



## The Power of Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

By Robert Gelinis

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### ***One of the Secrets of Rapid Business Growth is the Institution of Quantum Leaps, not Incremental Baby-Steps***

This article is about an important secret to empowering yourself and your organization to move to a completely different level of business performance, far from where you are today.

However, what you are about to read is not about “visualization” or “positive thinking” or even “faith” – albeit, if you believe in any or all of those things, that’s not a bad thing, and they might even help.

No, this article isn’t about attitude, it’s more about choices and practical action. It’s not about hope, so much as it is about adopting a radically different perspective from the one you now hold and then adapting your behavior to conform to that new perspective.

If you are a leader in a small to medium-sized organization, or perhaps just going to market with a new product or service, you may be wrestling with frustration and discouragement as you struggle for greater market visibility, desperately seeking the opportunity to demonstrate stronger credibility, and basically just wishing to be taken seriously.

You may shake your head in wonder as you watch your vastly more mature and well-funded competition win sumptuous deals on seemingly the sheer power of their reputation and market momentum alone, while you scramble to scrape up the crumbs that fall from their tables, which may just be barely enough to keep you from starving. Any of this sound familiar?

If so, then you need to discover that part of the problem that keeps you trapped in the “minor leagues” while the big boys play in the “major leagues” really has a lot more to do with perception than reality.

Psychology teaches us (and Sales 101 consistently affirms) that in most people’s minds, “Perception *IS* reality.” If this were not demonstrably true, then Marketers would have no function. It is from the basis of perceptions (real or imagined) that buyers are influenced to accept the alleged value of any proposition or offer. If that value is perceived as portrayed and believed, then human behavior is stimulated accordingly – preferably buying behavior.

So in the case of the small company that is highly desirous of one day becoming a big company, it is the very perception of smallness that perpetuates the reality of smallness. Furthermore, it is the belief in the myth of incremental development in key perception areas (which somehow never materializes) that is what really binds you to your present domain.

What may surprise you is that the “perception of smallness” of which we speak here isn’t confined solely to the market’s perception of your company and its offerings; rather, their behavior is the perfectly understandable and appropriate reaction to YOUR perception and of who you are, and of the image you therefore subsequently portray of yourself, of your organization and its offerings.



Part of the confusion when it comes to perceptions stems from an unfounded acceptance that: “Quantity Always Equals Quality.” That is, if a company is big, with lots of revenue, lots of employees, etc. that means they must be good. Conversely, if a company is small, with little revenue and not a lot of employees they must be bad. Of course, it is true that there are in fact plenty of very successful companies that are also big, and also many little ones that haven’t “broken out” despite their best efforts – and so, obviously, you might conclude that the little ones must be doing something wrong! Right?

Not necessarily.

For example, there are several major banks and automobile manufacturers out there these days – many of whom are household names – who have billions in revenues every year, who employ tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of people, and yet are teetering on the brink of collapse. Some have collapsed. Being big didn’t save them. For others, even government bailouts only perpetuated their time on life support prior to their demise.

On the other hand, there are many investment groups, law firms, medical practices, consulting organizations, retailers, and even product manufacturing organizations and service providers that are very successful and are considered leaders in their respective fields, and yet only have a relative handful of actual employees. Nevertheless, being physically small compared to major corporations didn’t keep them from grabbing the brass ring and providing their clients with tremendous value, of which they were compensated handsomely.

While it is very true that there does indeed exist a “Caste System” in business, between the Major League and the Minor League, the Pros and the Amateurs – participating in either league is determined more by active choice rather than by passive circumstance.

How can this be?

Remember the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*, which won the Oscar for Best Picture in 1982? This was the film about the two British runners at the 1924 Olympics. In one very poignant scene of that movie, one of the two runners, the character of Harold Abrahams played by Ian Cross, is brought into the university’s head master’s office, and the stuffy character played by Sir John Gielgud proceeds to lecture him about “what is proper” in his athletic preparations. Young Abrahams is scolded for hiring a personal running coach and adopting “A Professional Attitude” toward competing; whereas, their traditional preference was for “...the way of the Amateur,” as if that were somehow more noble and befitting their sanctimonious reputations.

That dichotomy is a perfect illustration of the Pros and Amateurs of business today. One group sees themselves as Pros, acts like Pros, and works with Pros – the other group considers itself an Amateur, acts like an Amateur, and for the most part tries to go it alone. The result is no surprise. The Pros are taken seriously, have credibility, and are highly visible. The Amateurs are all but invisible.

Yet the Catch-22 of this paradigm for the Amateurs is that the Amateurs will never be visible, credible and taken seriously until they begin to see themselves as Pros, act like Pros, and rub shoulders with Pros in various aspects of their business. You see, there simply is no intermediate “semi-pro” league to dwell in while making the transition from Amateur to Pro.



It's your choice. You either play in the Amateur ranks for fun, or you "turn Pro" and take on the best, and to the winner go the spoils.

This really is a fairly simple concept to grasp.

For example, World-Class Customer Service is expected from the Pros. Is it forbidden for the Small/Amateur organizations to be attentive to their clients' needs? Are they barred from helping their customers solve business problems? Can the little guys return phone calls, follow-up, and be proactive just like the big guys? Of course they can.

The Pros provide top quality products and services. Are the products and services from the smaller companies radically inferior? If they are, then someone never should have tried to bring them to market in the first place. But in reality, many small companies, who just happen to be young, are bringing new innovations and disruptive technologies to market that are in many ways superior to the offerings of the veteran market leaders. Isn't that why they brought their invention to life and got it funded in the first place?

