Most entrepreneurs have no structure or systems in place to grow their businesses and end up feeling overwhelmed, staying small, and never reaching their goals. *Your Most Important Number* is the operations and leadership guide that you were never given. It's one of the most powerful and practical books I've picked up all year and is a must read for entrepreneurs!

—Evan Carmichael
CEO, EvanCarmichael.com

Thanks to this little book about the Most Important Number we have made massive strides in our profitability. Our YoY numbers look great. Last year our net profit percentage was 1.6%. This year year we are averaging at 18.9%.

—Angela Arnold
Principle + CEO, Arnold Marketing Consultants

System Pavers has used the MIND Management System framework for the last three years and accountability and focus have improved significantly during this period along with our Net Profit. Our leadership team meetings have been more efficient, and we can quickly identify how each team is performing and how individuals are being developed to achieve their MIN.

—Larry Green
Executive Chair and Co-Founder, System Pavers

I wish all business strategy sessions were as focused and productive as the sessions with Lee Benson and his team. Using their MIND Management System process gets our leadership team in sync and on track for quicker implementation. I appreciate how our team's focus gets clearer with their accountability process. It's a major growth accelerator!

—Chad Willardson
Founder, Pacific Capital; Co-Founder, GravyStack;
and 2x Best-Selling Author

As the Founder and CEO of Black Mothers Forum, Inc., I was looking for a way to transfer my passion and purpose to our next generation of mothers. This work we do will outlive us, and we wanted to make sure we had a natural succession plan in place. Lee Benson facilitated our Annual Board Retreat utilizing the MIND Management System and ignited a fire in our team that is still burning bright and spreading throughout members of our organization and in our community. Lee was able to help our team collectively solidify our common purpose and set realistic expectations in the midst of dreaming big. We are now able to assign the proper tasks to the right team members and more efficiently accomplish our goals.

—Janelle Wood
Founder/CEO, Black Mothers Forum

YOUR MOST IMPORTANT NUMBER

INCREASE COLLABORATION, ACHIEVE YOUR STRATEGY, AND EXECUTE TO WIN

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AND EXECUTE TO WIN

LEE BENSON

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the thousands of incredible leaders I have worked with who intentionally accelerated the value their organizations created.

And to our team at Execute to Win, I am so excited about our future as we serve incredible companies.

For Special Bonus Content Associated
with this Book Visit:

etw.com/bonus

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Foreword

Jack Welch introduced me to Lee Benson about ten years ago. He wanted me to evaluate his operating methodology. After spending time with Lee, I was deeply impressed by the simplicity of his methodology—what he calls Most Important Number™ and Drivers™ (MIND™). Lee's method resonated with me immediately. It works!

Simplicity wins.

It's transferable, repeatable, and most significantly, it's visible. Many times in business, we try to get smart and tinker with the tools. When we do, we can introduce complexity into the equation. Try scaling complexity. It's never fun, especially in organizations with growing teams. You're in for a treat. Don't let the simplicity pass you by. Instead, latch onto it, and

make it your own. When you do, you'll identify your Most Important Number and start aligning your team around that metric.

I look forward to hearing your stories of business breakthroughs.

—Ram Charan
#1 *New York Times* best-selling co-author and director of several corporate boards in the US, India, China, Canada, and Dubai

Note to the Reader: Winning Means Keeping Score

Humans are hardwired to play, compete, and win. No one needs to teach children this. They discover it naturally in the nursery or on the playground.

It's not just kids, though. Many adults enjoy participating in sports. Even more enjoy watching sports.

Although it's ingrained in us from early childhood, playing, competing, and winning never leaves us. It continues through adulthood and shows up on the sports field, in the classroom, and even in the boardroom. The stakes might change, but the game still operates by the same rules.

The score.

The score tells us there are winners and losers. Imagine a Little League season without a championship or an NFL season without a Super Bowl. How boring would that be? The entire sports industry lives and dies based upon this one element.

No score? No, thank you.

Numbers matter to the players and the fans.

Ironically, business is also a game. There are winners and losers, and all center around one thing—numbers. When businesses don't publish their numbers, employees feel a lack of engagement.

Humans crave feedback. We want to know how we're performing. Numbers tell a powerful story.

Every business *has* numbers, but not every business *knows* its numbers. Fewer businesses know their Most Important Number. The good ones do. This isn't what makes them good, but make no mistake, it's what *keeps* them good.

