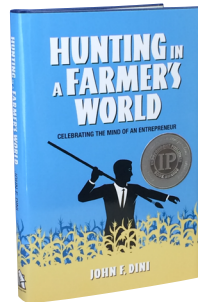


Excerpt

from:



About the Author



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JOHN F. DINI is a serial entrepreneur, although he prefers the term “chronically unemployable.” He has signed both sides of his paycheck for over 30 years.

John has spent over 11,000 hours coaching hundreds of entrepreneurs and building one of the most successful peer advisory organizations in the United States.

Mr. Dini writes numerous articles on business topics for newspapers and magazines, in addition to his weekly online column on business ownership, *Awake at 2 o'clock in the Morning?* (www.awakeat2oclock.com). He speaks frequently to business groups and national associations, and is a long time member of Jim Blasingame’s “Braintrust,” appearing regularly on *The Small Business Advocate*® nationally syndicated radio program as an expert on the issues of business ownership.

John lives in San Antonio, Texas with his beautiful wife and their two sons.

Chapter 2

“I’m a little bit ADD.”

HAVE A FRIEND who attended college with me in New Jersey. He was much more studious than I was and went to medical school. As a physician, he specialized in psychiatry. Eventually, he taught a class in Adult Attention Deficit Disorder at Johns Hopkins Medical School.

One day, we were having lunch and I said, “You know Andy, I sometimes think that I might have ADD.” He laughed. “John,” he said, “When I teach my class I have your picture mentally in front of me.”

Many of a hunter’s behavioral strengths are diagnosed as “problems,” because they do not fit easily in the farmers’ world. I’ve found that those same traits can be channeled into great results, if you recognize them and use them properly.

Farmer Prejudice

Before any business owner can join one of our peer advisory boards, I conduct a ninety-minute interview. Among the key questions that I ask are “What is your greatest strength? What makes you *good* at running your business?”

I have heard one answer so many times that I can recognize the body language even before the words are spoken. The interviewee seems to shrink a little bit in the chair. His eyes may look away. His posture and voice change into what I think of as “confession” mode.

“First, you have to understand ... I think I’m a little bit ADD.”

Then they begin their defense. “Not that I’ve been diagnosed, of course. I don’t take medication or anything. I just seem to have a problem focusing on the things that I should be focused on.”

Well, I *have* been diagnosed by an expert in the field. Attention Deficit Disorder is a label put on hunters by farmers. It is their way of saying that hunters are less able to compete in a society where farming skills dominate. They are wrong. Hunters are the best competitors, honed by eons of natural selection.

In 1997, Thom Hartmann wrote *Attention Deficit Disorder, A Different Perception*. It quickly became known as the “Hunter and Farmer Book.” I owe my original realization of the link between entrepreneurs and hunters to Mr. Hartmann’s insights.

It isn’t that all entrepreneurs are ADD, although with the massive over-diagnosis of that “condition,” most might be labeled as such using current standards. Hartmann argues that ADD children are displaying characteristics that were not only acceptable, but also desirable and prized in earlier times. I believe that entrepreneurs are displaying traits necessary both for success in private business and for the survival of our society as a whole.

The problem is not that there is something *wrong* with these traits; it’s that the common wisdom of how to utilize those skills is erroneous. In a world of farmers, the hunter is an oddity. He stands out. We are always suspicious of those who stand out when they are supposed to blend in.

I will discuss the pervasiveness of farming mentality in the next chapter, but for now, it is sufficient to say that farming is all about doing things systematically. A huge portion of common business knowledge tells entrepreneur hunters that they have to become farmers in order to succeed.

- Manage what you measure.
- Develop job descriptions.
- Know your numbers.
- Pursue Six Sigma quality.
- Failure to plan is planning to fail.

- Achieve ISO 9000 certification.
- Document your policies and procedures.
- Runaway growth is dangerous.
- The devil is in the details.

Where are the words that appeal to the hunters?

- Do something you love.
- Make a lot of money.
- Don’t sweat the small stuff.
- Work hard.
- Have fun.

Which one gets you more excited, the first collection of “business knowledge” or the second list? If you chose the second, you might be ADD but at the very least, you have the makings of a hunter.

