

About the Author:



For over 30 years, Steven Feinberg has applied the study of human behavior to performance efficacy. For the past 22 years, he has advised senior executives on key leadership, team, and organizational issues.

As president of Steven Feinberg, Inc., his major emphasis is on Advantage Maker Strategies which build leadership efficacy - strategic moves that lead to profitable courses of action.

Feinberg's Advantage Maker programs have included the implementation of a customer acquisition, retention, and growth program that generated a \$4 million revenue boost to a company that was losing customers daily, and transforming an executive from a must-get-rid-of million dollar legal liability into a much-sought-after leader to work for.

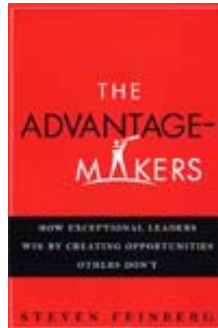
For the past 18 years Feinberg has also served as an adjunct faculty of the University of San Francisco's Department of Organizational Studies, teaching courses on leadership and practical strategies for increased organizational efficacy. His keynote speeches have awakened a variety of organizations and professional associations.

Feinberg's clients range from Fortune 500 firms to start-ups including Wells Fargo, Visa, Citibank, Sun Microsystems, Plantronics, HBO & Co., Synopsis, Seagate EMS, N.E.T., Affymax, Conifer, CustomerCast, Hughes Lan System, Natural Wonders, Synectics, Pac Bell, Xilinx, Docent, and Chameleon Systems to name a few.

For more about Steven Feinberg, please go to:
<http://www.stevenfeinberg.com/about.shtml>

The Advantage-Makers

How Exceptional Leaders Win By Creating Opportunities Others Don't



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■ The Big Idea

Some leaders are more capable than others. They consistently see possibilities that others miss. They learn more, but more than that, they learn *faster* – and transform their insights into breakaway strategies that lead to success. They collaborate more effectively and influence more powerfully, handle adversity far better, and are dramatically more successful at execution.

They, in short, are Advantage-Makers.

These skills aren't innate; they can be both taught and learned. And leaders who have managed to learn these skills have gone on to transform their organizations.

WHY YOU NEED THIS BOOK

The Advantage-Makers points out every skill would-be Advantage-Makers need to master, and then helps readers master each and every one of them. Readers aren't just exhorted to think different; they're actually taught how to do so. Readers also learn how to find the "commanding vantage point" in their situations – and use this high ground to spot and maximize every opportunity.

STRATEGIC SHIFTING: HOW TO SEE WHAT OTHERS MISS

How to Shift the Odds In Your Favor in the Best of Times and the Worst of Times

Would-be Advantage-Makers must first learn how to develop strategic shifting and find commanding vantage points to see what others miss.

- Advantage-Makers turn everything to their best possible advantage. They create superior outcomes.
- Their skills include:
 - An increased means of accomplishing their aims by getting the most out of what they have, spotting opportunities others don't know exist, and influencing situations to achieve superior outcomes
 - Superior effectiveness in the midst of constraints that allows them to make hard decisions, learn more and faster, course-correct from mistakes quicker, and design successful structures
 - Harness people's ingenuity by providing tactical structures to resolve conflicts, collaboration for breakaway strategies, and the power to persuade difficult people
- They are able to design choices that others don't even know exist.
- If you are not an Advantage-Maker, odds are you will lose to someone who is.
- Strategic shifting is adopting the right angle, and allows you to maximize opportunity and shift odds in your favor.

- A commanding vantage point is like a strategic hill from which to look at situations and see reality clearly. These can be dynamic and can provide a definite edge.

Breaking the Secret Code of the Advantage-Makers

There are a set of operating principles unique to Advantage-Makers – their time orientation, perceptions and mindsets, how they interact with people and challenges, and how they spot opportunities, create advantages and influence outcomes.

