

CHUNK MEETS MACHIAVELLI?

Book Excerpt: The Dealmaker's Ten Commandments: Ten Essential Tools for Business Forged in the Trenches of Hollywood

The Dealmaker's Ten Commandments provides a practical, no-nonsense methodology for negotiating deals, managing your time and handling crisis, all at the highest level.

Authored by one of the entertainment industry's most beloved success stories, prominent transactional attorney and former child actor, Jeff B. Cohen, created *The Dealmaker's Ten Commandments* to overcome resistance and achieve his goals without losing his soul along the way.

Although developed in Hollywood, the real world tactics, strategies and guiding principles are vital for any business environment.

WARNING

“Great and good are seldom the same man.”

- Thomas Fuller

This book is about being great. This book is not about being good. They are two distinct ideas. If you want to be good, there are other books for that. It is not my aim to show you what a nice guy I am or how much I love puppies. It is my aim to provide you with real world tactics, strategies and guiding principles to help you achieve success.

Fire can keep you warm or it can burn down your house. Likewise, *The Dealmaker's Ten Commandments* can help you create a terrific professional life or a horrific personal life. The principles in this book have been developed for dealing with enemies, competitors, bosses and

subordinates. They are wholly inappropriate for dealing with lovers, friends, family and puppies for that matter.

You have been warned.

THE DEALMAKER'S METHODOLOGY

**“Man is an animal that makes bargains: no other animal does this -- no dog exchanges bones with another.”
- Adam Smith**

We are all dealmakers. It's in our DNA. Ducks swim, tigers pounce, people barter. No wonder our professional lives are overflowing with transactions. We make deals with superiors, with subordinates, with customers, with suppliers, with collaborators and competitors. The Dealmaker's Methodology is comprised of ten Commandments, ten Questions for Self-Mastery, ten Tips and a healthy sprinkling of quotations.

The Dealmaker's Commandments

**“The Ten Commandments were not a suggestion.”
- Pat Riley**

These are the intellectual foundation upon which deals are made and business is conducted.

Within them exists nuances and stratagem, but the Commandments are the laws of physics that govern how everything interacts. Disregard them at your peril.

Questions for Self-Mastery

“It is a sad fate for a man to die too well known to everybody else, and still unknown to himself.”

- Sir Francis Bacon

Through rigorous self-examination we exercise the muscles of critical thinking and introspection. The objective is to transcend the mere acquisition of knowledge and gain wisdom. Phones can be smart, only people can be wise.

Tips

If you don't know what tips are, you should buy a different book.

Quotations

“The wisdom of the wise and the experience of ages, may be preserved by quotation.”

- Isaac D'Israeli

Speaking of quotes, here's one from Pablo Picasso: *“Good artists copy, great artists steal.”* I have stolen from some of the best: Nietzsche, Lincoln, Bonaparte, Shelley and many others.

Quotation is no substitute for critical thinking, but why not use the “experience of ages” to speed us along the way?

The End Game

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then is not an act but a habit.”

- Aristotle

The Dealmaker's Ten Commandments is not a quick fix. Excellence is achieved from consistent incremental improvement. Get in the habit of incorporating the Dealmaker's Commandments into your professional life. With sufficient time it will become second nature. Opportunities that

once were hidden become visible. Traps that would have snared you are avoided. Enemy vulnerabilities that would have gone undetected reveal themselves.

I'm sure you want to jump right in, but please allow me a few pages to share how the Dealmaker's Commandment came into being. My motivations are purely selfish. I'd just like to get it off my chest. Oddly enough, the genesis involves a chance encounter between a broken former child actor and a ruthless political philosopher.

CHUNK MEETS MACHIAVELLI

**“When I was 14, I was the oldest I ever was. I’ve been getting younger ever since.”
- Shirley Temple**

There's a famous old Hollywood story about a dreadful meeting between Shirley Temple and her mega-agent, Lew R. Wasserman, the mogul of MCA. According to her biography, he told the pubescent Shirley Temple that she was “washed up.” After all those hits, she had come to the end of her usefulness. The greatest child star of all time was unceremoniously fired as a client. She began to cry. Lew pushed a box of tissues her way. “Have one on me.” said the great mogul.

For me, 15 was the oldest I ever was. After having some success as a child actor, my career was kaput. As a little boy, I was a cute, chubby kid and did a fair amount of work in the biz. My most notable role was playing “Chunk” in the Richard Donner/Steven Spielberg film *The Goonies* in 1985. Top of the world at age 11!

But just when things we're starting to hum, I faced a child actor's greatest nemesis...puberty. "Chunk" was growing into a young man and losing some of his chunkiness. Those formally cute chubby cheeks, now had acne on them. Auditioning for parts became awkward and nerve-wracking. I even began to develop a stutter. I couldn't get jobs. Things were a mess. Some child stars transcend adolescence and go on to have great careers in front of the camera as adults. I did not.