Look at the traits of a typical ADD “sufferer”:

Overly distracted, frequently late, forgetful, overwhelmed by responsibilities, a dreamer, a tendency to overlook details, poor listening skills, hyperactive focus for long periods on a single task, a tendency to procrastinate, underestimating the time needed to complete tasks, relationship problems stemming from a tendency to tune out things that interfere with what they are doing. (Helpguide.org: *Adult ADD/ADHD, signs symptoms, effects and treatment*)

Dang, that is a description of 90% of the business owners I know. We should replace that with the *hunter’s diagnosis*:

Works tirelessly in pursuit of a vision not seen by others, juggles more responsibilities than normal people can handle, able to get the big picture, sees the potential outcome of actions through multiple iterations and decision trees, carries the burden of providing not only for his own family, but for the families of those who work for him, accepts the liability of bad results as a consequence of making decisions, accomplishes massive amounts of work while understanding that he will never, ever be “caught up,” functions in chaos when everyone else is panicking, has no time to waste listening to idiots, can accomplish huge

projects in short time frames, able to leap mid-sized buildings with a running start.

There you have it. The hunter's diagnosis doesn't contradict the ADD diagnosis. In fact, many of the behaviors described are identical. It is just a different perspective. What the farmers think of as a problem, hunters should recognize as ability.

Look back at the prologue. What were the traits of our Hunter of 7,000 years ago? He solved problems. He developed alternate solutions. He organized other people to be more effective. He recognized and used talent where it could do the most good. He ignored personal pain and deprivation. He stayed laser-focused on the task for extended periods. He took responsibility for the well-being of others. People did what he told them to do.

In a later age, our prehistoric hunter would have been a terrific entrepreneur.

Typically, when a business owner gives me the answer, "I'm a little bit ADD," he follows with "You see, I like building new things. Once it becomes routine, I have difficulty paying attention to it. I kind of lose interest."

Of course he does. The hunter hunted. Once he brought in the game, the rest of the tribe was responsible for the skinning and cooking. As humans perfected agriculture, the roles began to change. The other members of the tribe had previously spent their time either waiting for the hunters to bring something home, or else working on the last carcass the hunters provided. With the advent of agriculture, the whole tribe worked all day tilling and watering the crops. They were understandably less inclined to work all evening while the hunters sat around the fire swapping hunting stories.

Hunting by itself was no longer enough. The hunters had to pitch in with other chores. Crops provided a more dependable food supply and required constant attention. However, when the crops failed, there was only the hunter to fall back on. When times were good, the hunter provided protein. As humans learned to domesticate animals, even that need was fulfilled by people who could easily be taught the necessary skills.

We lionize the leaders of large corporations in the media; the Jack Welch or Steve Jobs type of charismatic leader with billions of dollars and tens of thousands of employees at his command. These leaders are profiled as examples to be emulated. The media portrays them as risk takers and gamblers who will "bet the bank" on a new idea or market.

The vast majority of leaders in large organizations spend their entire working lives in large organizations. They have never missed a paycheck. If they fail, it is a failure to meet a budget, or failure to reach a sales goal. It isn't a failure to provide for their family. In the case of the most extreme failures, they are fired. Often, that comes with a severance package of a few years' salary and benefits. Sometimes, it comes with a golden parachute sufficient to provide a comfortable lifestyle for them and their descendants for generations.



Hunters have no guarantees against failure

Entrepreneurs don't have contracts guaranteeing anything if they fail. They have no golden parachute, and usually have no parachute at all. Many small businesses owe their success to one man or woman who overcame challenges on the adrenalin of sheer terror. They knew that if they failed, the dark abyss of starvation (or at least deprivation) faced their families.

In the prehistoric tribe, the hunter's role was deemphasized over centuries in favor of agriculture and animal husbandry. In modern business, the entrepreneur's role has been deemphasized in favor of those who manage complex enterprises and financial structures.

However, when the crops failed, the tribe quickly turned back to the hunter to provide for them. Thousands of years later, in the Great Recession of 2009, the business press and politicians looked to small business as the engine that would save the economy. All the complex derivatives, all the mergers and acquisitions, suddenly shrank in importance when the economy needed someone to hunt, to come up with new ideas and to create new jobs. Society still needs hunters to hunt.

Maybe they should stop criticizing the characteristics that make it possible.

A Lifetime of Working with Hunters

Why should I be the one to write this book? More importantly, why should you read it? I am not a multi-millionaire, although I have managed to make a decent income while signing my own paychecks for over thirty years. I have never owned a business that made Inc. Magazine's top 500 list, although I've worked with several that did. However, I do possess a unique knowledge of what makes a successful hunter.

In the last fifteen years, I have worked exclusively with the owners of over 400 companies as their consultant and coach. They have revenues ranging from \$300,000 to \$450,000,000 annually, and employ anywhere from three to 1,500 employees in manufacturing, distribution, retailing, food service, oil and gas, professional services, construction, health care, technology, automotive, and transportation. They are male and female and range in age from their mid-twenties to their late seventies.

