

Keys to Success: 50 Secrets from a Business Maverick

By John Timpson

Icon Books, London, 2017, 256 pp, £12.99 ISBN 978-1-78578-199-5.

One of the companies I most admire is Timpson. They specialise in cutting keys, repairing shoes, fixing watches and processing photos. Whenever I go into a Timpson store I'm impressed by the swift, friendly and efficient service. So when I was looking for an easy-to-read business book to while away a long flight to Hong Kong, I landed quickly on company chairman John Timpson's aptly named *Keys to Success*.

The book, as the sub-title suggests, comprises 50 short chapters each offering a tip from the author's experience. This advice ranges from 'Trust your people' and 'Look after the superstars' to 'Check the cash every day' and 'Spend more time with your family'.

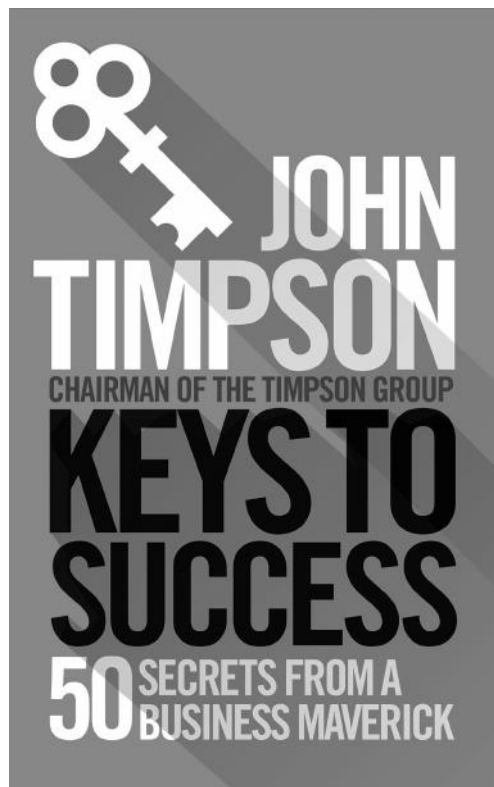
Rather than go through all 50 systematically, I will comment on those I found most distinctive to Timpson's thinking and way of running a company. They are also fairly representative in that they accurately convey the flavour of the book as a whole.

Upside Down Management

Timpson has become famous for his philosophy of Upside Down Management. By this he means that the people who serve the customers are at the top and the chief executive at the bottom, a way of thinking about organisations sometimes known as the inverted pyramid. For Timpson it means trusting colleagues with the freedom to serve each

individual customer in the best way they can. Stores thus have a considerable degree of autonomy, and are required to follow only two rules: Look the Part (i.e. dress smartly) and Put the Money in the Till (i.e. no financial dishonesty).

can be an invisible leader. Every business is bound to become an extension of the Chief Executive's personality'. Power is still being radiated from the top, and Christian faith encourages us to be honest about that, and not delude ourselves.



Say Goodbye to Drongos

Our last Faith in Business conference featured an interesting discussion about what to do about unsatisfactory colleagues or employees – in particular staff who pay lip-service to or are not fully committed to corporate values. Timpson tackles this problem head-on with his chapter on weeding out poor performers. He explains something I didn't know, that the origin of the word 'drongo' is an Australian racehorse in the 1920s called Drongo which ran 37 races without ever winning. Timpson expects high standards of all their employees – everyone should be rated either 9 or 10 out of 10. Drongos are people who drag down the average level of performance. His approach is not one of brutally sacking people, rather of giving them the simple message: 'Your best will never be good enough for us, so it is time for you to find your happiness elsewhere.' But he adds 'it is important to remember that we made a mistake by employing the wrong person, so we should be generous in our severance pay and employment advice.' This combines a refreshing honesty with a warm humanity.