

## GOLDEN NUGGETS FOR BUSINESS SURVIVAL

**Interviewee:** Robert Greeley

**Interview:** BTS 2

**Topics:** The Discipline of Business Survival and the Strategic Long Game of Real Estate

### Profile of the Interviewee

Bob Greeley is a seasoned finance and business professional with over 40 years of experience in banking and corporate restructuring. After spending 13 years at Wells Fargo, he transitioned into a specialized role as a court-appointed receiver and trustee, managing the turnarounds or liquidations of approximately 120 distressed companies. His unique "triage-first" approach focuses on securing immediate operations, protecting employees, and negotiating with creditors to mitigate personal liability for business owners. Beyond his work in corporate finance, Greeley is an active real estate investor who applies rigorous operational discipline to his property portfolio, emphasizing long-term stability over short-term speculation.

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### Core Business Fundamentals: Staying Within the "Picture Frame"

- **Define Your Identity:** Every business should have a metaphorical "picture frame" drawn around its core identity—who you are, what you do, and who you serve.
- **Avoid Competency Drift:** Businesses frequently fail when owners chase "adjacent profits" or hobbies (like race cars or gun safes) that drain capital and focus from their core expertise.
- **The Three-Yard Play:** Success is built on consistent, repeatable small wins—the "Joe Montana West Coast offense"—rather than risky, high-stakes "Hail Mary" attempts.
- **Solve Problems Early:** Most business failures are not caused by one catastrophic event, but by a cluster of ignored problems—weak marketing, poor controls, and overspending—that were allowed to grow.

### Financial Intelligence and Cash Command

- **Payroll is the Priority:** The first goal of any business in crisis is to make payroll on Friday; this survival milestone earns the right to plan for the next 30 days and beyond.
- **Liquidate Stale Inventory:** Assets that do not turn are "dead cash." Regular audits should be conducted to identify and sell slow-moving stock, even at a discount, to improve liquidity.

- **Aggressive Receivables Management:** You must be willing to call clients directly and insist on payment for services rendered; passive management of accounts receivable can kill a company.
- **Internal Controls as a Guardrail:** Establish strict internal systems to prevent "foolishness," such as unauthorized luxury spending by partners, which can destabilize a firm's cash position.

### Strategic Marketing and Customer Reality

- **Redefine Marketing:** Marketing is not just advertising; it is everything that makes a customer say "yes," including product quality, pricing, and communication.
- **Direct Engagement:** A business owner must be willing to stand "nose-to-nose" with a prospect, ask for the sale, and—more importantly—ask *why* they said no if they decline.
- **Know Your Marketing Area:** Expansion into markets or demographics you do not understand is a primary driver of business failure.
- **Sell Benefits over Margins:** Do not get distracted by high-profit margins on side products. Focus on the reliability and accomplishment of the service you provide to your core clients.

### Real Estate as a Disciplined Business

- **Treat Property as an Operation:** Real estate is not a passive hobby; it is a business with operations, service delivery, maintenance, and cycles that require active management.
- **The Seven-to-Ten Year Rule:** Successful real estate investing requires a long-term mindset. Holding periods should be at least seven to ten years to account for transaction costs and market cycles.
- **Profit on the First Deal:** If a business model or property cannot produce profit early on, it may never earn the right to scale.
- **Avoid "Home Run" Speculation:** Do not confuse a single, unusually profitable deal with a repeatable business model. Windfalls often lead to false confidence and riskier future mistakes.

### Leadership and Operational Triage

- **Face Reality Quickly:** Putting off hard decisions—like layoffs or liquidations—only increases losses and reduces your remaining options.
- **Hire Slow, Fire Fast:** Underperformers are usually known by their peers. "Reason together" with troubled employees and move them out quickly if they do not align with the company's needs.
- **Empower Experts:** Once you have hired good people with industry experience, "get the hell out of their way" and let them execute.
- **Smell the Problem:** To solve a business issue, you must get "in the trenches" and experience the problem firsthand rather than speculating from the outside.