ANTON KOVALEV

# BUSINESS

## WITHOUT WASTE

## CLARITY

## IN DETAILS

**Anton Sergeevich Kovalev**

# Business Without Waste. Clarity in Details

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## Аннотация

The management approach outlined in this book is a kind of business navigator. It provides practical tools for creating a business system for everyone interested in it, makes it possible to predict efficiency, and leads to a high degree of company stability. This system is based on the principles of lean thinking, without which modern management is impossible. Mastering such a system gives an entrepreneur or managing director a clear understanding of strategy and tactics of action: what to do, how to do it, what to do if something goes wrong, and how to teach this to every single employee of the company.

The author, Anton Kovalev, holds a PhD in Economics and is a certified specialist in law and psychology, an expert in business process systematisation, and a coach licensed to conduct professional activities. He holds an MBA degree from the Presidential Academy of RANEPA, a Lean trainer qualification, and the status of a Dragon trainer in visual process modelling. He is the Russian Kudo Champion,

holds a First Dan black belt, and is a knife-fighting instructor. He was awarded the Second Class Medal of Saint Joasaph, Bishop of Belgorod, by the Russian Orthodox Church, for his dedicated contribution to the construction of the Church of the Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessaloniki. Author of the books “From a Dream to a Happy Customer”, “The Power of System. How to Build a Lean Business”, and “Happiness in Details”.

# Содержание

AUTHOR'S NOTE 8
BUSINESS MANAGEMENT 17
THINKING FOR RESULTS 18
PEOPLE IN BUSINESS 33
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 35

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*Simply About the Complex.*

*Dedicated to everyone seeking new paths for advancing the art of company management.*

# AUTHOR'S NOTE



Fog is a very beautiful natural phenomenon. It fascinates and attracts, like everything unknown, intrigues us, calls us to see what lies beyond it. It seems that we are so strong and confident that we can part the fog with our own hands – after all, we easily step into this enveloping cloud. And through it, the final point, your ideal, already seems to appear. But once inside, we realise that the fog surrounds us with a dense curtain from all sides, there are no visibility instruments, and we can no longer find or even feel the direction of our path. All that remains is to wait until the cloud disperses. But waiting means lost time, and the main goal may never be reached. It is far more promising to move toward a goal in clear weather and full visibility, even if not the most pleasant surprise awaits us beyond the horizon. Advancing beyond the horizon line each time, we begin once again to see details and perspective. It turns out that when the fog is obvious, setting out on the journey is not worth it.

I would not now create even more fog around the subject of fog if many people dreaming of their own business, or even entire business empires, did not throw themselves into this stream headfirst, having only a superficial understanding of how everything is actually arranged. My task is to bring clarity to your mind, free you from illusions and traps, from beautiful pictures and captivating stories about successful business. I am always in favour of success in business, and even triumph, but understanding the foundations of a business system is the key to

these victories.

This book is also intended for those who want to transform their own business or the production structure entrusted to them into a complete, stable and smoothly functioning system, where processes are fine-tuned, mechanisms work accurately, details fit together well, people understand one another, and there is a real prospect for the development and long life of the company.

My book is about where to begin, what absolutely should not be undertaken, how processes are organised, which proven system tools should be used, what kind of business resource is actually necessary, which people should be brought in and who should be kept far away despite having "the best résumé," how to find an approach to people in general, determine their motivation and strengthen it.

Why do I place such emphasis on people? Because a person within the system is the most important element; everything depends on them: management, ideas, materials, processes, task execution, product quality – the entire working system. And above all, everything depends on the main person in the company, because only he knows what he wants to see in the future and what result he ultimately wishes to obtain. And even if he has a clear goal, he does not always know how to reach it. It often happens that the goal of a potential entrepreneur is not entirely clear, and without that clarity it is not worth starting at all. In this situation, the principle "start first and figure it out later" does not work. In short, I want to bring clarity to the

creation of a business where everything works like a clock. And if the clock suddenly starts falling behind, then to know how to quickly bring it back into rhythm. Allowing it to stop altogether is impossible – otherwise everything collapses. I will explain everything simply, in detail, step by step, with examples.

Sharing my experience on the pages of this book is not merely a whim. It is a sincere desire to help my country achieve a high level of management and production culture, growth in labour productivity, quality products of various purposes, and the creative potential of specialists at different levels. How can I do this? By speaking about what I know, what I can do, what I have achieved, how I do it, and what I strive toward.