**"The magic of first love is our ignorance that it can ever end."
- Benjamin Disraeli**

Acting was my first love and I was completely blindsided when it abruptly ended. Everyone liked me. I could contribute. I was good at something. I had worth. But, after puberty, there were no parts for me. I enthusiastically gave up my childhood to go on auditions and build a career. Now it was over. A has-been before I got my learner's permit. Looking back it seems kind of silly, but at the time it felt quite serious. The love of the audience had been lost and so was I.

That's when I met Machiavelli...

**"Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are."
- Niccolò Machiavelli**

I was a Senior at Taft High in the San Fernando Valley and had the good fortune of being accepted into an honors program that allowed me to take an actual bona fide college class at UCLA. Exciting! What class to take? So many options. I wanted to study something different

from acting that I could be good at. How about Political Science? Ex-actors do really well in politics in California. Ronald Reagan, the Governor, etc... Intro to Poli Sci it is.

One of the first books we read was a slim 120 pager called *The Prince* written by Niccolò Machiavelli during the politically volatile early Italian Renaissance. It's sort of a "how-to" book for a prince. How to run your state effectively. How to wage war and gain power. Unlike Aristotle and Plato, Machiavelli didn't believe in creating an idealistic Utopia. He is the father of political realism. His experience in Italian politics had led him to the conclusion that:

“in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely...”

- Niccolò Machiavelli

It was the first thing I had read that made any damn sense in as long as I could remember.

People are selfish and shortsighted. They will almost always do what is in their perceived best interest.

I was taught that to not sacrifice yourself for others was an aberration and shameful. I had given everything I had. But my need for adoration was unrequited. As William Butler Yeats wrote:

“Too long a sacrifice/Can make a stone of the heart.” I was freezing up on the inside.

Machiavelli turned my world on its head. He gave me perspective.

Audiences were bored of me. It's not because they're bad people. They're just people. I didn't look cute anymore and I didn't have anything interesting to say. They should be bored of me.

Self-centered behavior is not a moral failing, but a fundamental and reasonable part of human nature. It was cold, but liberating. Things felt less shameful and more clinical. A real explanation for what I was observing all around me.

“Whoever, desires constant success must change his conduct with the times.”
- Niccolò Machiavelli

Reading *The Prince* made me feel like a prince. I’m just a high school kid, but I’ve stumbled on to this “college” book of ancient wisdom. What an amazing gift! This could help me regain my bearings as a person, regain some semblance of control over my life. Machiavelli taught me that even though the world is tumultuous and people are myopically self-interested, great things could still be achieved if you based your decisions on how things are, not how you would like them to be. Analysis and actions need to be based upon unfettered truth not cockeyed optimism.

He advocated the virtue of adaptability. He gave me hope that there was a way out. I could still be good at something, even though people didn’t see it anymore. I altered my perception of my position.

“There is the greatest practical benefit in making a few failures early in life.”
- Thomas Henry Huxley

I began to see my experience as a child actor as a great blessing. How lucky to have experienced the cycle of success and failure at such a young age. I was very fortunate to be accepted into UC Berkeley for my undergraduate, eventually becoming the president of the student body. **“Chunk for President!”** turned out to be an effective slogan. I guess being a former child actor had some perks after all.

I returned to UCLA for law school and with the help of my director from *The Goonies*, the great Richard Donner, I got a job at Universal Studios Television to bring real-world experience to my studies. More upside to this failed actor thing...

**“Art is the proper task of life.”
- Friedrich Nietzsche**

I still loved art and entertainment. Art is eternal. It's what civilizations gift to future generations to enjoy and inspire. I wanted to find a way to add value to the entertainment industry. I discovered the moguls. I read about David Geffen, Bernie Brillstein, Louis B. Mayer and even our old pal Lew R. Wasserman. All of these Hollywood luminaries had something in common. They were great dealmakers, each of them remarkably savvy in transactional combat.

Yes, that's it. I'll be a dealmaker, a damn fine one.

In 2002, I co-founded a transactional media and entertainment law firm. Let's get “ready to rumble” Hollywood!

It's been a great ride so far. Over the past dozen or so years I have developed commandments, tips and tactics that guide me as a dealmaker. They have served me and my clients well. I feel very fortunate to have been rewarded economically and to have been lauded by my peers for doing something I am passionate about. Best of all, I get to help creative people create. That feels fantastic.

“If success is not on your own terms - if it looks good to the world but does not feel good in your own heart - it is no success at all.”
- Anna Quindlin

Success is life on your own terms. The Dealmaker’s Ten Commandments have helped me successfully negotiate the terms of my life and I sincerely hope they help you successfully negotiate the terms of yours.

Now, onto DEALMAKER’S COMMANDMENT I. Our journey together begins...