

Lara Morgan

Founder of Pacific Direct and Company Shortcuts

At 23, Lara Morgan, an unemployed telesales executive, started Pacific Direct in the middle of a recession, without a business plan. 17 years later she sold the business for £20 million. >>



Her first book 'More Balls than Most: Juggle Your Way to Success with Proven Company Shortcuts', published this month by Infinite Ideas, is an excellent resource for aspiring entrepreneurs. It details the highs and lows, the mistakes as well as the moments of genius that took Pacific Direct from Lara's home in the UK to becoming a major global player in the luxury branded toiletries industry. Here she talks to Nigel Wright Recruitment about the lessons she has learned as a business leader and the advice she hopes to pass onto other entrepreneurs and leaders in her book...

Pacific Direct was founded in 1991 with the aim of targeting the luxury hotel industry with high quality, innovative room accessories. The 'Brand Boutique' concept - a collection of luxury retail branded toiletry products made in miniature for hotels - placed Pacific Direct at the cutting edge of the guest amenities industry. Today, Pacific Direct is a global company, with around 500 employees and customers in 115 countries, manufacturing and distributing luxury toiletries and guest amenities for Hotels, Cruise Lines and Airlines.

Why did you choose to write the book?

Initially the book was written to celebrate the successful journey of building my business with my family, as well as acknowledging all of the participants who contributed massively to our success. I also wanted to share some of the fun we had during our mad journey of fast growth. I have often been asked why I had not written a book before and as our growth story evolved, I felt I could add value to other leaders in businesses looking for solutions, reassurance and ideas. If you read books to provide tools for learning and ensure that you and your team apply

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the lessons, then you gain a valuable return on reading-time investment. I hope my book is given out to the members of entire teams.

What exactly do you hope to pass on to others?

I hope to give readers the inspiration and tools to help accelerate their businesses' growth, whilst remembering to enjoy the process too. My book is a massive compendium of easy to apply, practical, time saving efficiency gains, as well as lessons that I have learnt along the way.

In the book you always refer back to 'Lara's Laws' and 'Company Shortcuts', tell me more about them?

Outside of work >>

Daily challenge

Triathlon training

Community or charitable initiatives

I have recently been involved in a brilliant charity called Trees for Cities. I was also proud to be a founder of Startup Britain.

Some friends and I have started a new nationwide campaign called 'Speakers who inspire' (www.speakerswhoinspire.com) which involves proven entrepreneurs presenting to their communities about their journeys of enterprise success. The first event takes place in Salisbury, in September.

What are you currently reading?

Dominate Your market with Twitter by Jon Smith and Jose Llinares.

How do you like to relax?

Lying in the hot sun...but seriously hot sun!

Outside of the UK, where would you live?

Many places! Right now though, I want to buy land in Sri Lanka which we, as a family, love.

Not everyone can afford the time to read the whole story. Taking the key messages that are 'Lara Law's' and highlighting them at the start of each Chapter, and referencing what the Chapter shares at the end, is a great way of gaining information and continual improvement techniques, quickly. Earlier this year I created www.companyshortcuts.com, which is essentially an online resource for business owners where they can access advice and download free frameworks and templates that will help them speed-up business growth, progress and profits.

And is it right to say you also want to give readers and people who access the site a 'Kick up the Arse'?

Yes that's right! Too often, entrepreneurs work in their business and get sucked into the daily demands of their teams, their customers and the desire to grow. They don't spend enough valuable time standing above the business and working on strategic development and continual improvement of the whole company. In my experience, most entrepreneurs are time challenged and develop bad habits in terms of prioritization and focus. The Kick up The Arse, (KUTA) download is simply a daily nudge - either via email or text - to make a leader think about all the small steps and improvement activities which can consistently sharpen their business deliverance. Not every tip will be of use for every business, but the objective is to remind the entrepreneur to always think about what else they could be doing to improve. Building a culture where constant improvement is a daily expectation of all team members, pays huge dividends.

How do you preserve the culture of an organisation during periods of rapid expansion?

