

# MAKING THE VEHICLE TO REACH YOUR DREAMS

**Growing a Great Business  
Making a Great Life**

**The Story of Phil Fournier and his Small Business**



Making the Vehicle  
To Reach Your Dreams

by  
Kenneth L. Stark  
and  
Philip Fournier

If you believe that a successful small business is based on the spirit and commitment of the business owner then “Making the Vehicle To Reach your Dreams” is a book that you will enjoy. This is a personal story that weaves together philosophy with individual commitment and experienced wisdom to deliver a refreshing look at pathways that lead toward a successful personal life and business.

The book is a sharing of life experiences mixed with humor and profound insights about people and the elements that are needed to successfully operate a business. The result is a book that is an interesting statement about the human spirit and what can be accomplished through hard work and commitment. The authors share personal values and experiences that apply to many. It is an uplifting portrayal of successful positive ways of addressing daily challenges while sharing the human side of leading the development of your own small business.

Richard Giese, President, Mt. San Jacinto College

# MAKING THE VEHICLE TO REACH YOUR DREAMS

**Growing a Great Business  
Making a Great Life**

**The Story of Phil Fournier and his Small Business**

Kenneth L. Stark, MA  
and  
Philip Fournier

*Making the vehicle to reach your dreams*

Copyright 2004 by Philip J. Fournier. All rights reserved. No portion of this book, except for brief review, may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means - electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise - without written permission of the publisher.

Published by Trafford Publishing

Book design by Johanna Lee

Cover design by Jenny Fournier

Printed in Canada

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Stark, Kenneth L. and Fournier, Philip  
Making the Vehicle to Reach Your Dreams  
The Story of Phil Fournier and his Small Business  
ISBN 1-4120-2014-X (trade paper)

This book is dedicated to teachers  
who spend their lives imparting knowledge to others;  
in particular to my high school Spanish teacher, Inez Fallis.  
~ Phil

For my grandparents  
Herman and Wanda Stark  
who loved and protected me unconditionally.  
~Ken



# **MAKING THE VEHICLE TO REACH YOUR DREAMS**

## **CONTENTS**

Dedications / vi
Contents / viii
On the Wisdom of Getting Advice / xi
Preface / xii
Note to Readers / xiv
Introduction / 1

## **PART I ~ ABOUT PHIL FOURNIER**

1. Lifetime Highlights / 4
2. Philosophy of Life / 13
3. Shaping Experiences / 22
  - What Influenced You Early On? / 22
  - How Have You Been Helped? / 29
  - How Have You Been Hurt? / 31
  - Plusses and Minuses of Owning a Business and Doing Things Your Way / 36
4. An Influential Teacher / 42
5. The Story of Maria / 45

## **PART II ~ ABOUT PHIL'S BUSINESS ~ PHIL'S AUTO CLINIC**

1. Why Are You In Business? / 50
  - Goals When You Started ~ 1984 / 50
  - Goals for Business Development ~ 1988 / 50
  - Goals Now ~ 2003 / 51
  - Mission Statement / 51
2. What's It Like to Own a Business? / 52
  - Starting Up / 52
  - Best Things About Owning Phil's Auto Clinic / 52
  - What's Overrated About It? / 53
  - What Would You Do Differently? / 53
  - Self-Management / 53
  - General Management / 54
  - Marketing and Sales / 54

- Operations (delivering products and services) / 54
  - Finance (finance, administration, human resources) / 55
3. Four Critical Issues / 56
    - Flat Rate System / 56
    - Dealing With the Slows / 57
    - Burnout or Fun? / 65
    - Desperate Measures for Desperate Times / 73
  4. Business Vignettes / 76
    - The Bigger Picture / 76
    - Someone You Love / 77
    - Geezers and Brakes / 78
    - The Stolen Radio / 80
    - The Wedding Story / 81
    - It's the People, Not the Problem / 82
    - The Sam Story / 83
    - Other Enlightening Employee situations / 87
    - Fraud In Auto Repair / 91
    - The Impact of Time / 96
    - Pricing ~ Economy Versus Quality / 97
    - Price Clubbing / 98
    - The Jobber-Shop Relationship / 103
    - Cooperation Between Shops / 106

### **PART III ~ THE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

1. What Enables Change / 110
2. Designing Your Business Vehicle / 114
3. Phil's Early Frustrations / 119
4. Phil's Business Development Diary / 122
5. Progress Reports ~ Excerpts / 132
6. Diagnostic and Planning Tools / 176
  - Business Needs Survey / 177
  - Ten Dilemmas of Business & Life / 180
  - Expanding Your Comfort Zone / 183
7. Dynamic Selling System / 187

### **PART IV ~ APPENDIX**

1. Organizational Charts / 198
2. Making Marketing Plans / 200

3. TV Ads ~ Scripting / 205
4. Newsletters / 210
5. Action Plans / 214
  - Using the Customer Keyboard AP / 215
  - Stress Reduction AP / 216
  - Squeaky Brake AP / 217
  - Solving Problems With Employees / 220
  - Constructive Communication / 222

**PART V ~ ABOUT KEN STARK**

- Profile and Mission Statement / 225  
Correcting Mistaken Thinking / 227  
About Ken's Practice / 231  
Speaking and Workshops / 233

• • •

## On the Wisdom of Getting Advice

Dear Fellow Owners,

“Couldn’t you do that on your own and save money?” people asked during our business development program. Had I tried, I’d have been guilty of *self-swindling*.

