



# CHANGE THE GAME: SHARE THE WORK

Building a business that works  
better for everyone (especially you)

Kirsten Gibbs

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## About the Author

A Sloan Fellow of London Business School, with additional degrees in Spanish and software engineering, Kirsten Gibbs has spent more than 30 years helping businesses large and small to systematically improve the way they do things.

She is most enthusiastic about working with small businesses of up to 20 people, to enable everyone in them (including founders and owners) to enjoy a better life while keeping ever more customers happy and coming back for more.

“For small business owners, it’s personal.” says Kirsten. “They’ve built a really successful business by making promises and keeping them.

The challenge when growing further is how to keep it personal without killing themselves or their success in the process. For me, the solution is to turn your business into a system. A system for making and keeping promises that’s run by all the people in it, not just the owner. I hope this book will get you thinking about how that might work.”

Find out more about Kirsten and her work at [www.gibbsandpartners.com](http://www.gibbsandpartners.com).

# ALL MODELS ARE WRONG. SOME ARE USEFUL.

Walmart is a planned economy the size of Sweden. It isn't a republic or a democracy. It's a complex, strictly controlled, bureaucratic hierarchy, with the Walton family at the top.

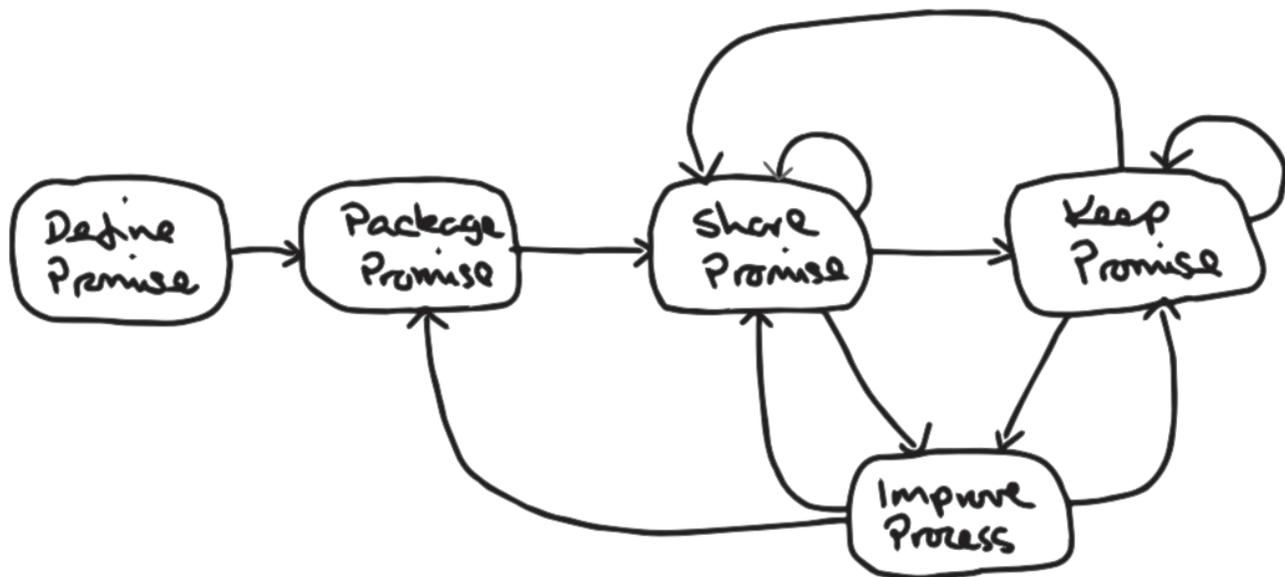
That isn't what most small business owners want, so for them, hierarchy isn't such a useful model.

One alternative is to think of a business as a system – “a group of interacting or interrelated entities that form a unified whole.”

And since “the system is what the system does”, it also helps to define what a business system is meant to do.

For most business owners I know, that is to make and keep a promise to customers, employees and community, and in the process make enough money to keep doing it well.

This model of a business is wrong. But it might be more useful for you.



