

Landing On Your Feet

Landing On Your Feet

An Amazing Story of Business Mistakes, Survival, and Success

Michael G. Kerrison



Landing On Your Feet

An Amazing Story of Business Mistakes, Survival, and Success

By Michael G. Kerrison

Published by

Broadview Press, Inc.

7760 France Avenue South

Suite #1119

Bloomington, MN 55435 U.S.A.

Orders@BroadviewPressInc.com

<http://BroadviewPressInc.com>

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

Unattributed quotations are by Michael G. Kerrison

Design by Hugh Bennewitz

Copyright 2003 by Michael G. Kerrison

First Printing: 2003

Certain names and situations have been changed to provide confidentiality. Any perceived slight to any person was unintentional.

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication

(Provided by Quality Books, Inc.)

Kerrison, Michael G.

**Landing on your feet : a story of business mistakes,
survival, and success / by Michael G. Kerrison.**

p. cm.

Includes index.

LCCN 2003090358

ISBN 0-9728566-9-2

1. New business enterprises. 2. Entrepreneurship.
3. Success in business. I. Title.

HD62.5.K47 2003

658.1'1

QB103-200125

**To my dearest ones-
Chad, Cammy, Madelyn, and Chelsea**

“Success is never ending. Failure is never final.”

-Robert Schuller

Table of Contents

Foreword **xiii**

Introduction **xv**

Part One *Filling In The Blanks*

- 1. A Few Notches Above Poverty** **5**
- 2. Bless Me, Father, for I Have Sinned** **19**
- 3. A Rough Start** **27**
- 4. Adversity Taught Me Well** **35**
- 5. Rowing My Own Boat** **45**

Part Two *The Business Years*

- 6. Everything Happens for a Reason** **61**
- 7. Drifting** **77**
- 8. Flying Solo** **87**
- 9. Riding the Series/1** **109**
- 10. Going a Little Crazy** **115**
- 11. The Meltdown** **125**
- 12. The Turning Point** **143**
- 13. Saved by Sorbus** **153**
- 14. Tubby's Tutorial** **159**
- 15. Rebuilding the Business** **173**
- 16. More Ups than Downs** **189**
- 17. Leading NCC** **201**
- 18. Putting it all Together** **209**
- In Closing** **221**

Part Three *The Toolkit*

Selling Tools **225**
Planning Tools **265**
Management Tools **281**

Index **291**

Foreword

By Larry Wilson, founder of Wilson Learning Corporation

In 1975, I watched a young man glide down a long aisle smooth and straight before flying up a stairs to an awaiting stage. Earsplitting music pulsed in the room, while strobe lights danced on the walls. I was at the annual IBM Hundred Percent Club, and I had just finished my keynote address to over one-thousand salespeople. As the man approached us, the MC revealed his remarkable credentials and accomplishments. I observed with interest and admiration. At 232 percent of quota, this person at age twenty-three had set a new level of performance at IBM, earning him the coveted award of “Rookie-of-the-Year.” He was the best of the best. His name was Mike Kerrison.

I have spent my life’s work trying to help people grasp the significance of their lives and to use their courage and creativity to face challenges, handle adversity, and grow as individuals. I have written five books and given countless speeches with these intentions in mind. Mike had been one of my students, and now, years later, I could be one of his. I have gotten to know Mike and his remarkable story. He has come a long way since that day in 1975. This book, *Landing On Your Feet* is one of the most authentic portrayals of what’s really involved to start and build a business that I have ever read. Not only will it deliver powerful tools to help you run your business, but it will show you how to run your life with passion, meaning, and purpose.

We live in confusing and turbulent times. The trust and confidence we once had for America’s corporations has been weakened. Many of our greatest companies are floating in a sea of red ink, now bobbing in the wreckage of their own greed. As a result, entrepreneurs are on the rise, seeking to fulfill their own dreams, no longer willing to be vulnerable to the whims of big business. But big or little, these companies all need help.

Paradoxically, we also live in a time of great opportunity. Mike Kerrison understands this. So he wrote this book for us, showing us how to succeed by learning from our mistakes, accepting our shortcomings, appreciating our gifts, and teaching us to never give up. He proves to each of us that we can accomplish whatever we put our mind to. His ideas are simply presented, easy to use, and can make a profound difference in our business and in our life. For some of us, Mike’s story could be life changing.

I am excited about this book and the influence it will have on thou-

sands of readers. It represents the distillation of twenty-five years of work by one of our finest entrepreneur's. You will laugh out loud, cry in private, and rejoice in the fact that the average person can have true success and fulfillment in life. *Landing On Your Feet* will help you achieve both. Read, learn, apply, and enjoy. God bless!