In process management, I possess a solid expert level and rather substantial managerial experience: ten years in business, five implemented projects in the entertainment industry, as well as a number of solutions in project financing for companies with consideration for reaching project capacity and establishing current operations. I hold a PhD in Economics and a psychology degree, which I obtained not merely to tick a box on my list of qualifications, but in order to truly delve deeper into the processes of interpersonal relations within a company and to build technologies for high-quality communication between employees. I have already published three books, and they are not only about how to organise processes competently, but also about how to harmoniously build one's life in order to acquire resources and achieve success, to enjoy one's work and to be happy. These

books are: “From a Dream to a Happy Customer”, “The Power of System. How to Build a Lean Business”, and “Happiness in Details”.

With every passing year, my practical and life experience is enriched with new knowledge about the latest developments in the field of management, and each time I feel a strong desire to share this with the reader. Books are my passion. I read a lot, draw ideas from them, then process and transform them, and as a result my own thoughts emerge, which I pass on to you.

Since childhood, I have been engaged in sports – I prefer martial arts. At first it was karate, then kudo, in which I achieved notable success: regional champion, Russian champion, and not long ago I became interested in knife fighting. I speak about this not merely to embellish my portrait, but so that you understand that I know what a real fight is, what it means to win and what it means to lose, how to move toward victory after falling several times, and where to find strength. The analogy with business here is direct and obvious. Sport teaches not only combat techniques; it teaches to look at situations more broadly, to try different styles of struggle and apply them when necessary, to understand the moment when a particular combat scheme should be used. Sport teaches respect for an opponent and freedom from fear of them, teaches not to fear pain and to find the resources to overcome it. In any business there are plenty of serious challenges, and one must be prepared for them, be adaptive, functional, feel the timing, know the overall picture of life – all this must be

learned continuously, whether you want to or not. These are the times we live in: the situation changes every day, and one must correspond to it here and now, know how to direct a business in the necessary direction, understand how to build an action plan based on existing experience and objective data, and so on. Therefore, continuous learning is a mandatory condition of modern business.

Nothing appears out of nowhere; everything has its source. I would not be far from the truth if I said that I am a hereditary manager. One of my grandfathers was a civil aviation pilot, the other was the director of a shoe factory and deputy manager at a mining and processing plant. He held various leadership positions, told many stories, gave examples of situations where others failed but he solved those same tasks – all of this settled in my young mind and later surfaced at the necessary moment when a solution had to be found. My mother is a senior executive in a large holding company that includes more than fifty enterprises and has successful experience in implementing business systems. My father was a teacher of English and French and also vice principal for educational work at school. I picked up this connecting "rope" between generations and continue my path in business projects by applying system management.

A strong inheritance is one of the favourable factors in the formation of personality, but school also plays an important role – what teachers invested in us, who sat beside us at the desk, what kind of environment it was. Much later, after

graduating from school and already becoming a manager with a solid background, I realised how important it is who your mentor was. All this shapes our attitude toward work, toward accepting responsibility, toward striving to achieve a set goal, our worldview, our attitude toward people, and the building of relationships, including with colleagues and subordinates. I will discuss this in more detail in the corresponding chapter of the book.

There is another reason why I can recommend certain methods of building personal resources: I am fairly young, I live actively, continuously learn different things, raise children, travel, engage in sports, and devote time to strengthening my health. All this provides a powerful charge of energy, without which business is difficult to sustain. Everything matters, and everything gives experience and ideas.

My management approach, outlined in this book, is a kind of business navigator. It provides practical tools for creating a business system for everyone interested in it, reveals a clear picture of business, makes it possible to predict efficiency, and leads to a high degree of company stability. This system is based on the principles of lean manufacturing, without which modern management is impossible. Mastering such a system gives an entrepreneur or managing director a clear understanding of strategy and tactics of action: what to do, how to do it, what to do if something goes wrong, and how to teach this to every single employee of the company so that everyone in their place knows

the answers to these simple at first glance, yet global questions.

