

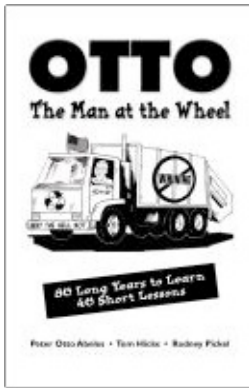
# OTTO

The Man at the Wheel



**80 Long Years to Learn  
40 Short Lessons**

Peter Otto Abeles • Tom Hicks • Rodney Pickel



*OTTO: The Man at the Wheel* finishes the story of Otto, which began in Vienna, Austria, and continues in Naples, Florida. Otto and his friends, Hickey & Clyde, communicate with humor and wisdom 40 important life and business lessons told with passion and common sense. Eighty years in the making, the book features a new "Otto" cartoon character and "Ottoisms" to convey the lessons, along with quotes and stories about an interesting cast of characters.

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# Otto, The Man at the Wheel

*80 Long Years to Learn 40 Short Lessons*

Peter “Otto” Abeles

Tom “Hickey” Hicks

Rodney “Clyde” Pickel

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ISBN 978-1-61434-991-4

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Printed in the United States of America.

BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2012

First Edition

## **Chapter 1**

### ***There is a blessing beyond belief***

As business owners and entrepreneurs, you learn to do it all. Tom and I have delivered parts and made service calls to get paid at all times of the day and night. When you are in charge of customer relations, it is important to be right but is most important to get paid. In the end, that is really what counts. But, boys will be boys and like the song “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun”, so do boys. I mean, really want to have fun.

The four years I spent in the United States Air Force was an important part of my life and a great learning experience. It was a lot of hard work and during that time I had to learn that someone else was behind the wheel and I was just supposed to follow orders. That is hard to do for an independent guy like myself.

I found out that if you did the crime you had to do the time as Tony Beretta would say. It was Sunday afternoon, our only day off and as my buddies and I scanned the bulletin board, the first thing we saw was Monday’s KP roster. Lo and behold my name was on top of the list, which of course made sense, since the list was in alphabetical order. Four of my buddies were also so honored, so we made big plans for our day off. Like all red-blooded American boys we decided to party that night. We splurged and went to a fine restaurant and of course, graced the premises of all our favorite hang outs. Late that night this group of worn out Air Force boys called it quits and headed back to the base. Feeling no pain, I might add. On the journey back, we spotted a drive-in, shut down for the night, with a huge sign out

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front declaring “Closed on Mondays”. Despite my altered state, a brilliant idea popped into my head. “Stop”, I yelled! “Take a look at that sign! I have an idea. Why don’t we steal the sign and hang in front of the mess hall?”

Today I am reminded of something Clyde’s old pal Mike Mountain used to say, “No air battle, no medal.” That’ll make more sense later. Trust me.

Anyway, back to my story. It’s not hard to get a carload of drunken guys to agree to anything. I recommend if you have a brilliant idea and your inebriated pals agree with you, perhaps before you act, you might want to wait until you sleep on it to determine its genius. But, since it was very late and there would be no one near the mess hall, we carefully hung the sign where it was prominently displayed in clear view.... and went to bed. Early the next morning we reported for KP duty as scheduled. Every one wondered why the five of us all had stupid grins on our faces. At 6 a.m. the Mess Sergeant opened the doors for breakfast and of course nobody showed up. At 6:30 a.m., coincidentally, there was a phone call from the other mess hall and an agitated voice reported, “We are swamped. What the hell is goin’ on?” Somebody went outside and spotted the sign and reported it to the Mess Sergeant whose face turned crimson red. Well the shit hit the fan and that’s never a very pretty picture. He took one look at the group of us and apparently had no trouble narrowing it down to the fabulous five. After a severe tongue lashing that ranked up there with one of my mother’s rages after tripping over my toy soldiers; we got a week of KP as our punishment. Though I didn’t feel it at the time, I have to say, it was worth it.... in many ways. It bonded my friendship with my other buddies, and it also taught me, really taught me,

there are always consequences for your actions. Beretta was right.