People used to tell me that it wasn't possible for bigger 'international' companies to do that. I think that's rubbish. In Pacific Direct's experience, the return on investment for time spent building the culture, created value far beyond other easily measurable, commercial benefits. We did endless things to build on the established culture of each part of the global business. For example: the

Chinese factory was given the sales proceeds from the UK chocolate sales tuck-box, to buy a video and karaoke machine. The UK office and the Czech factory used to bet against each other, on various football matches. We painted the different offices mad colours for brightening up the workspace. We invested in the best technology for high performing teams and we organised international exchange programmes for staff. After I bought a Manchester United shirt for the China factory manager he thought I walked on water! Small things count. We always put family issues first for staff and offered sensible, practical support in exchange for far more than their ounce of flesh!

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What brands or business models inspired you to set up Pacific Direct?

Twenty years ago there was no such inspiration for me. I needed a job and a friend of mine made pre-threaded sewing kits and shower caps for the hotel trade. From these simple accessories we became the leading global player supplying guest amenities focusing on luxury five star properties. (It wasn't easy and every mistake in the book was made along the way.) The only business model I knew was my determination to always strive to be the best. We expanded our range and capabilities

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as we reacted to customer demand, combined with commercial sense checks. Having lived with a father that went bankrupt, the experience protected me from the danger of over trading without managing cash flow.

How does a growing business maintain high levels of customer satisfaction when chasing aggressive targets?

Simply put: the faster you place your feet into the shoes of your customer and live and die by what expectations they have, the better off your business will be. Pacific Direct lived and breathed the importance of the customer being the salary provider and we endlessly trained all of the team on the importance of cost control, commercialism and client retention value. Learning about the importance of client retention as being at the heart of your business, enables accelerated and successful reputation building. Growth through recommendation is low cost and very profitable and it is much easier to build reputation this way when a company is small, dynamic and flexible.

Were there any books that inspired you as an aspiring entrepreneur?

There are so many it is difficult to single individual ones out. Nevertheless, there are some that remain timeless, easy to read and they apply whatever business you are in. At the top of my pile is:

- How to Win Friends and Influence People (Dale Carnegie)
- The Organised Executive: New Ways to Manage Time, Paper and People (Stephanie Wilson)
- The Power of Focus: How to Hit Your Business, Personal, And Financial Targets With Absolute Certainty (Jack Canfield, Mark Hansen and Les Hewitt)
- How to Become a Rainmaker: The Rules for Getting and Keeping Customers and Clients (Jeffrey J. Fox).

Direct sales or cold calling was important to your early success – is this still an effective strategy or is it outdated?

Highly targeted, well-trained, persistent and selective cold calling will always pay dividends. Especially, if you have researched the market and the clients you wish to win. I think opportunities are regularly missed in the UK as a whole, today, because of the poor quality of sales techniques. I'm referring specifically to relying on email communication. Sales should always be 'people to people', ideally 'face to face'. Persistence is the only way to become really successful. Some of the follow-up standards I have experienced recently have been pathetic. No it's not easy, yes, it can be demoralizing, but the results that can be gained are considerable.

How difficult was it to make the transition from saleswoman to 'the boss' – responsible for 100s of employees around the world?

I wish I could say it was easy but it wasn't. It was very difficult, I made some horrid mistakes and it was by no means a perfect process. I learnt over time to take a deep breath and 'wing it' more times than I care to remember! I even had to incentivize myself to get the worst conversations done. I read relentlessly about leadership, management, how to become a CEO and anything else that I thought might smooth the process. Dealing with difficult people, giving someone a promotion, moving people sideways or managing poor performance require you to overcome emotional hurdles. You have to take the time to plan and think about the right things to say to make sure you get a clear message across.

What was the most important aspect of the Pacific Direct brand you wanted to preserve when giving up your majority share in the business?

The reputation the company had achieved as a global leader in offering luxury brand licensed toiletries of the highest quality, supplied by a world-class team of individuals who enthusiastically represented our products with pride.

What would you say is your greatest achievement to date?

Being the mother of three amazing children remains my most priceless achievement. I am a



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nightmare wife to a very patient man (albeit my father warned him, "no man alive should try living with his daughter.") Together we have managed to create a wealth of memories and experiences that are very valuable. We can now choose to do what we wish with the rest of our lives and we have the time in which to have a go at everything.

What is next for you?

In the short term I hope to participate in the world triathlon championships later this year. Longer term, I wish to do more putting back into life what I take out. So far, the scales have been tipped in my favour.

Lara's book 'More Balls than Most: Juggle Your Way to Success with Proven Company Shortcuts' will be available to buy at Amazon.com, from June 17th.

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