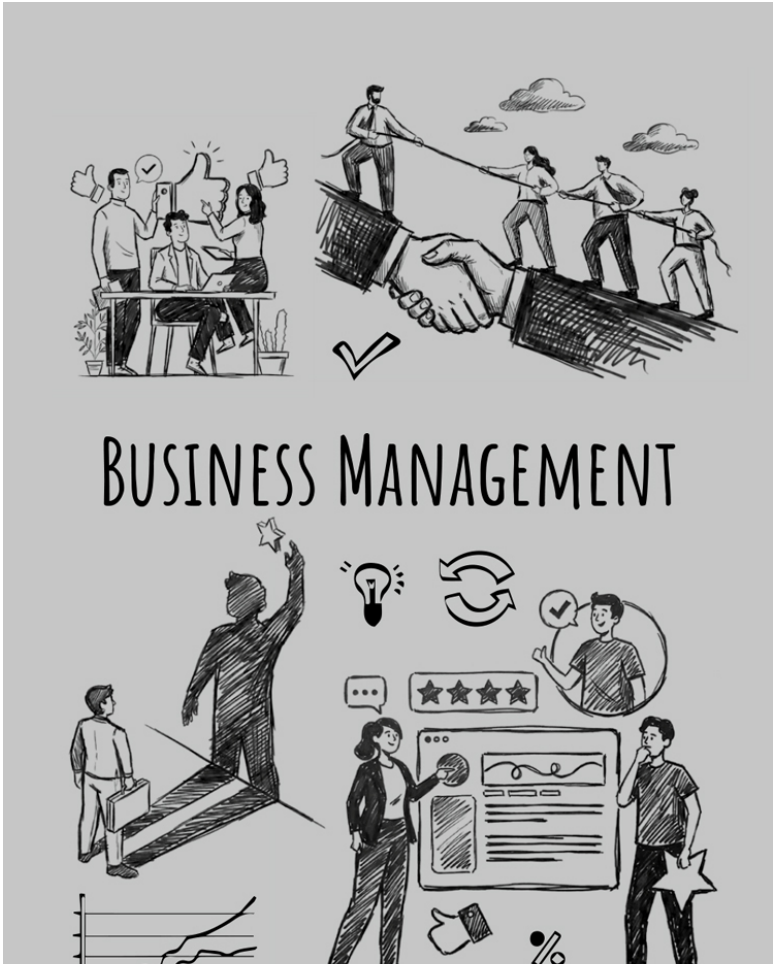
The lean business system itself encompasses three important aspects: the philosophy of building a systematic business – in my case, this is precisely the philosophy of lean thinking, the psychology of effective management and interaction with the team, and the tools that help transform a business into a flawlessly functioning mechanism.

Another fundamental tool for building a system is the algorithmic language DRAGON, developed by Soviet scientists during work on preparations for launching the Buran shuttle. DRAGON is an abbreviation for outer-Directed Russian Algorithmic Glossa Observing Neatness. Every word in this title is reflected in my lean approach to company management – we will certainly discuss this throughout the pages of the book. This is the foundation of the foundations of any business or simply any project when it comes specifically to a comprehensive approach, rational use of resources, and building high-quality communication between participants. And the key words here are "observing neatness." Visualisation is a powerful modern management tool. In the overwhelming majority of cases, process management is built upon visual, graphical materials that provide immediate understanding of a task and its precise execution. Without using an algorithm as the basis for standardisation within a company, it is not even worth starting a business – the outcome will be far from what is desired.

I can say with complete confidence that a lean management

system is a practice-proven framework of principles and methods that consistently delivers results and leads organizations toward their goals. Now it's time to clear away the fog of uncertainty and move on to practical lean implementation.

# BUSINESS MANAGEMENT



# THINKING FOR RESULTS

It is possible to objectively assess whether a business is successful only after ten years of operation, when throughout all that time it generates stable and confident income. Practice shows that within five years of operation, 95% of companies in a wide variety of fields close down. This happens for different reasons: the owner loses interest, goes bankrupt, sells the business. After this period, around 5% of companies remain afloat, 2.5% of which continue operating without generating income, while the remaining 2.5% not only operate but also actively develop.

An entrepreneur, even if he is not yet one, always thinks about organising a structure that will function without failures. In business, in addition to tasks connected with producing specific products, there are many problems, including: organising space, installing communications, design, purchasing consumables, regulating the working day, cleaning premises, product logistics, arranging the checkout area, displaying goods, and much more. When all these issues fall upon the poor entrepreneur's head, the situation becomes hell for him. He tries to comprehend and do everything alone in order to save money at the initial stage or sincerely believes that he can handle everything, but quickly drowns in a whirlpool of concerns. So what then – not undertake the matter at all? Of course undertake it. But there

is one "but." *Only a person with systems thinking and knowledge of the systems approach will be able to build a structure with functioning and interacting mechanisms, where everyone at their own point performs specific actions that lead to the desired result. What is the essence of such thinking?*

Systems thinking is a way of perceiving and analysing the surrounding world aimed at understanding the interconnections and interdependence of elements within complex systems. It allows one to see the whole picture, take into account the relationships between system components and the external environment, identify the causes and consequences of processes, and determine the key factors influencing system behaviour. It may sound complicated, but if you think through each point, you will come to understand that this is the only way one should act.



