



by Jay Goltz

# Goltz On Business

## *Politics, Football, Framing?*

**W**e live in a competitive world. How competitive your world is depends on how much you want out of life. Recent happenings have once again illustrated just how brutal the climb to the top can be.

For instance, former Presidential candidate Howard Dean. After months of grueling campaigning, moving up in the polls, and taking a leadership position, the stress, adrenaline, or desperation finally got the best of him, and it showed—in a speech where he came off like a maniac. It was the beginning of his demise as a candidate.

I don't think any of us can imagine what it is like to work non-stop, from city to city, constantly being in the eye of national media, working towards a goal that will probably slip through your fingers. I don't know about you, but when I work really long, hard hours, under a lot of stress, I usually get a payoff at the end. That's not usually the case when you run for office.

And then there's the biggest thing to hit TV since "The Simpsons"—Donald Trump's "The

Apprentice." Forty million viewers watch 16 "brilliant" (as Mr. Trump calls them) contestants battle for the opportunity to run one of Donald's companies and earn \$250,000 a year. If you have watched the show, you'll notice that while they are hardly brilliant, they are typical

success-driven people. The show is chock full of brutal business reality.

Success, failure, back-biting/front-biting, missing money, blame passing, bad decisions, good decisions, no decisions. And ultimately, a firing. It is amusing, if not thought provoking.

Millions of people also pay to see another type of head-to-head competition. Billions of dollars are spent on it each year. And then equally as many people spend their time

talking or writing about it. It's called sports. A lot of people spend a significant amount of their waking hours discussing one sport or another with whomever will listen.

In all of these cases, you have the same components: Success. Failure. Winners. Losers. Celebration. Condemnation. The fact is, competition is like nature; it can be as beautiful as a sunset, or as ugly as a destructive hurricane. In

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the end, it boils down to one thing: survival of the fittest. While there are a lot of motivational posters about goals, attitude, persistence, and teamwork, there isn't one for "survival of the fittest." You know why? It doesn't make a pretty picture.

In business, it's a picture many people shun away from. While millions of people watch "The Apprentice" and enjoy waiting to see who gets fired, it's not like that in business. Business can get personal. If you're the unfortunate one that has to do the firing, it's quite painful for both parties. Often you are firing someone who can't get the job done; or worse yet, someone who used to be able to get the job done that's melting down.

Because it can be personal, it can be very uncomfortable. You may know their wife or husband. Maybe the person gave you a ride home a couple of times. You know their kids' names. Or, if it's a younger person, you have met their parents, or know who their favorite rock band is. There's always an eerie feeling around the company when someone gets fired. Even with the most righteous of firings, seldom is there any positive reinforcement for the boss for doing what he or she has to do. At worst, it's ugly. At best, it's just sad.

But every competition has its moments of truth. In football, it may be the last two minutes of a championship game when the score is tied. In politics, it can be when a candidate's character is attacked and he or she decides how to respond. These "moments" exist in business as well—when you have to make a decision and go forward.

You know what it comes down to? You have to want, or probably *need*, to be successful to enjoy the game. You like the invigoration. You need the adrenaline rush, the satisfaction, the exhilaration of winning. Some people are happy being in the stands, watching the game. Others want to be closer to the action, so they are in the band. They want to be part of it, they just don't want to get hurt.

As a businessperson, you are not content watching the game, you want to be down there on the field. People in business, like football players, can deal with getting hurt as long as they have another chance at the goal. They know how to pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and get back in the game.

The fact is, in business it's not just survival of the fittest. More accurately, it's "success" of the fittest. People who crave survival don't have to be in business, or certainly don't have to aspire to a management position. Success is about pulling yourself up. You can pull others up with you or, sometimes, let them go—to crash to their untimely business death.

I told you it ain't pretty. ■

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