepreneurs will draw enthusiastic customers and valuable employees to it. Passionate entrepreneurs will set themselves on fire, and people will pay to watch them burn.

#### Ownership

Of course entrepreneurs own their business. But that's not the most important type of ownership. Entrepreneurs are the CEOs of their lives. They must be intentional about their thoughts, habits, and actions. We need to remember to cast a leader's shadow. Our employees will determine what is most important by, not what we say, but what we do—especially what we do when we don't think anyone is looking.

We also must take 100 percent responsibility for learning new things and becoming subject matter experts. We must establish our personal brand. Brands like McDonald's and Coca-Cola are known the world over for specific things. How will you be different? What expertise will set you apart?

We also need to take 100 percent responsibility for how we spend our time. To be successful, entrepreneurs must live balanced lives. We cannot be wedded to the business 24/7, but must also spend quality time focusing on our families, communities, and spirituality.



## Associations

Who influences you the most? Do you pay attention to the type of people you hang with? Entrepreneurs carry a lot of responsibility on their backs, and they can feel isolated from peers. People who discourage and deplete us, even if they are family members or good friends, can hurt our chances of success. Although it can be hard to do, we must minimize our associations with people who bring us down. However, by developing healthy associations with people who encourage and teach us, we can climb to the next level.

You don't need to hang with a bunch of yes men. You need to hang with people who will support and challenge you. Healthy associations can also help you in developing new business opportunities and raising capital.

In the following chapters, we'll look at each of those principles in detail. During my years as a McDonald's owner, I rarely focused on money. Instead, I focused on the freedom I found by following those concepts. And yet, today, I have all the money I could ever need.

Living in freedom occurs when you get up in the morning and go to life and not a job. You go to life and get paid for it. I've learned the hard way how to live in freedom. I've learned through the struggles of living without money and without the comforts of a home. And I've learned through the struggles of becoming a McDonald's owner at a young age and learning on the job. I traveled through the arches, through entrepreneurship, and came out the other side a wealthy and free man. Now I want to pass along the knowledge I gained.

Entrepreneurship, when done right, is a wonderful adventure. Turn the page and let the adventure begin!