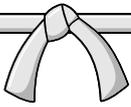




White Belt to Black Belt in ~~365~~ Days 125

BY PETER COOK





About Pete



Peter is a smart cookie so to speak. He holds a Masters of Business in organisational change, a science degree in Advanced Physics, a law degree with honours, a diploma in financial services, and more importantly he got 100% for Maths A in his HSC.

Pete also has 14 years experience as a consultant and business coach working with 100's of businesses from one man startups to some of the biggest companies in the world. In his spare time he's also launched four successful startups. He works across Australia, New Zealand, and Asia helping organisations large and small implement strategic change, true innovation and breakthrough leadership.

Peter is the epitome of the Million Dollar Expert — when he first participated in the Million Dollar Expert Immersion Program he asked what was the quickest time anyone had taken to go from White Belt (\$10k a month) to Black Belt (\$60k a month). On hearing the answer was 14 months, he set out to do it in a year while blogging about it. You can read his blog [“White Belt to Black Belt in 365 Days”](#) — he got there in 125 days! Check out his other escapades at www.petercook.com

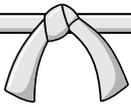


Foreword

In May 2010 I joined Matt Church, the founder of [Thought Leaders](#) and creator of the Million Dollar Expert (MDE) Program for the two-day MDE immersion — the flagship Thought Leaders program. It was hands down the best professional development course I've ever done (and I've done a few in my time). I was so impressed with it that I immediately undertook the accreditation process to run the program, and become a Thought Leaders Mentor.

The MDE program is about how to take the income you make from your expertise from \$10k a month to \$60k a month and beyond, or from White Belt to Black Belt as its known in the Thought Leaders Community.

I asked Matt what the quickest that anybody had ever gone from White Belt to Black Belt was. He told me that it had been done in fourteen months. I have to confess that I do have a competitive streak in me ... and when I heard that I decided to have a crack at doing it in twelve months. White Belt to Black Belt in 365 Days ... and blog about my journey. This eBook is the compilation of those blogs. Enjoy!



The Quest

Day 1 — WHITE BELT

Hi, and welcome to my Thought Leaders blog. You can find out a bit about me by clicking on my profile. And yes, that's a painting of me, not a really bad photo as people occasionally think.

I've just completed Million Dollar Expert (MDE) with Matt Church last week. MDE is about how to build a practice around your thought leadership that makes serious money (a million dollars a year). I've been hanging around Thought Leaders for a while, been to a few group mentoring sessions, and read some of the stuff on the website, but this was the first training that I did.

One of the great distinctions that we learned was the Growth Stages of the Million Dollar Expert. I love this model. I love the context of making money, the levels from White Belt to Black Belt and the steps take at level.

Matt suggests that starting from scratch it should take 3 years to get to Black Belt. I've set myself the quest of getting there in a year — White Belt to Black Belt in 365 Days. This blog is going to be my logbook of the journey — I'll share my victories and challenges.

I've been told that this has never been done before. So why am I setting myself this audacious quest?

Firstly; because I've now had my coaching practice for 10 years. For the last 9 of those years I've been at White Belt. I've had a couple of businesses along the way too that I've made money out of, but as far as my practice is concerned, I've been a White Belt for 9 years. Its time!

Secondly; I want to have the Thought Leaders Community on my side to make it happen. I know that declaring it publicly will make me much more likely to succeed. I'm going to dig a bit deeper and go a bit further, knowing I've got an audience. And I'll have a powerful community egging me on.

And finally just because I love the idea of a bold, crazy adventure around my thought leadership.

If you want to follow my adventures please lookout for my blog. If you want to give me some encouragement as I'm setting out, please make a comment below, and add me as a friend on [Thought Leaders Central](#).

STAGE	TURN OVER	FOCUS
10	\$1,200,000	Distribution
9	\$1,080,000	Capacity
8	\$960,000	Productivity
7	\$840,000	Engagement
6	\$720,000	Investment
5	\$600,000	Leverage
4	\$480,000	Positioning
3	\$360,000	Activity
2	\$240,000	Value
1	\$120,000	Decision



Being Accepted into the TL Mentor Community

Day 3 — *WHITE BELT*



It's a proud day for me today — I've just completed the Thought Leaders Mentor Accreditation Program, and been accepted as a Thought Leaders Mentor.

I've really enjoyed hanging out with the other mentors — it's great to be around a group of intelligent, committed people who are up to big things. Thought Leaders is all about helping clever people become commercially smart, and the mentors are the crew who have put their hands up to make that happen in the world.