- Advantage-making is constantly creating superior outcomes in a timely manner by leveraging assets in the face of constraints and doing so simply and directly.
- Constraints are a fact of business life; they are the opposite of leverage. They should be seen as part of advantage-making materials and, as such, put to best use.
- Shifting time generates possibilities; shifting perception creates winners; shifting interactions transforms the game; shifting structure creates behavior.
- Advantage-Makers strategically shift time, interactions, perceptions, and structures.
 - Timing is the fundamental sense for Advantage-Makers.
 - Interactions determine the relationships between business, organizations, teams and people.
 - Perception separates the winners from the losers: winners see options; losers only complain.
 - Structure shapes behavior.
- The Code of the Advantage-Maker lets you spot opportunities, create advantages and influence outcomes.

Wise or Otherwise: Are You Following Any of the Hidden Laws of Defeat?

Even smart leaders can fall prey to pitfalls that prevent them from creating advantages. As a result, they may inadvertently produce disadvantages and have to play catch up. Knowing what to avoid can be as important as picking the right target in the first place; the emphasis, therefore, is how an organization can be steered around the traps.

Here are the Five Laws of Defeat and how to detect and avoid them.

1. Opportunity Knocking: Do Not Disturb – opportunities are missed because we don't comprehend the strategic context in which we can see a way to win. We don't see opportunities as such because of a lack of vision.
 - a. Avoid imposition of goals.
 - b. Avoid missing the strategic context.
 - c. Avoid the inadvertent "Do Not Disturb" error.
 - d. Avoid making things unnecessarily complex.

2. Perceptual Bias and Error: We Think We Are Thinking, but Are We? – one of the easiest mistakes leaders fall prey to is confusing perception with reality. We don't see that we don't see, and thus don't confront reality effectively.
 - a. Avoid basing judgments on information that's readily available.
 - b. Avoid comparing things with what you already know – especially if it is not an appropriate analogy.
 - c. Avoid simply going for consistency and maintaining order at all costs.
 - d. Avoid fixating on a reference point, which prevents us from getting to a commanding vantage point.
 - e. Avoid becoming overconfident by under- and over-estimating.
 - f. Avoid over-attributing personal factors and under-attributing situational forces when making judgements.

3. Competing against Yourself – At Cross Purposes – make sure there is a unity of purpose in all that you do. Otherwise you will simply be competing with yourself and you will weaken all the objectives you want to advance.
 - a. Avoid inadvertently fighting against yourself.
 - b. Avoid competing goals.
 - c. Avoid inadequate decision authority.

4. Stuck in Persistence: Making Sticky Problems Stickier – it's good to be persistent, but not if your persistence only makes the project worse.
 - a. Avoid simply doing more of the same, only harder.
 - b. Avoid throwing good money after bad.

5. Reactive: Playing to Avoid Losing – don't simply react against difficulties; work to create outcomes instead of simply complaining or blaming circumstances.
 - a. Avoid complaining; solve problems instead.
 - b. Avoid defensive behavior.

Shifting to a Commanding (Ad)Vantage Point

Most executives are strategists, but not everyone shifts to a favorable perspective. People need to learn how to strategically shift to a commanding vantage point, which will lead to a profitable course of action.

- Leaders must provide the right vantage point.
- The principle: *strategically shift to a commanding vantage point.*
- An opinion is a point of view, but may not be a vantage point.

- Vantage points can be moving as well as positional. You need to include the movement of all forces at play to see what is really going on, what is required. A vantage point is not some idealized spot.
- Wisdom develops from cultivating vantage points. Advantage-making is derived from a commanding vantage point.
- Leaders are thought by many to have the answers inside them. The answers, however, are also in other people.
- A general assumption is that every point of view is of equal value. Vantage points, however, are perspectives for real opportunities to be found. Sometimes a vantage point can be constructed by adding up the different viewpoints.

THE ADVANTAGE POINTS: THE LEVERS OF ADVANTAGE-MAKING

Adaptive Stretching: It's Not the Best Who Wins – It's Who's the Most Adaptive

The first advantage point: *adapt rapidly. The person with the widest range of responses wins.*

Non-adaptive responses are costly. Flexibility and agility, rather than rigidity, lead to control. Without this skill, executives encounter obstacles that constrain success. They must learn to spot unexpected opportunities and use anomalies.