Systems thinking is based on the following principles:

→ *Integrity* – considering a system as a unified whole rather than simply a set of separate parts, understanding how changes in one part affect the entire system.

→ *Interconnectedness* – analysing interactions between system elements; any change in one element may trigger a chain reaction in other elements.

→ *Feedback* – evaluating the influence of feedback on system

behaviour: positive feedback amplifies changes, while negative feedback stabilises the system.

→ *Empiricism* – using observations and experiments to identify patterns.

→ *Adaptation* – the ability to adjust to changes in the environment through continuous improvement and adaptation of system behaviour.

Examples of the systems approach can be observed in completely different areas of life: economics – analysing interactions between labour, capital, goods, and service markets; medicine – diagnosing diseases based on understanding the complex influence of a number of factors on a patient's health; ecology – studying ecosystems as complexes of factors influencing the sustainability of natural resources.

If we take a simple example from the field of engineering, we can observe the same thing. Parts ready for assembly on an automotive conveyor are merely parts; parts connected together and linked with one another already become a unit that produces some benefit – a whole automobile, another object, a complex of functioning units dependent on one another. The system lives thanks to the operation of each individual mechanism. If any part fails, the entire system may fail as well. But a malfunction is not yet a breakdown and not yet the collapse of everything. A malfunction can be localised by acting according to an accepted process standard so that the entire system will not even notice it. Moreover, such a breakdown can be prevented if a set of

preventive measures and standards is introduced. A punctured tyre on a car is replaced – and it continues moving. But if several parts fail functionally or the main unit breaks down, there is a risk of large-scale system failure.

In the case of business, if this has happened, it means that initially there was no systemic foundation, certain mechanisms were not embedded or properly adjusted, or not all of them were put into operation. *When a person thinks broadly and structurally, they orient themselves better within complex reality, and this helps them find the optimal solution to a problem.*

Any company can be compared to a large orchestra. The manager is the conductor, and also the chief architect of the entire process. A successful manager possesses a whole combination of skills and qualities – he is a strategist, communicator, leader, mentor, organiser; he sees the overall picture of his business, has a vision of its future, clearly formulates the final goal, inspires the team toward work and achievement, knows how to listen and hear, responds constructively to criticism, makes balanced decisions and finds ways out even in conditions of uncertainty, reacts quickly to changes in the external environment, recognizes the potential of employees and helps them develop.

*What is a successful company in my understanding, in a few words.*

In the moral aspect:

→ Brings benefit to society

→ Does not harm the environment
→ Makes employees happy

In the material aspect:

→ Has real profit
→ Allocates funds for investment development
→ Ensures a return on invested capital
→ Has the ability to provide material motivation for employees.

And on a separate line: the owner fulfils his dreams!

The life of a company is like the life of a person. It has a starting point, passes through stages of development, has its own illnesses and peaks of prosperity, after which it either completes its journey or is reborn and enters a new cycle of activity. And this also forms part of the system.

*I will name the key stages in the life of a business:*

→ **EMERGENCE, DEVELOPMENT:** creation of an idea, development of a business plan, attraction of initial resources and formation of a team. The company is at the startup stage, where the main task is to test the viability of the concept and acquire the first customers. After a successful launch, the company begins to actively develop, expanding its client base, increasing production or services, and attracting additional investment. At this stage, it is important to ensure effective growth management in order to avoid overloading the management system.

→ **MATURITY**. The company reaches a certain level of

stability and sustainability and enters the maturity phase. Here growth slows down, competition intensifies, and the organisation focuses on process optimisation, increasing efficiency, and retaining existing customers.

→ **DECLINE**. If a company does not adapt to market changes, new technologies, or consumer preferences, it may encounter a period of decline. This stage involves falling revenues, shrinking market share, and decreasing profits. Some companies attempt to overcome this period through restructuring, innovation, or diversification.

→ **REBIRTH OR CLOSURE.** At the final stage of its life cycle, a company either successfully renews its strategy and products, returning to a path of growth, or makes the decision to cease operations. Rebirth requires significant effort and investment, but it can open the door to a new phase of development. If a business is the owner's life's work or a long-standing family enterprise, it must continually find new avenues for growth. Otherwise, it will eventually cease to exist, because markets and business conditions are constantly changing. If, on the other hand, the owner is an entrepreneur in the purest sense, the ultimate objective may be to scale the business and sell it. For example, the company can be built to maturity, sold, and replaced with a new venture. Or it can be taken through another growth cycle, sold again, and the process repeated. Without continuous development, decline is inevitable, and the business eventually closes. Global business practice has proven this time

and again.