Later in the business world when I was first starting out, my father and I had another of our ongoing arguments. Working for family *can* be rewarding but it can also be very stressful. This particular argument was different and far more violent. In life, battles are a part of the deal. I learned that lesson as a child in Vienna when the Nazis came rolling into town. You see, I respected my father, but this was a different time and place. It was obvious I wasn't going to win this battle with him so, to make our long argument short, I quit. My father told me I couldn't quit....then he proceeded to fire me. And, that was ok with me except for this one thing that really pissed me off... he took my company car.

As I rode home on the train, angry and scared, I formed a plan of action. I like to write down my plans and so I scribbled my thoughts to the rhythm of the rails.

I needed some wheels so *Item 1* was *Look for any kind of job as long as it provides a company car*. I was on a roll now and *Item 2* came quickly. *Use the new company car on my day off to look for a better paying and more permanent job*. *Item 3* was the culmination of the two, *Sky's the Limit!* I had a lot of confidence in myself and recommend that you have the same. If you are not your #1 Fan, then who is?

After scanning the "help wanted ads" for a few days, I came across something interesting. It read, "*Collector messenger wanted- company car provided- Contact Ace Scavenger Company*". I copied down the address. Ace Scavenger Company was a large trash collection company. When I applied

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for the job, I told them I didn't just *need* the job, I *wanted* the job. My confident, positive attitude paid off. While proudly driving home in my new company car I was reminded of *Item 1* in my plan. *Look for any kind of job as long as it provided a company car.* Step 1 complete. The soldier in me was winning. Remember, "No air battle, no medal".

The job entailed servicing what they called their cash collection routes each day. I would visit their customers in different parts of the city and collect the fees they owed for the services we provided. The job was easy, *and* kind of boring, but as I looked around on my routes I found a lot of businesses that seemed to have no collection service. And, as it just so happens, there was a lot of construction going on in those days. Don't be discouraged, my friends, because America's construction business will come back to life. It has in the past and will in the future.

That afternoon I asked my boss if he would mind if I tried soliciting new business for the company. Not only did he not mind, he was delighted! He promised the first month's charge from any new account as my commission. I was so excited I could hardly sleep that night. I tried counting sheep but all I saw was dollar signs.... \$\$\$\$\$. You see, and here's part of the lesson, if you visualize money first, then you already have it in a way and you can start claiming it for your own. As Napoleon Hill said, "There is one quality which one must possess to win, and that is definiteness of purpose, the knowledge of what one wants, and a burning desire to possess it." I knew what I wanted and I had a burning desire to possess it.

The next day I started looking for new accounts, first small stores, then gas stations and finally parking lots. Soon I was



bringing in new customers every week. I loved the commission checks. After a few months, I asked the boss if I could get some help with the collections so I could have more time to develop new customers. He loved it! The way I see it, if you don't have new ideas popping into your head every day, then something's wrong. They should be pouring in at the same rate as the commission checks. So, formulate these ideas into plans and take action. And remember just as there are negative consequences for negative actions, there are positive consequences for positive actions. "For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

On a side note, I also learned a very valuable business lesson from a completely different perspective. You see my boss, Dean Buntrock, began to realize my sales efforts were paying off, both for me and the company. Consequently, he decided that weekly sales meetings were in order. As he and I became more comfortable with each other, Mr. Buntrock began to share his business problems and concerns with me. Therein lies the birthplace of my new idea and the reason for this "side note". As he listed things he either did not like to do or had no time to do, I would offer to take care of them for him. For a lazy man, this might be considered "sucking up", but for a man with high aspirations it was merely an opportunity to begin a path down the road of entrepreneurship. You see, one of the steps to succeeding within the company structure, is to find out what's on your bosses' "don't like" list, and make that your personal "to do" list. Trust me; it works. Now, where was I? Oh yeah.....