- Anomalies are often the key to seeing what hasn't been seen before. Pay attention to anomalies to open up potential solutions.
- Become an experimenter. Balance expertise with experimenting. Fail forward!
- We can be stuck in "tall weeds" and don't see available solutions.
- Requisite variety – the internal diversity of any self-regulating system must match the variety and complexity of its environment. The most adaptable person or team always wins.
- There is a twist on control: If you want control, become more adaptable.

- Advantage-Makers use requisite variety to:
 - Adapt to a competitive-market environment and shift strategies and tactics in the marketplace
 - Design an organization with the requisite variety to change rapidly
 - Increase resourcefulness to shift their thinking and mental agility to handle changes
- Shift gears! Use your resources to move to second or third gear. Don't stay in first gear.
- Become the chief leverage officer – make sure your organization has an adaptive culture.

The Game Changer: If You Are In a Hole, Stop Digging and Change the Game

The second advantage point: *Game Changer. Do something that shifts the game.*

Counterproductive behavior results from persisting in a course of action that actually doesn't work, but thinking that it should or it will. There is a pattern of mishandling difficulties that turns into recurring problems. There is a method that instructs users to do more with less, instead of making sticky problems even stickier.

- It's insane to keep doing what you've always done and expect it to lead to different results.
- Doing more of the same usually leads to just more of the same – a first-order change effort. Try a second-order change, or a 180-degree strategy.
- Unintended consequences result from repetitive cycles.
- If you are going in the wrong direction, change direction; don't argue.

Move or Lose: Manage Momentum to Advance Your Organization

The third advantage point: *Move or lose. Spot the invisible forces at play that drive forward movement.*

Structure shapes behavior. A set of practical advantage-making steps are provided to position leaders for forward movement and to create momentum.

- Movement is behavior. You're at point A and want to get to point B. This provides a commanding vantage point to see your best choices.
- Leadership is recognizing that your organization is at A, while at the same time knowing where you want to get to, foreseeing what results you will have created at B, and then mobilizing forces to move from A to B.
- Organizations create and have motivating forces moving within and upon them. Mishandling these forces at play can produce problems.
- Your business has an underlying structure that determines your course of action. Change the structure and you change the behavior.
- The tendency for conflict avoidance is more than just a personality trait; it's an organizational pitfall. Resolve the conflict so that problems won't develop and fester.

Strategic Influence and Influence Perception: How to Get People to Say Yes in the Right Way to the Right Things, and Helping People See What they Need to See

The fourth advantage point: *Strategic Influence: The Multiplier Effect. Small influential moves, big leverage gains.*

- Advantage-Maker leaders are influencers. At critical moments and times of uncertainty, we look for their influence. If you are not influencing, it becomes difficult to think of yourself as a leader.
- Influence occurs when someone is making a request.
- Powerful influencers:

- Vivid framing of relevant arguments. Vivid information is more important than valid information.
- Reciprocity designed to give first and then receive. Social capital is generated by reciprocity.
- Source credibility that demonstrates lack of bias. Establishing unbiased authority will help you establish leadership credibility and influence.
- Source similarity to show social proof. We are creatures of social comparison and compare our views with others like us to validate and know what is correct.
- Contrasts – brains like them. First contrast and then make a request. People compare contexts and then draw conclusions.
- Act consistent with your word and image.
- Timing is extremely important – timing can be everything in many circumstances.

Being an Advantage-Maker: How to Play in a Different League

Time to apply. If you aren't continually creating advantages, customers, employees and stockholders will look elsewhere. Advantage-making is a high-level craft that only improves with practice.

- Advantage-making is the consistent ability to create superior outcomes by leveraging assets in the face of constraints. It's shifting the odds in your favor.
- Advantage-Makers are inquisitive and acquisitive in developing their advantage-making capacity. They make more connections, experiment more, learn more, fail more and rebound quicker.
- Leaders become Advantage-Makers through the application of the four Advantage Points discussed earlier.
- Do the most with the hand you were dealt. Ask yourself if you are making the situation what it could be.

- Spotting advantages is the key. Nuance is highlighted in the beginning. Take care not to miss the little clues, the anomalies.
- Don't simply defer to the genius. They see what they see and you see what you see. Cultivate the nerve to decide; leverage the constraints.