



Simplifying Complexity

The biggest opportunity for entrepreneurs in the 21st century.

By Dan Sullivan

Geniuses at creating solutions.

Through my work as a coach, I know hundreds of men and women who have an uncanny ability to see life through other people's eyes, to walk through life in other people's shoes. This makes them extraordinarily clear and focused in creating and implementing unique solutions. This innate talent continues to improve as each of these individuals establishes and cultivates new client relationships.

This talent, I believe, represents the single most important skill any entrepreneur can have in the 21st century.

Too complex to comprehend.

Over the past 30 years, microchip-based tools and systems have been applied to countless situations in all sectors of the global economy. And not only the economy — microtechnology, as we grow to understand its virtually unlimited applications, is now seen as a crucial factor for progress in all areas of scientific, political, cultural, and social development. Simultaneously, all these diverse applications worldwide have been integrated into vast and myriad communication networks too complex to comprehend, culminating in what has now become the Internet, with its billions of daily uses and users.

We now live in a world where, every day, new opportunities for cooperation and competition emerge that were unimaginable 50 years ago.

But this also means that we live in a world where large numbers of people are faced with three serious dangers:

- **Confusion.** The experience of endless change driven by technology confuses people in many different ways. They lose their sense of where the center of things is, and they aren't clear on where to focus their

thinking and actions. Because of this confusion about the present, they don't know how to invest their time, energies, and resources to produce a better future. For many, it's more difficult to have a sense of personal meaning that keeps getting stronger; it's harder to have a sense of purpose that stays on track.

- **Isolation.** Traditional forms of community based on mutually supportive relationships — extended families, small towns, neighborhoods, church membership, political parties, fraternal organizations, labor organizations, sports clubs — have weakened or disappeared from the lives of many people who live and work in modern settings. Even the most successful individuals often have few people they can confide in. There has been an increase in the number of temporary, transactional relationships in both personal and business spheres. People feel less commitment to long-term relationships, and they sense the same in others.
- **Powerlessness.** Conventional education is increasingly unable to prepare people confidently and competently for an unpredictable future. Knowledge and skills that were relevant five years ago can be worthless today. People who were successful in one setting find that changing circumstances are rendering them less useful and valuable. Specialists with 30 years of successful experience find that they have become redundant. Many people find that they are falling farther behind in terms of the constantly changing knowledge and methods that are crucial for success.

This is the *bad news* about the 21st century. The destructive side of change is never a pleasant experience. There's certainly a lot of destruction already, with much more to come, making life scary, miserable, dan-

gerous, and even deadly for millions of individuals. This will be true for the entire century.

Now the good news.

There's also *good news* caused by endless global change. It lies in the diverse creative opportunities that are born from the destruction of old, outdated forms that are no longer workable or valuable. An entirely new set of needs has arisen from this technological revolution, needs that require entirely different kinds of entrepreneurs.

The 21st century offers unlimited opportunity, freedom, and usefulness for the right kind of entrepreneurs — those who can resolve the complexity in others' lives.

The business of transforming complexity.

People need to feel that they're not alone with complexity. They need to feel that they are being taken care of, that other people are looking out for them, that other people care. They want to have a sense of direction, and they can't provide this for themselves. They want to feel confident, but they don't know how to do this on their own. They want to feel capable, but they need others to provide them with capabilities. They simply can't deal with all the complexity of the world straight on.

Bureaucracies and traditional communities are no longer providing a buffer between people and the complexity around them. The principal role of entrepreneurs in this century, then, will be to create the financial and psychological opportunities that motivate large numbers of individuals to keep raising their capacity to work with complexity throughout their lives.

Complexity is raw material.

My own analysis from coaching entrepreneurs over the past three decades tells me that complexity is not only something to be viewed positively, but is the single most important resource for creating new value in all marketplaces in the 21st century.

Of all the capabilities entrepreneurs can acquire, the ability to simplify complexity is the most important one. They will transform all aspects of their working and personal lives to use and increase this capability.

"Transformation" is the sector of the global economy where the greatest opportunities are emerging, and where the highest prices can be charged. Very few people at present have identified this reality and the opportunities that go with it.

With this in mind, anyone who wants to be successful in both personal and professional life from this point forward needs to have simplifying complexity as his or her central focus. The strategy is, first, to look for complexity in one's life and simplify it. Then, using the direction, confidence, and capability that come from doing this, the next strategy is to look for complexity in other people's lives and transform it into simplicity.

Entrepreneurs with this ability will be able to help their clientele escape from the dependencies of the old industrial society. They will enable clientele to free themselves from anxiety and make the crossover to the personal and professional realities of life in this new century. I believe this represents the greatest skill and the greatest opportunity for entrepreneurs over the next hundred years. ★

Adapted from the upcoming book, The Advisor Century™, to be released summer 2007.

Want to simplify your complexity?

Complexity is one of the biggest issues entrepreneurs face in a growing business. Simplifying complexity is what [The Strategic Coach® Program](#) is all about. To find out more and to learn about upcoming workshop opportunities, please call 416.531.7399 or 1.800.387.3206. For information on workshops within the U.K., please call 01625 545 600 or 0800 389 3206.

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