The real question therefore is: Is your product or service of true commercial/professional value? Does it address a real business and market need? If so, then the only thing prohibiting you from going toe-to-toe visibly, credibly, and seriously with the best-of-the-best is human perceptions. And those perceptions start with you and your employees.

There's an old proverb that is very pertinent to this discussion. It goes like this: "Surround yourself with Giants and you shall become one. Surround yourself with Dwarves and you shall become one."

Now as much as that saying is applicable to wise hiring practices, in principle it applies to everything. The point is that people naturally acclimate to their environments. What is your environment? Do you see yourself and your company as small and minor league, but hoping to work hard and one day be in the big leagues? Or do you see yourself and your company as a World-Class entity already, providing unique and precious value to the market, but you just happen to be in an early development stage? See the difference?

The son of a King is still a Prince, even during his childhood. And even a boy Prince is respected and revered by his people long before ascending to the throne – and they do so for no other reason than that's who they know him to be. And how do they know this? They're told it. They see it. They hear it. They "perceive" it to be true.

Of course, there's the tendency to be wary of such illusory perspectives, and you might very well be sorely tempted to think: "We can't go around acting like an industry leader when we're just a small, young company. That would be disingenuous, probably misleading and fraudulent, if not self-delusional."

But weren't all the captains of industry today once small princes at one time in the past? How on earth did IBM yield its throne as the kings of the computer industry to a little start-up called Microsoft? And did Microsoft ever show any reticence about growing as fast and prolific as it possibly could, devouring everything in its path? Do you think even a young Bill Gates and Paul Allen ever felt "unworthy" to play in the big leagues against the competitive Titans of their day?



Your present circumstance can never be allowed to define who you really are and ultimately what you're capable of doing. It only defines where you are on a journey, of which no particular point on that journey – save its very end – is any greater or worse than any other point, in good times or bad.

The Good Book says, "You shall know a tree by its fruits." That phrase has more than one important inference to take careful note of here. The first point is the realization that a fruit on a tree is first seen from a distance; if it is deemed attractive it is then picked and felt and smelled; and if it is then determined to be ripe and desirable, it is then eaten. Many senses come into play in this qualification/disqualification process. Sight, from a distance. Touch and smell, up close and personal. And finally taste, the final arbiter of what is a true and delicious value.

Is the process of market perception of your company really much different? First you are seen, in terms of your visible presence: website, literature, marketing communication, artifacts, your sales people, right down to business cards and stationary. If what is seen is attractive from a distance, then intimacy of interaction can follow in the form of sales engagement: phone calls, emails, face-to-face meeting, presentations, events, etc. Is the up-close and personal experience to their liking? If so, then a relationship may ensure whereby they decide to "take a bite of the apple" and try what you have to offer. A sale!

So once again we are back to the matter of perceptions. What do people really see when they observe how you portray yourself? Do they see an Amateur or a Pro?

You get to decide that. No, it's true. In so many more ways than you think, it really is up to you.

For example, do the top companies' business cards cost more than yours? Probably so, if yours are printed on a cheap ink-jet printer on your desk on perforated cards from the office supply store. On the other hand, having top quality cards printed by a reputable printer can often cost less per card than self-printed ones when you factor in the cost of your ink and blanks. But more importantly, what do your business cards, logo, and themes look like? Have they been professionally designed? To do so is a relatively small expense, and yet something so small and seemingly insignificant just might make all the difference in the world in terms of a prospect's perceptions of you.

How about your website? Did you get it professionally done? Or did you do it yourself one afternoon with a downloaded template and a few copied graphics? Do you realize that one of the first things new prospects do after learning something interesting about a new company or product is to go check them out on the web and "see if you're for real"? What does your site tell them: Amateur or Pro? And again, a professional website design doesn't have to be a major investment. But Pros make such investments.

How about all of your other literature, presentations and collaterals? What do they say about you and your offerings? Amateur or Pro?

Obviously, even if you are successful at making yourself appear to be an A-Player with a truly top-shelf offering, and yet when it comes time to deliver you are deemed to be "all sizzle and no steak" you're in trouble. So we're going to assume for the sake of discussion that what you have to offer really is genuinely credible, valuable, and would be desirable if only the market could get past their misperceptions of anything to the contrary.



That means your obstacle isn't really formidable competitors beating you to all the deals. It's the perception of the market of your competitors in positive contrast to how you've negatively portrayed yourself and your company.

So face the fact: Your transition from small/amateur to big/pro isn't an incremental evolutionary process. It's a quantum leap, that begins with a change in your fundamental perspective of who you are, and then the decision to start acting like it. The subsequent revenue growth and employee expansion are the natural byproducts of such decisions and behaviors – not the precursors of it.

The bottom line is this: Just remember the wise words of Richard O'Brien from his classic stage play and movie, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*: “Don't Dream It, Be It.”

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#### About the Author

Robert Gelinas is the President and CEO of JPE Inc. Consulting ([www.jpeincconsulting.com](http://www.jpeincconsulting.com)). He has spent over 20 years in the IT industry as a senior executive and sales and marketing leader, having built many national and international Enterprise IT sales and marketing organizations. He has both an extensive Fortune 500 background as well as a wealth of successful Start-Up experience. He is also a published novelist, writer, publisher ([www.archebooks.com](http://www.archebooks.com)) and frequent public speaker on both IT marketing and the writing and publishing industry.