The next day I came to work wearing a white shirt and conservative tie and announced proudly, "I am going to start looking for some large customers." I hadn't forgotten all that new construction going on. You see, growth stimulates and

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inspires a *salesman*. The folks in the office were somewhat surprised at the sight of me in my new wardrobe. That's because they had never seen anyone dressed up in the *trash* business. I spent evenings at the library and started poring over the Dodge Report. I made a note to myself to convince the boss to let me subscribe to this useful tool. These reports listed every new building and factory under construction.

I was not afraid to ask questions. I was not afraid to make mistakes. When you are at the bottom, every fall is a short one.

Slowly at first, I started having success. And soon, my commission checks were much bigger than my salary. It wasn't long before I had a title *and* an office. My new career had started out of the ashes of my old one. The cars got nicer, the titles more prestigious and the offices bigger. Eventually I became an officer of Waste Management. I am reminded of a saying of another old friend of my pal Clyde's. His name was Bob Cahill and he lived in Northern California. He used to say, "In order to accumulate, you got to speculate." I guess you could say my speculations were starting to pay off.

As it turned out, I never really had to incorporate *Item 2*. It happened in its own time. *Item 3* is still happening. *Sky's the limit!* If I were to summarize, I would say this. Whatever you do, you should do it to the hilt whether playing a prank or starting a new career, do it with the same gusto. In other words, play hard and work hard. Certainly, winning is about the prize, but it is also about the battle, large or small, and the pleasure in knowing you gave it all you had, and being able to say "I did it; I fought the good fight, I finished the course, and I kept the faith."

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And, I've got to tell you, it feels good! You should always practice the art of "feeling good". And, what adds to that feeling and makes it even better, and this is the really cool part, is taking what you have learned and being able to say, "I helped someone else do it, too!" Why the hell not? Be the patron you were destined to be.

And therein lies the wonderful law of exponents, when you hear that the person you helped do it helps someone else do it and the third party doesn't even know you were involved. That is *the blessing beyond belief*, living life on your own terms, the very best of terms, at the top of the heap where the air is fresh and clean.



"Gentlemen, Otto's terms are simple...  
I accept only unconditional surrender!"

## Chapter 2

### *Life starts with a few stutter steps*

Nobody and I mean nobody has it easy. Everyone has a few curses to go with their blessings. It's called being human. You stumble around. Walking itself has been described as a controlled fall. Let me explain.

My wife Bonnie and I had the chance to see the Academy Award winning film, *The King's Speech*. The unlikely monarch, King George VI of Britain, was brilliantly portrayed by Colin Firth, who won both the Oscar and Golden Globe for Best Actor. It's also worth mentioning that Geoffrey Rush in the role of the speech therapist was also outstanding. Although nominated for Best Supporting Actor, he lost out to another amazing performance by Christian Bale in *The Fighter*. But, I digress. Back to *The King's Speech*, I have to admit that as great as the movie was, it brought back painful memories of my freshman year in High School. You see, that's when I began to stutter, and for a fourteen year old kid from Vienna, Austria living in Chicago, that can be devastating. In a nutshell, it made my life miserable.

Quite frankly, a stuttering freshman is not just subject to ridicule, but will most likely attract the attention of the school bully. In those days, bullying in school was not only tolerated, but often completely overlooked. And, that left only two options. Either suck it up.... or do something about it. I was reading just the other day that more than 68 million people worldwide stutter, which is about 1% of the population. In the

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United States, that's over 3 million Americans who stutter. So, I wasn't alone. But of course, I didn't know that then.

Now, you would expect a young guy like me, who'd only been in America for 7 years, would get a little support from his family. But, then again, you didn't know my family. Apparently my mother thought that *stuttering* was a defect and since she couldn't trade me in for a better model, she dealt with me the only way she knew how. She would shake me, as though that would erase the pressure of stammering, and yell "Speak right, Otto!"