I simply didn’t know enough. I couldn’t discern the real causes of problems and had I been able to, I could not have solved them ~ I mean *really* solve them so they wouldn’t return.

After several years of learning, I *could* have grown Phil’s Auto on my own, but knew that I *would not*. I lacked the discipline. I needed more motivation ~ just as I need prodding to use these CD-Roms sitting on my desk for the past two years. I’ve yet to install them and spend hours learning to repair my computers. I know I won’t. It’s too easy to put off till tomorrow.

Two things motivated me to learn ~ the monthly fee and having someone to report to. I wanted full value for my money, and I needed someone to answer to besides my partners. Strategizing with Ken Stark, my adviser, and having to follow through on our plans kept me on track. When I got off track or stressed out, or just couldn’t figure what to do, he was there, helping with problems and teaching what my business was really all about ~ not just a job, a vehicle to reach my dreams.

So are you like me, not so good at learning on your own? It’s nothing to be ashamed of. You’ll do better to admit weaknesses and find solutions with the help of a good mentor. For me that means structure ~ a program with commitments to keep me going.

An adviser also can help to mediate between partners. (For that matter, between husbands and wives, as Ken has sometimes done. I now enjoy tennis with my wife Karen, even when she beats me!) It’s difficult for equal partners to assign work to each other. One may think he’s carrying a bigger load than the other, but an adviser can assign work equitably. He can prevent misunderstandings, give broader perspective, and help to ensure peace in the partnership.

That’s been a huge benefit, along with a better running and more profitable business. Besides, lifelong learning keeps me young!

Phil Fournier  
Hemet, California

## Preface

Is my story really that interesting?" Phil asked when I proposed a book. "Your story and its lessons? Absolutely," I said. *Making the Vehicle to Reach Your Dreams* is about turning a dysfunctional firm into a profitable, smoothly running operation, with its harried owner becoming a capable business developer and a happier guy.

That's a tale worth telling.

Phil is a great client because he works with grit and good humor, applying practical solutions to problems and seeking root causes in himself. The result: a business that runs smoothly most of the time and gives him, his family, and employees' good incomes and high quality of life.

The book is a real collaboration. First I interviewed Phil long-distance and word-processed his answers as we talked, then edited for brevity and clarity. I outlined the book and wrote *The Bigger Picture*. Phil contributed his original materials and articles. We emailed back and forth till we were happy with each section. I added materials from my consulting practice, and finally I assembled it all for publishing.

*The Bigger Picture* and *Business Development Process* make the book more than one man's story. You can apply the lessons to any business or life. The *Appendix* offers some of the tools that have helped Phil's *Auto. Burnout or Fun?* addresses a need that most firms sorely neglect.

Collaborating on *Making the Vehicle* with Phil and helping to make Phil's Auto Clinic what he and his brother Dan want it to be has been rewarding and fun. We hope that you'll enjoy and learn from Phil's story. And we'll be delighted to hear what you think.

~ Ken Stark, August 2003



When Ken first proposed collaborating, I had little idea what would transpire. My first inclination was the knee-jerk, "Just say no, it's safer and cheaper." But I've learned to push beyond my comfort zone, take risks and not let fears over time and money stand in my way.

So I thought about my story. Was there something heroic about it? Not particularly. But I felt inspired by James Herriot, the English veterinarian who wrote so compellingly about his everyday life. His books are as much about people as animals. Similarly, *Making the Vehicle* is about people and

the ups and downs of life and small business, more than about auto repair.

Herriot's books have helped me a lot. In my speech to 8,000 at the 1998 Napa AutoCare convention, I quoted from *Every Living Thing*, recounting how the author learned that he had been a favorite of a woman (who subsequently passed away), though he hadn't been able to cure her dog. She appreciated his great caring, despite what looked like a professional failure. The story inspires me to give the same kind of care, though I can't fix every car that comes my way.

I hope that my story helps others, be they small business owners or folks looking for life lessons. It's been fun writing it. Enjoy!

~ Phil Fournier, August 2003

• • •

## Notes to Readers

Parts of the book originally written by Phil, or transcribed by Ken while interviewing Phil, appear in Book Antiqua typeface.

*Unless otherwise notes, italicized comments within the parts described above are Ken's.*

Original materials written by Ken appear in Lucida Sans Unicode typeface.