It's a bit like being knighted in the days of King Arthur and joining the round table. It's certainly not a triangular table (in joke for the other mentors — sorry). Instead of a sword on each shoulder, we were given a jacket and a cap and welcomed into the fold. (and then went out for a scrumptious lunch overlooking the beach at Manly to celebrate).

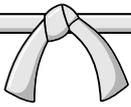
Here's a picture of me in my TL jacket and cap with Matt (if this was a better better photo, you could see the Thought Leaders logo on the cap, and read Thought Leaders on the jacket — as it is you'll have to take my word for it).

Its been a full on week and a half. I've really dived into the deep end of Thought Leaders. Million Dollar Expert on Thursday and Friday, then the Mentor Accreditation Program from Monday to Friday, and setting myself the White Belt to Black Belt in 365 Days challenge.

I said to some of the guys at lunch, even though I've just arrived, it feels like I've come home.

It also feels like a turning a point in my life. And I guess the next 362 days will show if that's true.





Getting to White Belt

Day 7 — WHITE BELT



One week in, and I'm still a White Belt. This could be a bit tougher than I thought! Just kidding.

Today I want to talk about getting to White Belt — how I got to the starting line.

My practice started 10 years ago. I was working at Accenture as a business consultant, and was rising up through the ranks. Got to travel a bit, and work on some pretty cool projects, but at the end of the day was unfulfilled. I was working on big projects that didn't really matter — if Citipower didn't get a new billing system, or Dulux didn't get a new sales channel to their trade painters, so what.

I decided to leave, and was working with a business coach to work out what I wanted to be when I grew up. At that time I ran into an old friend who was telling me about his business. I made a couple of suggestions, and told him he needed a business coach. You're right — do you know anyone he asked. He became my first client.

The first six months were really tough. I had never trained as a coach, had never run a business, was 27 years old and had one client. I was calling people out of the phone book, knocking on doors, and getting lots of no's. I remember making \$400 in the sixth month of my practice.

Luckily my second six months went a lot better, and I started to get some referrals from the couple of clients I did have, and it started to snowball. By the end of my first year I was up to a six figure income. Doesn't sound much in the context of White Belt to Black Belt, but was better than 91% of coaches in the market according to the stats.

I was coaching people to grow their businesses, so of course that's what I did myself — grow my business. My own practice, (my coaching), stayed at White Belt, but I started to add other people into the business.

I tried franchising, and spent a lot of money and a lot of time working out that franchising was definitely not the model I wanted to use to grow. I then employed other coaches, and grew the team to ten people.



We had a beautiful office, full time admin support, lots of over heads... and lots of stress.

The business was called [Love Your Business](#). A little over a year ago, I was sitting on a beach, in Bali on a 10 day holiday (because that was about the most time the business could survive without me). I realised I wasn't loving my own business. I was working 6 days a week, stressed, and constantly running around making sure there was enough work and enough money for everyone.

I decided to go back from a business to a practice. I gave up the office, my PA, let the team all go and find their own path, kept the half a dozen clients I wanted to work with, and came full circle back to my own practice. Although this time around it was set up so that I can run it from anywhere. Here I am in Hawaii:



And I just got back from two months in Bali in February. My coaching practice now only takes a day a week, which gives me time for the other activities and modalities that will take me to Black Belt.

So that's how I came full circle back to my practice, and how I got to White Belt ready to launch to Black Belt in yellow.

A Rookie Error

Day 14 — *WHITE BELT* //

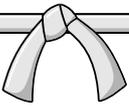
I made a rookie error on Friday that may cost me my Yellow Belt this month.

I had a training day scheduled this week for a large corporate client for \$7k — enough to push me into Yellow Belt.

I received a panicked call on Friday from the HR woman organising the day. A couple of people can't make it, a couple of others hadn't told their managers who are now pissed off that they are losing them for a day, some marketing people are also pissed off that they hadn't heard about it and weren't invited. Is it possible to postpone?

I was reeling a bit — to be honest my first thought was of my Yellow Belt slipping through my fingers. I couldn't very well say "but I was counting on this day for my Yellow Belt", so somewhat weakly I said





I've already booked flights and a hotel room. That's fine, she said, we'll still pay any out of pocket expenses.

For my small business coaching and mentoring clients I've got a clear policy. I need 24 hours to reschedule a session. Its in the agreement that a new client signs, and everyone is clear. And given the client has normally paid monthly in advance for a certain number of sessions in a month, and they are one hour sessions, I'm happy to reschedule.

Unfortunately I didn't have a policy for my corporate clients — this is a new game for me. So I didn't have an answer, and ended up rescheduling the session.

What I should have said was something along the lines of “you are giving me less than one business day's notice, I'm obviously not going to be able book anyone else in on that day, and my normal policy would be to charge the full rate. However given how much I value the relationship I'm happy to reschedule and only charge half the rate for Monday” or words to that effect.