Making things better is what humans do. And we mostly do it by creating new, better tools – tools for making and tools for doing; tools for organising and tools for co-ordinating; tools for learning and tools for thinking; tools for connecting and tools for feeling.

For me, great tools extend human capabilities without undermining the humanity behind them or the context around them. They make us both more human and more part of the world we live in.

Our very best tool is our ability to re-imagine what 'better' means.

**LET'S SEE HOW...**

# DOING IT OURSELVES

Mozart could carry an entire opera in his head. But he didn't expect his orchestra to read his mind. He didn't tell his musicians where to put their fingers either.

He wrote them a score.  
He told them what to play, not how.



Art Blakey didn't expect his band members to read his mind either. He also wrote them a score.

But he left gaps in it for them to improvise in – within the framework of the piece.

The piece was different every time, and yet also the same. You can tell when it's Art Blakey.

It's tempting to do it all yourself when you want to control the experience your audience has.

But better to work on creating a framework that supports your team to do it on your behalf.



# TRUST

There's a visible gap between the hands of the free-falling trapeze artist and those of her companion coming up to catch her. A gap that makes my stomach lurch just looking at it.

That gap is filled with trust. Trust that a promise made is a promise kept.



What happens, when trust gets eroded? When we discover that institutions and corporates aren't keeping the promises they made? That the ham we've just bought doesn't actually contain ham? The car we've just bought puts out more emissions than we were sold? The pension we were relying on has been appropriated by the firm we've worked for for 40 years? The news we read on social media and in the papers is fake?

When trust disappears, we stop taking risks.

We narrow our perspective.

We lower our expectations. We start accepting worse instead of expecting better. Cynicism starts to poison everything.

The only antidote is to make our own promises, the biggest we can, in spite of that stomach-lurching gap, and keep them every time.



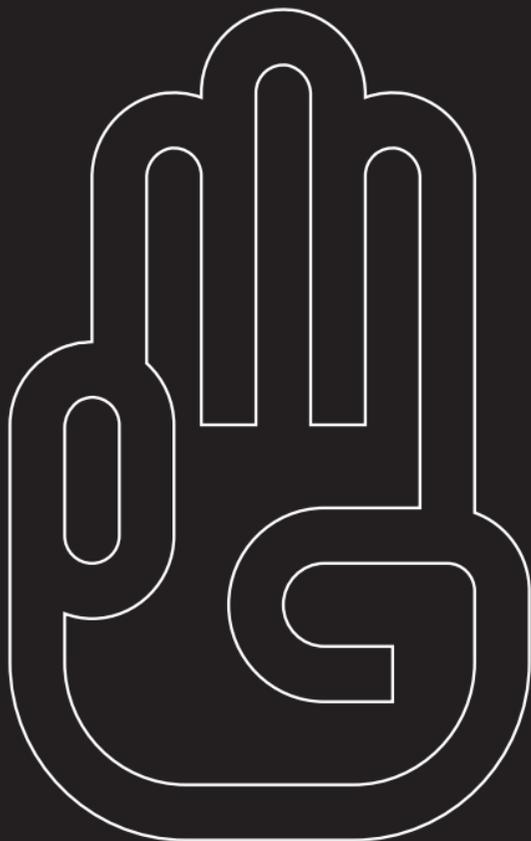
# THE PROMISE

Every great business is founded on a promise.

Not to shareholders. Not to staff.

To prospects and customers.

The promise of a change that's yearned for,  
that's worth more than the money in my pocket.



A promise you do your utmost to keep.

All businesses have such a promise, it shows, but it isn't always articulated explicitly.

Making it explicit, and sharing it with your team is the first step in building a framework that enables them to deliver it on your behalf.

The first (and last) rule of your enabling framework:

If in doubt, remember the promise, then do what it takes to deliver that.

# SELF CHECKOUT

"I can see you're waiting, why don't you use the self-checkout?" asked the shop assistant.

"Because I don't want to leave the store angry." I replied.

"Is it because people have lost their jobs?"

"No, often there are more jobs created fulfilling online orders."

"So what is it then?"

