

From Riches to Rags and Back: One Entrepreneur's Heartfelt Journey

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Many entrepreneurs dream of the day when their hard work pays off with riches and financial security. For Grant Muller, that day came before he was age 30, when the startup he was involved in went public and he became a multimillionaire. But he lost it all, became a drug addict who lived on the street, and turned his life and fortunes around only after some serious soul-searching and hard work.

Today Muller is an author and head of The Grant Muller Group, a real estate company. In this interview with EIX, he shares the story of his comeback and some unconventional wisdom about how entrepreneurs can make money and build relationships and businesses that last.

The Comeback

EIX: It sounds like starting a new business served as a kind of springboard for turning your life around. Please tell us more about that part of your journey.

Grant Muller: In my early career, I enjoyed success in corporate America and then at an internet startup in the late 90s. We ended up with a nice IPO, and we all got rich. I'd reached my ultimate goal: becoming a millionaire by 30. I remember sitting in my fancy condo overlooking the Denver skyline, thinking, "Is this it?" This achievement, one I had sacrificed so much of my life for, hadn't solved a fundamental issue. I still didn't like myself, and I couldn't stand living in my own skin. Money and success didn't fill the hole I was trying to fill.

I picked up drinking again—I'd stopped cold turkey a few years prior—and within six months, I developed a cocaine habit. I lost my job within the year, lost my stock option "wealth," and eventually ended up homeless and desperately addicted.

Eventually, with a lot of help, I managed to get clean and

sober. At this point in my life, I was living in a storage unit and was virtually unemployable. I knew that the only way up and out of poverty was to start a business. I had plenty of time and very little money, so I decided to become a real estate agent. Real estate allowed me to be my own boss and create my own future.

Lessons for Today's Entrepreneurs

EIX: What lessons did you learn that might be especially applicable to people starting or running their own businesses today?

Grant: When I started in real estate, I took on the persona of what I perceived a "successful agent" would look and act like. I did my best to impress and dazzle with all the right scripts and marketing pitches. It was a struggle, but I started getting a little traction, mostly by grinding like crazy in the online lead generation game. I posted ads and called leads quickly and relentlessly, saying exactly what I was taught to say and then hoping to land an appointment.

One day, I got a call from someone who said a client of mine referred them. I began to give my best sales pitch until this person stopped me and explained: "There's no need to sell me. Jake said you're great to work with, so let's get to work selling my house."

This was a light-bulb moment for me. I remember thinking, "*Maybe it will be easier to build a business based on referrals.*" I realize this seems obvious to many smart business people; it's easier to grow a business with existing clients and referrals than it is to grow with brand-new clients. But what's common sense isn't always common practice.

Over the next few years, I learned a lesson that changed my business and life forever: You can enjoy massive business growth, be yourself, make more money, and have more fun—all at the same time! There are just



three requirements:

1. *Adopt a relationship-based mindset.* Relationships transcend transactions. When we're in front of a lot of people rather than *with* people, there's no opportunity for trust to form. But when we're authentic and create genuine relationships with our clients, our business grows.
2. *Create a culture of excellence.* Delivering excellent service creates loyalty and builds your brand. Whether you work in a boutique business or a massive corporation, this happens one conversation at a time. These conversations turn into relationships, and these relationships will result in referrals. When opportunities arrive, we must be ready with our best.
3. *Create a community to serve and call on.* When we invest in deep and genuine relationships, our lives and businesses scale to greater heights. I've learned that my referrals come from a core set of allies who want to see me succeed, not random strangers at networking events.

Handling Conflicts and Tradeoffs

EIX: Running a business, as you know, can involve lots of human connections, like connections to customers, employees, and suppliers. How do you handle situations where those connections seem to pose conflicts or trade-offs?

Grant: I love this question because the answer is *in* the question: Business involves human connections. We must make the mindset shift from transactional to relational. If we invest in relationships, like we invest in other parts of our business, we'll get a stellar ROI.

There are a few ways to shift your focus toward relationships; these strategies work equally well when connections seem to pose conflicts or trade-offs:

Be real. When we get real about who we are, we take the first big step to better relationships. As we examine our beliefs, values, strengths, and opportunities for improvement, we set ourselves up for a candid self-evaluation.

Take a minute and ask: What are your values? How about your top beliefs? Who are your heroes? What makes them unique? Do you share any of their traits?

It's easier to embrace what makes us unique when we admire those qualities in others. As we get in touch with who we truly are, we build a quiet confidence that will bring peace to our relationships.

Be present. Connections to our customers, vendors, and team members flourish when we show up in the moment just as we are. Trust builds as we exude self-acceptance.

When I'm working with situations that include conflict, I check in with myself and ask three questions:

1. Am I fully attentive and aware in this moment?
2. Have I let go of distractions? (I often meditate briefly to prepare and clear my mind.)
3. Am I prepared to take ownership of the energy I'm bringing into this moment?

Be open. When relationships get difficult, it's important to demonstrate personal courage. When we let our personality shine through and speak up for what's important to us, even when being candid isn't popular or easy, we build trust with others. When we show appreciation, support, and kindness, conflict will soften.

Be helpful. I often ask myself how I can help a person overcome an obstacle in front of them. In heated moments, I've even found myself realizing I'm the obstacle! This helps me see conflict from a fresh angle, and I gain a different view of the truth in the moment.

Grant Muller is a speaker, author, Certified High Performance Coach™, and a seven-figure real estate agent. Ranked in the top 1.5% of realtors nationwide, he's on a mission to help high achievers who have tried every tool and tactic to sell more, achieve more, and find more fulfillment but aren't quite making the progress they desire. In his new book, **Top of Heart: How a New Approach to Business Saved My Life, and Could Save Yours Too** (<https://a.co/d/7HCO97f>) (Practical Inspiration Publishing; July 11, 2023), Muller chronicles his 15-year journey from homelessness to a thriving real estate career, all from prioritizing real, human relationships. Learn more at grantmullergroup.com (<https://grantmullergroup.com/>).