As you might imagine, her *help* was ineffective. In fact, research also shows that family problems, of which we had more than our share, may in fact contribute to stuttering and stammering. This shaking routine occurred whenever my actions were considered an infraction by mother's standards. Eventually, I began to fear all physical human contact. Whenever anyone would wrap their arms around me, for *whatever* reason, I expected to be shaken violently. It even terrorized me to be hugged. Can you imagine the emotional and physical problems resulting from not wanting to be hugged?

Well, since Mother's corrective method was not having the desired effect, I decided I had to solve the problem on my own. As always Heinz Robert, my older brother was there to help and together we developed a plan. Rather than just sitting and reading the paper quietly and to myself, I would stand in front of the mirror and read stories from the Chicago Tribune aloud, over and over until I was flawless. Guess what. It worked.

Eventually the stuttering stopped, and since I was no longer stuttering, so did the shaking. Slowly, I warmed up to the idea

of being touched and began to see it as a positive thing. Tom and Clyde are both huggers and whenever we see each other; *just guess what we do?* You got it. We hug! It's awkward at first but you kind of get used to it and then you desire it. And the old proverb says "as you teach you learn."

You see, one thing leads to another and before long you might not even remember when or why you got off track. So what do you do? Do what I did. Take the bull by the horns and develop a strategy that gets the job done. And the unintended consequences of a *negative* circumstance can have unexpected *positive* results.

For me, I learned to overcome my speech problem, became a better reader, knew more about the news events that shaped my world, and rediscovered the beauty of a hug. And when I saw the movie about the king who had similar problems and through the help of an honest though unlikely friendship working toward a lifelong solution, I realized that everyone is in the same boat. That recognition helped make me a better marketing professional for business and that personal experiences can't be compartmentalized. Bottom line.... relating to the weaknesses of others strengthens our own efforts.

On my bulletin board at my home office, I have a valuable saying located where I can see it at all times. It reads: *If you can't eliminate stress, learn to manage it.*

I still don't like shaking as much as hugging unless it is a method used to make a perfect martini. And when there is one of those tasty treats around, Clyde and Hicks will always be around to join me. So you see, I took a negative and turned it into a toast to celebrate life. L'Chaim!



You are the one and only reflection of who you really are and who you will one day be.



## **Chapter 3**

### ***Mobsters are People, Too***

In the summer of 1949 I decided to apply for a job driving a Checker Cab. Little did I know that to be a “cabbie” I would have to become a member of the local trade union. This was, after all, the Chicago I had heard about as a boy in Vienna and was now a reality to me. I filled out all the necessary paperwork and was told by the clerk that the fee was sixty bucks! To me at the time, sixty dollars was a small fortune! She might as well have asked for a million.

As I stood there, tearfully explaining to the nice lady that I did not have the funds, a short dapper looking man walked by the counter. He must have overheard my sad story. He stopped and reached into his pocket. For all I knew he was about to pull out a gun. This *was* Chicago and I recalled those images of the gangster movies I loved as a young boy in Austria. Heinz Robert used to play the role of Al Capone and I was his muscle. We would ride with Adolph, our chauffeur, through the streets of Vienna pretending to be the mob. We had so much to learn.

Anyhow, the man pulled out a huge wad of cash and peeled off three crisp twenty dollar bills. He said “Here kid. Pay me back from your first pay check.” Then he spun on his heels and disappeared into the office. I stood there stunned, grateful of course, but stunned nonetheless. Finally I heard the nice lady clearing her throat to get my attention. So, I handed her the money. She seemed a little surprised by the actions of the man with the wad of money. “Do you know who that was?” she asked.

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I shook my head and managed to get out a muffled “no”.

“That was Joey Glimco, the president of the union. If I were you, I would pay back the money as soon as possible or you will end up with some broken bones.” She grimaced at me and I got the message loud and clear.

I mumbled thanks and rushed out of the office looking over my shoulder to make sure the door to the office remained closed. I walked quickly down the street hoping I wasn’t being tailed.

