

“Losers quit, winners keep on going”

DREAM big dreams and be bold in your vision because winners see opportunities where others see only obstacles — so the good book says.

In the current recession-fearful climate, entrepreneurs could benefit hugely from reading *STAR* — Leadership Behaviours for Stellar SME Growth, a new business book by successful Belfast businessman Will McKee and his partner and son John.

STAR is a cracking read. While many business books build motivational models around the likes of Bill Gates or Richard Branson, *STAR* is stuffed with invaluable vignettes from the careers of Irish business people like Michael Smurfitt, Dr John King of Galen, Norman Kilroy of Grafton Group, and Sean Quinn of Quinn Group, the richest man in Ireland.

The strength of using local heroes is that the paths suggested by the book are made to seem more attainable to the Irish wannabe entrepreneur. In a word, you must be brave.

“We all fail before we succeed,” Will McKee told Grapevine. “The difference between success and failure is how we cope with failure when it occurs. Losers quit, winners keep on going.”

“Change creates opportunities for good leaders to become winners. If leaders adopt the methods in our book, their businesses will profit. Many businesses reach a certain point, then trickle along without any real direction. Our aim is to give people some of the ambition and drive to go forward which you see in people like Michael Smurfitt.

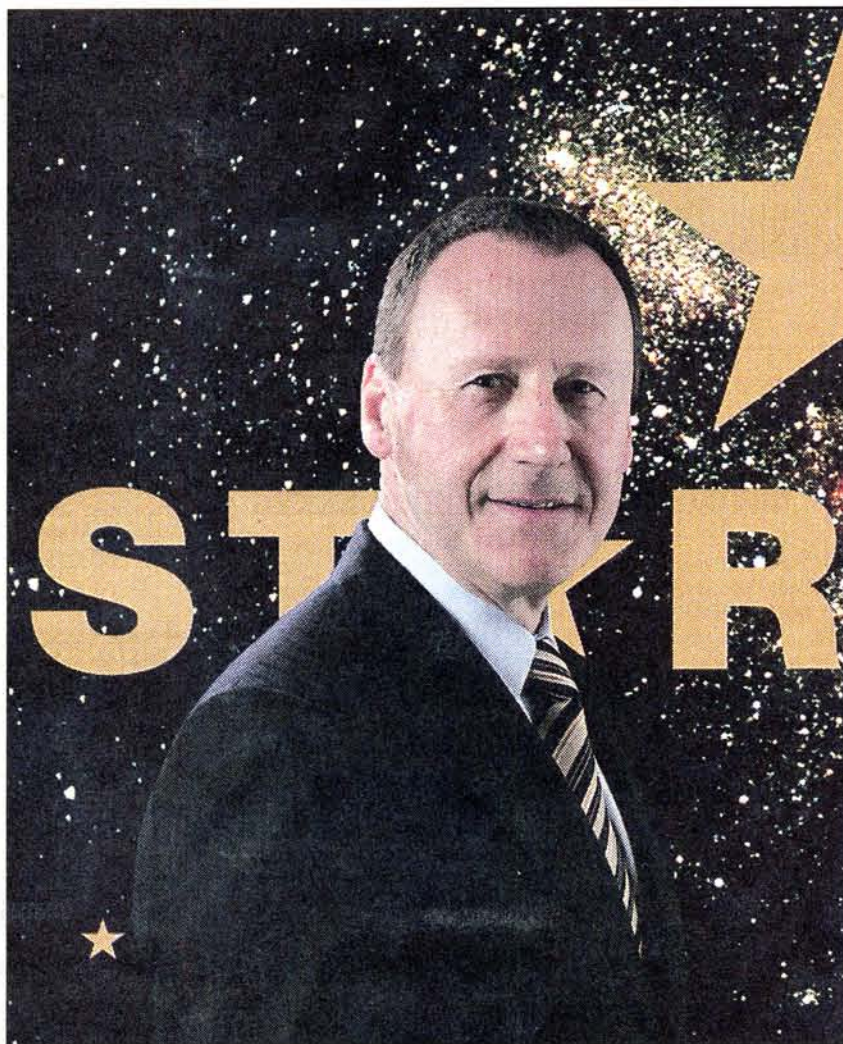
“Everybody laughed at Smurfitt when he talked about his ambitions for his small cardboard box company. Nobody was laughing when he turned it into a global leader. Many people building successful businesses share a number of common traits.”

Will McKee knows a fair share about success. He is chairman of Linkubator, which trains and coaches CEOs and team leaders from start-up businesses to large established multi-nationals. Over his 30-year career he has been CEO, director or chairman in a wide variety of companies and has worked in enterprise establishment and early-stage business support in Ireland, Britain and North America.

Will's son and business partner John is also a winner. He is CEO of Linkubator. He is also CEO of biotechnology company, Amtec Medical, which is one of the stars of the cross-border state bodies promoting indigenous life sciences expertise in Ireland. For instance, the Amtec Venometer is a portable device which uses a simple, non-invasive test for safely screening patients with suspected Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT).

Published by Oak Tree Press and sponsored by Ulster Bank, *STAR* is written specifically for executive managers, directors, CEOs and non-executive directors of the SME companies that employ 56% of the people in Ireland and the UK and represent 99% of the businesses in these islands.

The book is built around the ‘star’



Will McKee: author of *STAR*, a guide to business success.

characteristics of the entrepreneur: visionary, innovator, team builder, manager and seller. It tells tales like that of Co Down native Terry Brannigan, whose cleaning and maintenance firm Maybin Support Services is well on its way to its target turnover of Stg£250m (€315m) this year.

In the book, Brannigan is cited as a good example of a strong negotiator, a skill he initially developed while working Sir Gerry Robinson in building the giant Compass group in Britain. Upon his return to Northern Ireland, Brannigan acquired Maybin for Stg£30m (€37.5m).

Through swift deal-making, Brannigan created a business which now employs 15,000 people throughout the UK and Ireland. His first move was to snap up Maybin's closest rival, Grove Services.

Brannigan explained: “Grove had some key customers which we wanted to have on board and it was active in some areas we wanted to get into. But the key reasoning for us was that a number of national players had also tried to buy Maybin and we knew that they might be tempted to buy the No.2 in the marketplace as a route into Northern Ireland. So, to put it bluntly, we shut the door in their faces.”

As a model for ‘assertive attitude’, the McKee duo cite Michelle Mone, the straight-talking Glaswegian inventor of the Ultimo bra and founder of

MJM International, one of the UK's leading lingerie businesses with a home workforce of 120 and 1,500 staff in China.

The company recently opened a chain of Ultimo retail outlets in Debenhams. Of this, Mone said: “I think the High Street should be concerned. We'll have the price points, the quality, the best fitting bras in the market and the shops. They should be frightened.”

McKee's book describes Mone as energetic, sometimes upsetting staff, and always upfront with her views.

Mone said: “I would say I'm firm but fair. I wouldn't say I was a nasty bitch or anything, though others probably would.”

“If you're a man in business and you're tough, then you're a hero. If you're a woman and you're tough and direct, then you're a bitch.”

The McKees' book uses personal traits of this kind to develop a behavioural model for stellar growth among SMEs. It ends up with a scored questionnaire which allows each company to develop its own ‘Star profile’.

Succinct and vividly real, *STAR* is much more than just a good read — it's a must-have entrepreneur's manual for how to bring your business to the next level.

■ *STAR* is available from all good bookshops and at www.oaktreepress.com (tel: 021 4313 855). ISBN 978-1-904887-23-2, Hardback, €35, stg£27.50.