Understanding this life cycle helps managers better recognize the stage their business is in and make sound management decisions.

As a company grows, its development can also be viewed through four distinct levels of organizational maturity. I describe them as follows:

**DISORDER:** Everyone is driven by their own priorities. There is no system, no organizational structure, no standardized processes, no clear daily plan, no defined responsibilities, and no quality control. The company's activities resemble the chaotic movement of people around an office or production facility.

**ORDER:** Everyone understands where the organization is heading and what role they play. Clear procedures govern people, materials, and information flows. Balance is established, and the system begins to function as a whole.

**OPTIMIZATION:** With order in place and the system operating effectively, the company focuses on identifying and eliminating waste while continuously improving and standardizing its processes.

The self-learning organization:The company goes beyond optimization by embracing continuous improvement, developing its people, and setting ever more ambitious goals to achieve even greater results.

*In the context of building a business system, I once became interested in fractal theory. The concept of a fractal is a*

*tool for analysing and synthesising complex systems, providing management through particles. The principle of organising a system at the macro and micro levels is structured almost identically, although the processes themselves may differ. Applied to business, a fractal represents a separate structural unit of a company capable of acting autonomously and adapting to changes.*

I will explain this interesting phenomenon in more detail. A fractal is a component part of a certain whole, repeating it according to specific characteristics and resembling other similar component parts of the whole. In simple terms, it is self-similarity – something similar to itself, to something larger and to something smaller. A fractal is originally a mathematical concept. Scientists actively studied this phenomenon in the middle of the twentieth century, although the first examples of fractal structures were discovered back in the nineteenth century, and the development of computer technologies made it possible to visualise fractal structures.

Fractals are used in a wide variety of fields: biotechnology, architecture, design, medicine, geography, finance, electronics. They surround us everywhere. In life there are many fractal objects, such as a seashell, a snowflake, a seashore, mountain ranges, a riverbed, a tree branch, lightning. Fractals reflect the complexity and diversity of nature while simultaneously revealing hidden organisation within seemingly chaotic forms. Let us take, for example, a drop of water. It spreads out and

begins to resemble a lake, a sea, an ocean. In short, from the small to the large – everything in the world is similar. Just as relationships within a family or a team resemble the relationships of different countries throughout the world.

There are also companies with a fractal type of organisation; moreover, we constantly strive toward this model. These are companies with branches or autonomous divisions, franchise networks, which at the same time are parts of one system and operate according to unified principles corresponding to the production and corporate culture of that company. We can see that, in essence, the concept of lean thinking is also built on fractal theory (which we will discuss later), when each organisational unit has the capacity for self-organisation, can act autonomously while adapting to changing conditions, when there is at every level a constant aspiration toward growth and improvement, where procedures and management criteria are clearly defined, cooperation exists as the basis of effective interaction rather than confrontation, there is clarity of the company mission for everyone, understanding of goals, an attitude toward quality as something self-evident, and readiness for healthy competition. This is how the principles of fractality manifest themselves, confirming the idea that the principles of lean management are identical at both macro and micro levels.

The process of analysing an enterprise using a fractal approach helps reveal the potential and threats of a business. When we also visualise this approach, it shows very clearly how the business is

structured. That is why I always emphasise: the ability to "draw" business processes is a mandatory task for a manager and owner.

*The main advantages of fractal approaches include the ability to respond quickly to customer needs and improve coordination of actions between departments.*

The principle of fractality also manifests itself in macro and micro level operations. High-level processes covering the activities of the entire company as a whole are called macroprocesses. Such processes unite an entire complex of interconnected actions, unlike microprocesses, which relate to activities within departments, for example, or concern one process, everyday actions, one specific direction, and are oriented toward achieving the strategic goals of the company. Macroprocesses often include major organisational functions such as:

→ Cash flows: includes budgeting, expense accounting, tax reporting and investment activities, accounting of funds, income, expenses, cost formation, inventory assets that have their own storage locations and accounting, and so on;

→ Material particles: includes design development, procurement of materials, assembly, and quality control;

→ Movement of people: includes recruitment, training, motivation, and evaluation of employee efficiency;

→ Movement of information: includes market research, creation of advertising campaigns, interaction with clients, and product promotion.