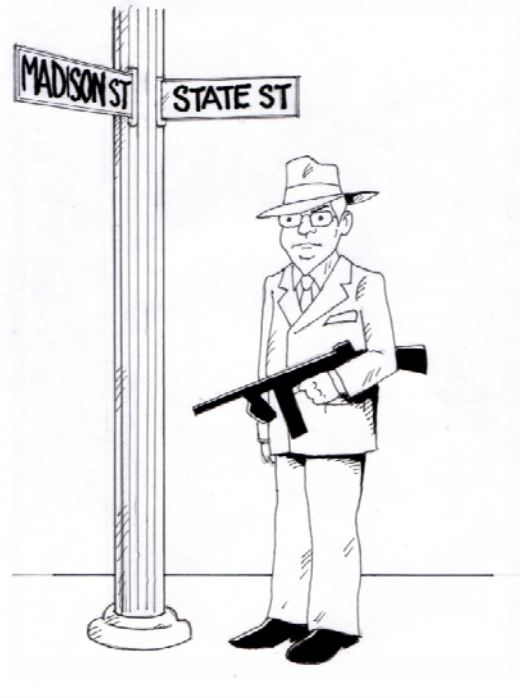
With my first check, I immediately paid off my sixty dollar debt. I loved being a cabbie. I learned a lot about the city that I now consider my home. Joseph Paul Glimco died in 1991. That was a memorable day for me. He was an Italian American labor leader and the union did a lot for the working stiffs in The Windy City. He was also a well-known organized crime figure. He was considered "Chicago's top labor racketeer" in the 1950s. One high-ranking Chicago Teamsters leader noted in 1954, "He is the mob. When he opens his mouth, it's the syndicate talking." Glimco was active in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) and a close associate of Teamsters president Jimmy Hoffa. I really can’t speak to all of that.

All I know personally of Joey Glimco is that he helped out a kid who really needed it, a kid who was able and more than willing to repay the loan. But, he did something else. He gave me a break. He didn’t have to do that. You can be as independent as you want in this world. You can say you do things on your own, but now and then, everyone needs a break, from the janitor to the CEO. And, if there is one thing we need to remember, it is to be grateful. That man changed my life.

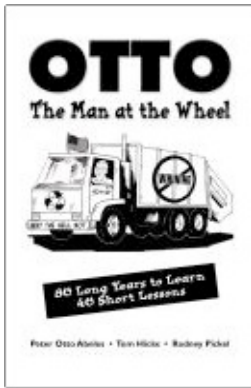
Tom often tells me that I am his business mentor. He says we were brought together by destiny and that he is eternally thankful that we were. Out of that relationship, my first book was spawned, *Otto the Boy at the Window*. Then out of the blue, we both seemed to be inspired at the same time. That inspiration led to a stage version of my life. We contracted William Dorian, a Nashville director and brilliant playwright to develop a theatrical production for us. I remember the day Tom told me that Rodney Pickel was perfect to portray me as an adult on stage. We then brought him into the mix for his superb acting talents.

Like the dream I had the day I walked into Mr. Glimco's office, I know there is more to be done. Dreams and people are both meant to be fulfilled. It takes gratitude, but it also involves something else. And that is old fashioned hard work. I like to think when Joey Glimco saw me standing there he had a gut feeling that this kid had what it took. I like to think that I come across as someone who has been around the block, chased by Nazis and haunted by my childhood memories of a volatile home life. I like to think I'm a guy who takes advantage of every opportunity, no matter where it comes from. I guess you could say I like to think.

And thinking requires a price, your valuable time. When someone says "a penny for your thoughts", you might consider negotiating because they are worth a lot more and your actions even more for as the old sages thought, "If charity cost nothing, the world would be full of philanthropists." Be a real humanitarian. A mobster was to me.



"Just remember, kid, nobody's all bad.  
Not even you or me."



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