Not all numbers are equal. Some carry little weight, like how many paper towels you stock in the restroom. Other numbers represent a significant component, like profit margin or client turnover.

The key is identifying your Most Important Number. Failure to do so could mean the end of your business.

This book is that tool—the simple method to help you discover your Most Important Number and significantly improve how your team thinks about creating value.

By identifying your Most Important Number and aligning your business around it, incredible changes

begin to take place. We've discovered this simple method increases collaboration, equips teams to achieve strategy, and helps them execute to win.

Literally, **your Most Important Number is the clearest factor that determines whether you're winning or losing**. Without it, you're just playing around. In this scenario, top performers leave, morale declines, and customers get left behind.

But the opposite is true. Discover your Most Important Number and align your time, money, and energy around that number, and you'll start winning. Stay focused on your Most Important Number, and you'll keep winning.

I can't wait for you to experience your winning season, and I'm excited to help you on this journey. This is what makes business fun. It's also what helps you and your people win championships and give back to your communities.

—Lee Benson

PS One more thing. In the introduction, I share the brief origin story of how the MIND Management System™ came to be. If you're not interested in the context, then skip this section and get right into Chapter One. The "fact-finding" readers may appreciate the history. The "give me the details" readers will want to jump into Chapter One. Either way, it's my honor to welcome you to *Your Most Important Number*.

Introduction

Don't (Just) Wish Upon a Star

I started my entrepreneurial journey $600,000 in debt. I bought a small electroplating company for its debt of more than half a million dollars. At the time, there were only three employees, one being me. We had just lost 90 percent of our business. We had no money in the bank and very little in the way of equipment. But we had a good idea.

I told the other two employees I couldn't afford to pay them during the first year, but I would give them stock instead. One said he knew this would work. The other said it would never work but to sign him up anyway because he just wanted to see what would happen. In the first year, we earned $360,000 in sales, and

over the next twenty years, we grew to 500 employees and added two additional companies doing business in sixty countries with 2,000 customers.

We were in the aviation aftermarket business, and our mission was to safely reduce aircraft operating costs. We started our journey by offering our customers roughly eight repairs to specific parts on two different helicopter models. Our first brochure listed the repairs we performed and to call Rick, Lee, or John with questions. We created a tremendous amount of value for our clients as we saved them up to 80 percent of new part replacement costs.

At the time we sold the business in 2016 for a nice nine-figure exit, we had approximately 10,000 FAA-approved repairs and hundreds of FAA-approved parts we manufactured in-house. The year prior to selling, we estimated to have saved our customers $200 million over their next best value alternative, which was often having to purchase new parts.

More than Meets the Eye

This might read like a business fairy-tale now, but things are rarely as they appear. Prior to the big payday, we had our own less-than-ideal experience.

I remember feeling like the growth of the company was stuck for a couple of years at about $8 million in sales and 150 employees. At the time, I didn't mind working 70-plus hours a week, but I knew there had to be a better way. We would get aligned on what

we needed to do to win, and in short order, things would drift. As a result, I spent a lot of time realigning everyone and being frustrated with the decisions that were being made.

I started studying our company's functional leaders to understand why some achieved desired results from their team, and others did not. Based on the knowledge I gained from this experience, we created a Leadership Audit Checklist our leaders affectionately referred to as the "LACL" (pronounced "lackel").

We identified and categorized our leaders by four distinct levels:

1. Frontline Supervisor
2. Manager
3. Senior Manager
4. President

Each level included descriptive leadership behaviors, operating system elements, and foundational readiness elements we rated green, yellow, or red based on the quality of their results. The LACL generated a total percentage score for each leader, and lo and behold, as one would imagine, the leaders with the highest LACL percentages achieved better results than leaders with low scores.

This new awareness caused us to create a surgical-level leadership development program. We posted all leaders' scores with complete transparency so each could review and find opportunities for improvement. In addition to leaders finding their

own opportunities for improvement and acting on them, their managers could see exactly where they needed development next in order to create the most value. Within a few months, all scores improved, and we started growing again. This was an amazing lesson in effective leadership development.

The scores for each person were in three categories:

1. **Leadership traits**—How leaders "showed up" and developed others
2. **Management operating system elements**—Designed to hold leaders accountable for doing what they said they would
3. **Foundational readiness areas**—Created to ensure leaders had the capabilities in place to win now and win later

With improved leadership results now driving growth, we worked to ensure every employee had clearly defined goals related to quality, cost, safety, delivery, and culture. Productively demonstrating work to achieve these goals became a measurement of performance as well as a condition of employment.