As of this writing, we have spent nearly 11,000 hours together in face-to-face coaching, consulting, peer group meetings, and interviews. That is 11,000 hours of listening to business owners solve problems, test theories, trade experiences and float new ideas. As one long meeting, it would consume eight hours a day, Monday through Friday, for five years without vacations or holidays.

Boredom is never an issue. We spend our one-on-one coaching sessions discussing an owner's hopes and ambitions, and focusing on building new value or pursuing new opportunities. Each new client brings fresh experience and ideas into the conversation. My knowledge base of business problems and their solutions grows daily. I also understand entrepreneurship on a more visceral level. Before I advised owners about running companies, I had several of my own.

As a kid growing up in the Ramapo Mountains of northern New Jersey, I was always the top seller of candy bars and greeting cards for my school. I had lemonade stands and created carnivals in my backyard, which I promoted well enough that the neighborhood kids begged their mothers for spare change for the "rides."

After dropping out of college (I finished later), I got a job on the loading dock with a warehouse distributor, where I detailed cars for

other employees on my lunch break. Not surprisingly, I transferred to a job in sales and became the top salesperson. Eventually, my employers offered me a partnership in their failing California operation if I could turn it around. I was thirty years old and my first lesson in business ownership was a harsh one, but more about that in a moment.

Since then, I have owned a manufacturing company, a healthcare management company, and two consulting firms. The current fashionable term for this kind of career path is "serial entrepreneur," but I sometimes think that "chronically unemployable" might be a better description.

The Light Bulb

In California, we assembled a new sales team (the incumbents had all been fired) and grew the branch's revenue from \$1 million to over \$5 million in fifteen months. I was acting as a salesperson and running the warehouse while supervising the construction of a new facility, hiring new employees, purchasing inventory and managing day-to-day operations. I had no management training (my degree is in accounting) and I kept doing every critical job and making every important decision personally.

Mr. Handreke was the senior partner of the German company that had purchased a minority position in our business. When our margins began to slide, he came to California for a visit. He told me plainly that the declining profits made it appear that I was not up to the job.

I protested, of course. Not only had I engineered amazing results in sales, but I was working eighty or ninety hours each week. As he listed the areas where my company was underperforming, I finally exclaimed in frustration, "I practically live here. I'm always the first to arrive and the last to leave. I can't possibly work any harder!"

Mr. Handreke looked at me for a moment. "John," he said, "If you were returning record profits, do you think I would have come to California to ask why you were leaving the office early?"

I suddenly realized that I had become a farmer. A very hard working farmer, but then most farmers work very hard. I had stopped being a hunter.

That lesson stuck with me, but I wish I could say that it changed my behavior right away. Like many hunters, I had to learn it more than once. The German partners eventually bought out all the other owners, and put one of their own people in to run the company. I took on a few more business turnarounds, and then drifted into consulting. Like many folks, consulting to me was something to do between “real” jobs. In my case, it has been covering the gap in my employment for over twenty years.

When I worked in California, I belonged to an executive peer group called Adaptive Business Leaders, run by my friend Mimi Grant. It was a great experience and my group helped me through many business issues. I eventually moved to San Antonio to allow more time with my family while traveling nationally for my consulting practice. Even from a more central location, my travel was almost constant. I thought that running a peer organization would be an ideal way to meet other business owners and to find local business opportunities. I began developing a plan to create a peer group organization in Texas.

Stuck in First Class on the runway at LaGuardia airport during the winter of 1997, I was on my second cocktail (I do miss all those consultant’s frequent flyer miles!) when I saw an ad for an “executive’s dream franchise.” I called the number, and found The Alternative Board® (TAB), a franchisor that helps consultants learn to coach business owners and facilitate peer advisory groups.

I purchased the franchise without even visiting TAB’s offices. I was a fully developed hunter and I understood what my strengths were. I didn’t need anyone to teach me how to sell my services or deliver them, but I recognized that developing systems wasn’t what I did well. Within eighteen months, I was the most successful franchise in TAB’s history by number of clients, and held that title until I sold half of my territory in 2010.

That is how I accumulated 11,000 hours of face-to-face consulting and coaching. This book contains the combined experience of hundreds of successful entrepreneurs. I’m just one of them; one who has been lucky enough to listen to and collect their knowledge. This book is about what they know.

Buy your copy today!

Hunting in a Farmer’s World



Available here on:

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