Larry Wilson
Boca Grande, Florida
May 2003

Introduction

When people ask me how I started my business, I don't launch into a lecture on business planning or raising capital. I just tell them what happened. Not long into the story, they usually request that I back up and fill in some of the blanks-you know, jobs, childhood, where I grew up, things like that. In other words, where did this all begin? They gather and sort through the information, as if searching for clues, drawing parallels between the events of my life and their own.

Their expressions ask, "Should I start a business?" or, "Do I have what it takes to do this, too?" They wonder if there is some magic to it all, some mystical formula, but starting a business requires no magic. It's done every day by average people who do extraordinary things because they are tired of being average. That is why I wrote this book-because despite what you may think, you are not average, and you can start a business, too.

I am hardly alone in this endeavor. Much has been written on this subject. Bookstores are jammed with success stories, many of which sit on my own shelf. I call them "business cookbooks"-recipes for success. A *dollop* of this and a *pinch* of that is often all that separates them-the author of each a specialty chef, spicing up the same old recipe. I have read all of them, and-as with any good cookbook-when I grab them off the shelf, my favorites have broken bindings, loose pages, dog-eared corners, coffee stains, and lots of notes. They provide a ready index of recipes to help me run my business, to be sure. But they are all missing a major ingredient. I feel underfed. You see, I rarely find a personal story, just the mechanics-which is never enough. I want to know these entrepreneurs and what really happened inside their business. Often these books tend to glorify the successes and shun the failures. That's where the real story gets lost. Our longing for victors over goats conceals the truth.

I want the truth. All the "desperate bits"-the authors' mistakes, their pain, their passion, their drive, their loneliness, their despair, their meltdowns, their recoveries, their fears, their families, the people who helped them, the people who hurt them. I'm trying to find someone out there like me! Someone who is going through the same things I am. I, too, am searching for clues, comparing notes. Don't misunderstand me; I enjoy reading books about Bill Gates, Lee Iaccoca, Sam Walton, and Jack Welsh. I admire them and their remarkable stories greatly. But I have trouble relating to them. The comparisons are too vague, the appli-

cations too abstract.

Whenever I shared my story with family and friends, I got a consistent reaction: “Mike, you should write this down—all of it.” That always seemed to be a heady proposition, because I didn’t seek to gratify my own vanity through my story since most people dislike vanity in others. That said, though, I have decided to yield to the weakness so natural to most entrepreneurs to tell you about myself and the good fortune I’ve had in business.

Yes, this is a rags-to-riches story. No, it is not unprecedented (I’m not Bill Gates). But I can tell you that all three of my technology companies prospered, reached multimillion-dollar levels, received statewide and national recognition, and eventually produced several millionaires. They sprang forth for different reasons and at different times, falling into each other like dominoes. What I find most exciting is that they serve as incontestable proof of my original premise: The average person can do extraordinary things. My story is one you can relate to—and one you can apply. It’s a compass for you to follow so that one day you will have your own story.

I am going to take you on a journey that will uncover the “desperate bits.” I will tell you without censorship what I did and how I did it. I will not try to be glib or clever, and I will not load you up with a bunch of popular business philosophy. Instead, I will give you the truth about myself and the straightforward, no-nonsense answers that work in business (and in life)—answers that have always worked but have been buried in a deluge of en vogue business theory.

This is not an autobiography or an instruction manual for business start-ups. Instead, it’s an extended *curriculum vitae*, showing how one entrepreneur was formed. It’s an opportunity for you to compare notes, with an inside look at how my childhood, ambition, desire, luck, and some talent all played a part in starting and building a business—which built a life.

As I reflect on all of this, if given the choice I would have no issue with going back and correcting many of the decisions of my life—no differently than an author correcting in a second draft the faults of the first. While you may find things that you deem fit to be imitated should you find yourself in similar circumstances, I believe the real learning will occur by examining the mistakes that I made along the way, because our success teaches us little. That’s just the way we keep score. So in that spirit I will give you the whole, uncut version, beginning with snapshots of my formative years, with all their color and turmoil, followed by the

business years, with all the ups and downs. I then wrap up with my *toolkit*-a bunch of rusty old tools that have always worked for me. I want you to have them, and use them to build your business.

Finally, this book strives to jar you to the recognition that you, too, can fulfill your dreams, however you define them. Do not think of yourself as average, suffering the label of having “great potential” when you instead can be labeled a “great achiever.” I aim this book directly at you, the so-called average person just like me, who has a yearning to start a business and be extraordinary at something. It is also for the existing business owner wanting to revitalize his or her company and take it to the next level. The “blue-chip” executive can benefit, too-the one struggling to restore some of the energy and trust so often lost in a giant corporation. This book has something for all of you.

So if it's agreeable, I would like to start the journey. I must warn you, though, it was not always pretty. I made a lot of mistakes-some serious. But in the end it worked out better than I ever dreamed possible.