Twenty percent of our employees loved the process, and 60 percent worked well within our parameters. The other 20 percent, we had to drag along kicking and screaming. At the time, I didn't care because we were beating our competition globally on any core product on which we chose to focus. The most notable benefit was it gave us a systemic and sustainable mechanism to objectively rank all employees on

culture and performance. Figure 1a (below) represents the evaluation results of approximately 500 of our employees in 2015.

Figure 1a

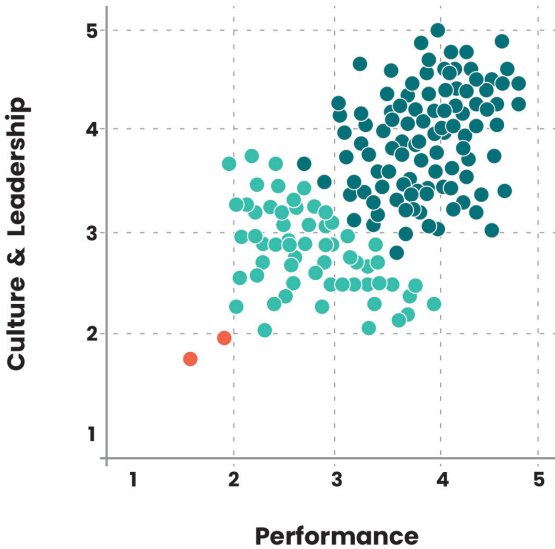On the Y-axis, we objectively measured all employees on culture and leadership. On the X-axis, we objectively measured all employees' performance. I loved that even though we were winning globally on all of our core products, there were still lots of opportunities to improve culture and performance.

For additional resources on this topic, including exclusive content and proven tools, visit **etw.com/tools.**

Every Business Runs on a Management Operating System

In 2011 when my colleague and friend Jack Welch (former CEO of General Electric and voted "Manager of the Century") reviewed our operating system, he said it was "the best business management operating system he had ever seen, and had he used it when running General Electric, their results would have been exponentially better."

When I asked Jack why he felt it would have been exponentially better, he said the greatest number of leaders they could ever fully follow, develop, and appropriately position in the organization was the top 500–600 leaders. He felt anything greater tended to become a mostly check-the-box exercise. Jack told me if he had our operating system in place at GE, he could have personally followed, developed, and positioned up to 2,000 leaders.

With Jack's endorsement, in addition to the results we experienced with our clients, I decided to write this book. I wanted to provide access to a proven methodology, tools, and lessons learned for any leader looking to solve the universal leadership challenge of getting teams to consistently create more value over time.

As with most challenges in life, there is no silver bullet to achieve this. The next best strategy to create a culture of winning is creating a management-operating-system-based methodology that works for 80 percent of all teams.

A management operating system (MOS) is generally defined as the set of tools, meetings, behaviors, and general way of doing the work to manage your people and processes to deliver results. As we all know, creating something workable for 80 percent of anything is much easier said than done.

There are several popular management operating systems to choose from, as well as a plethora of organically grown systems. None of these management operating systems are designed around consistently improving the Most Important Number.

As a result, these systems are difficult to sustain because they're based on complexity. As you probably know, it's nearly impossible to scale systems of complexity. Besides, even if you could, it's not fun, rewarding, or stress-free.

In the rare exception they do work, it's because a star team member was driving the process. Likewise, when the star leaves a company for whatever reason, the results simply stop. The results are rarely replicated by another team member because of the level of energy and commitment required to make it work.

Management operating systems shouldn't take a Herculean effort to keep them going. If they do, we are either not doing the systems right or, more likely, trying to force something that doesn't make sense into our organization's culture.

Since I just mentioned culture, let me define it now because it's an important concept within this book. In our context here, I define culture as "what we have agreed to do, and how things get done." As you

can imagine, culture and winning go hand in hand. When both of these components are part of an operating system, business becomes truly fun.

A System That Works for Every Business

After our business transformation and then eventual exit, dozens of my friends noticed. Many ran their own businesses and said they wanted to implement the management operating system I developed for my business so they could experience the same amazing results we were getting. Guess what? It only worked for about 5 percent of these CEOs. I believe it took *too much discipline* to consistently drive it over time. In short, it was just too hard for most organizations to sustain.