*Macroprocesses play a key role in ensuring the competitiveness and sustainability of an enterprise. They make it possible to optimize the work of the entire organisation, reduce costs, and increase the efficiency of resource management.* With ineffective management of macroprocesses, serious problems arise within an enterprise that affect productivity, product quality, and the competitiveness of the company.

*If proper importance is not given to the management of macroprocesses, problems inevitably arise, including:*

→ Lack of a complete picture of business processes. Without understanding the interaction between different departments, it is difficult to identify weak points and take measures to improve overall productivity.

→ Lack of coordination between departments. This leads to situations where the same task is performed simultaneously by several employees but using different methods. This leads to losses – of time and resources – and creates confusion among staff.

→ Waiting for approvals. Many actions require approval from a manager or another responsible person. Due to overload among management staff or insufficiently effective communication, such approvals may drag on, causing delays in project implementation and reducing the speed of response to customer requests and these are the same temporary losses.

→ Outdated systems and technologies. The use of obsolete technologies and software leads to problems with manual data

processing, increased probability of errors, and reduced speed of operations.

→ Loss of control over financial indicators. Insufficient transparency of financial flows may lead to incorrect allocation of resources, unjustified expenses, and losses. Effective financial management requires constant monitoring and analysis, which becomes impossible with poorly organised macroprocesses.

→ Unreliable information. A lack of up-to-date data does not allow management to effectively plan company development, while incorrect forecasts and wrong decisions lead to loss of profit and missed opportunities.

Without regular analysis of process conditions, identification of weak points, and timely implementation of necessary changes, it is impossible to avoid losses – the main scourge of business. And the tools of lean thinking, which we will discuss further, can be applied to absolutely all micro and macroprocesses.

*One more important point. If the owner conceives and implements changes, then he trains everyone, and time must pass for everyone to master the skill or tool. The development of employees within a company resembles the movement of gears within an entire mechanism, and this is already a microsystem. In the process of development, it is necessary to proceed consistently, without sudden leaps or radical actions, when a manager changes decisions about changes while already in motion.* It often happens that employees have only just mastered new operations, while management is already changing the activity algorithm. It is

better to act according to the principle: first think everything through, and only then implement it; once all skills have been mastered – only then introduce new ones.

If we consider the entire company to be an orchestra, then the audience consists of clients, consumers of the product or service it produces or offers. There must always be continuous renewal of customer experience within a company. The customer receives an emotion from the product, and if their experience does not qualitatively move to a new level, they will become uninterested, begin looking toward competitors, or stop using this service altogether.

*What is an effective operational process? It is high company performance indicators, meaning the achievement of set goals with minimal expenditure of resources – time, money, energy.* We discuss this issue with employees during planning meetings, noting which process they consider effective. At the same time, they must be given a foundation according to which specific indicators should be evaluated; for this purpose, there are measurement tools. And then observe how they change – whether they grow, decrease, or stabilise.

A system company requires comprehensive control – the question lies only in its level. When there is line personnel and a manager assigned to them, that is one level of control. When there is a division and a manager supervises the work of several departments, that is another level of control. When there are several divisions and managers, that is the next level. And there

is also the chief manager, that is, the owner, who has their own control points for the “conductors.” The owner together with the managers in each division must build a separate control system and teach the direct manager to regulate the activities of the department. These control points must be described in a standard – what exactly should be done and how. But a manager must not interfere directly in operational activity; they are obliged to perform the control function using methods that are applicable and approved within the company.

# PEOPLE IN BUSINESS

I want to focus attention on an important issue: not every specialist who perfectly understands all the subtleties of a profession is capable of becoming a business owner or managing director. And not every manager who has mastered the technology of process management in a particular field is ready to bring the dream of owning a business to life. I will explain why this happens.

Usually, a business develops according to the model from specialist to owner. A hairdresser, after 15 years of work, opens their own salon; an auto mechanic opens a car service centre; a ventilation engineer starts a company servicing the corresponding equipment. I know many such examples where an employee, specialist, or manager becomes a private entrepreneur, considering this the natural path of development. This is understandable: people want more freedom, money, status, self-realisation. But most of them fail, although it would seem there should be no prerequisites for this – they know the field, know the work, have thought everything through, prepared themselves. The whole point is that when becoming an owner, one has to leave very far behind that comfort zone and area of knowledge to which they are accustomed. Very far. And it is impossible to prepare for this without possessing entrepreneurial skills. For a former specialist, unlike an owner, business still

remains work. At most, they acquire management skills by expanding their functionality.

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