I've learned what made me wildly successful in my aerospace businesses won't work for most organizations. It is difficult to emulate the results one company gets by trying to replicate what they did.

In my efforts to resolve this, I've studied, tested, and developed a solution to consistently create more value over time and enhance the work of any team in any type of organization. The culmination of this work is what I have named the **M**ost **I**mportant **N**umber and **D**rivers Methodology. We call the application of these concepts the MIND Management System.

MIND Management System has worked in 100 percent of the teams that truly integrated it. As a result, I've dedicated my life's work to facilitating and implementing the MIND Management System

in organizations. Whether it is through this book, our online MIND Course, or by joining one of or our EXECUTE MasterMINDs, I am committed to helping every leader who is willing to do the work, grow holistic value creation in their organization. I created the company Execute to Win (ETW) for this purpose. As it's grown into serving clients around the world, we created customized software to make it much easier to sustain the MIND Management System over time.

Over the past ten years, we've had the opportunity to work with hundreds of teams and thousands of leaders. In this process, we've studied how teams set goals, developed their leaders, and held people accountable to their vision, mission, and values.

ETW's MIND Management System and supporting cloud-based software tracks performance and culture, allowing leaders to operate with complete transparency to the inner workings of their organization at any point in time. As a result, the MIND Management System is a highly collaborative way to do work. It is easy to implement and scale, and it rapidly improves results.

Unexpected Benefits

We've seen how the payoff our clients have experienced from this journey can significantly impact profits, revenue, cash flow, employee alignment/ engagement, and more. The biggest payoff I've seen, although completely unexpected, is how the

ripple effect of the MIND Management System has strengthened communities.

Healthy communities take care of their own with little to no outside help needed from the government or anyone else. I saw this time and again within my aerospace business. When employees needed help, team members would organically surround them to get them back on their feet.

Such was the case with Kevin, an employee who injured his spinal cord in an automobile accident on the way to work one day. The injury left him without the use of his legs. Kevin had worked for the company's shipping and receiving department for less than a year. Without being asked to do so, several employees remodeled Kevin's home, so he could have complete access to both floors. When Kevin was able to come back to work, we trained him in a new job, and he is still working in that role today. It was remarkable how the team rallied together to help.

This type of teamwork is contrary to the norm. You've probably seen the research. Approximately two-thirds of all employees dislike their jobs to varying degrees. This unhealthy energy often permeates into the home, workplace, and even their communities.

We are working to change this by offering a solution that energizes and rewards employees at all levels. We have had countless clients who've adopted the MIND Management System say it has significantly changed their personal lives for the better. This is the positive energy we want to send into the world.

In the process of adopting the MIND Management System, we've found over 80 percent of employees love and fully engage in their work. This is more than 30 percent higher than "normal" levels of engagement, as reported by Gallup Polls for the past two decades. An elevated level of employee joy and engagement unleashes an amazing flow of positive, productive energy into our employees' communities.

Impacting the larger community creates a much better world for my family, friends, and colleagues. Within this game, using the MIND Management System, we can all win! And on that positive point, let the games begin.

About the Author

Lee Benson has accumulated more than 25 years of experience as a CEO, and he understands the challenges and tensions that come from putting people first while remaining focused on performance. After selling Able Aerospace for nine figures, he turned his attention to creating a system to help other leaders improve their company's results—the **M**ost **I**mportant **N**umber and **D**rivers, or MIND, Methodology. When implemented, MIND improves an organization's most important numbers as senior leadership teams develop an intentional, high-performance culture.

THE MIND COURSE

The MIND Course is a comprehensive online solution that empowers you to quickly and cost-effectively learn and apply the MIND Management System to navigate your business challenges with confidence. Master the framework that has empowered 1,000+ teams to achieve alignment, make value-driven decisions, and foster a culture of accountability today!

etw.com/mind-course

EXECUTE MasterMIND™

EXECUTE is a better MasterMIND committed to helping its members continually and responsibly increase the value of their business.

etw.com/mastermind

Bring the MIND Management System™ to your audience

Invite Lee Benson to speak

He has a passion for helping companies discover their Most Important Number.

**Increase Collaboration.
Achieve Your Strategy.
Execute to Win.**

etw.com/speaking

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