*A good rule of thumb
is aim to climb
two belts a year!*

And now I have a policy that goes on any proposal or invoice — 50% paid on booking the day, 50% cancellation fee more than one week out, 100% cancellation fee if it's within a week of the event. We live and learn.

I'm still going for my Yellow Belt this month. I've got two shots at it — first one is to get this training gig rescheduled and paid for by the 30th. The other one is a speaking event on the 29th — I'll be selling stuff at the gig, and could sell enough to get me over the line. Stay tuned!



A Couple of Cool White Belt to Black Belt Videos

Day 21 — *WHITE BELT* //

Here's a couple of cool videos that have just been uploaded onto Thought Leaders Studio.

The first is [Matt talking about the different revenue stages in becoming a Million Dollar Expert](#).

The second is [me talking specifically about being a White Belt](#) — what to do at White Belt, what to focus on, and how to get from White Belt to Yellow Belt.

I'd love to hear your thoughts about either of them. Please comment at the [White Belt to Black Belt discussion forum](#).



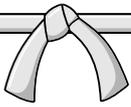
Yellow Belt!!! (and a new financial year invitation)

Day 23 — *YELLOW BELT* //

I am now officially a Yellow Belt! June was my first \$20k month. The training day that was rescheduled didn't come through in June, but I hit the jackpot on my talk on Tuesday. I was paid \$450 to speak to a room of bookkeepers, and then sold \$12k of product as a result, which was enough to tip me into Yellow Belt.

Getting over the line for my Yellow Belt and going to Summit yesterday was a great way to finish off the financial year.





An invitation for the new financial year

Go to the [White Belt to Black Belt discussion forum](#) below and declare what belt you are aiming for be the end of the financial year.

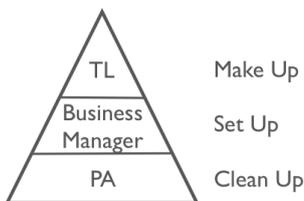
A good rule of thumb is aim to climb two belts a year. Typically the White Belt to Black Belt journey takes three committed years. So if you are starting out, you might aim to be Yellow Belt at the end of the year. If you're a Green Belt, you could aim for red.

Or of course if you're a bit crazy and / or impatient like me, go for more. And if you want to have a crack at White Belt to Black Belt within the year, I'd love to have you as part of that club.

Why set a goal for yourself and declare it? Thought Leaders is about clever people being commercially smart. The danger for us is that we are clever people just being clever. We can get seduced by thinking and ideas, and avoid the commercialising part. Having a commercial goal for the year keeps it front of mind, especially if everyone knows about it. And as we all know, declaring the goal publicly makes it much more likely you'll achieve it.

The Good Oil on Getting a Business Manager for Your Practice

Day 29 — *YELLOW BELT* //



This diagram shows Matt's model for the roles you need to build a Black Belt practice with you (the thought leader) and two other team members.

Your role as the thought leader is make up — you make up everything in the practice. The IP, the packages, the pricing etc. The business manager does the set up — sets up the sales, the venues, the packages etc. The PA does the clean up — what's left. Interestingly in this model, the PA isn't your assistant, he's the business manager's assistant.



At White Belt it's just you. I've made the mistake in the past of bringing on a PA while I was still at White Belt thinking that would free me up to make more income. It was too early, and didn't work.

Around Green Belt you put on the business manager — you still do the clean up, and you make her cups of coffee.

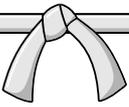
Around Red Belt your business manager gets her personal assistant.

Given I'm at Yellow Belt fast approaching Green Belt, I've started the process of hiring my business manager. I initially asked Matt for his thoughts about the process, but upon reflection I realised the importance of this decision for my practice, so I decided to go right to the top. I spoke to Elle. I asked her what differentiated a business manager from an executive assistant, and what I should be looking for. Here's what she said:

*Thinking first—
then the
commercialisation*

- A good relationship. The most important thing is a good working relationship.
- Not afraid of change. Needs to be someone who isn't looking for routine.
- Not attached to the work they have done. You can spend three months working on a project only to discover the market doesn't like it, and it gets dumped.
- Lots of initiative. The Business Manager runs the practice, so they can't need direction all the time.
- Willing to sell. Not scared of closing a sale (although Elle did say that was something that she learned).
- Willing to take advice / mentoring on how to perform the role better.
- Doesn't want to run a thought leaders practice themselves — isn't interested in the limelight, being on the stage, running the workshops etc.

Its a great summary of what to look for. I'll keep you informed of how I go with my search.



One Message, One Market, One Mode – Tathra’s Story

Day 36 – YELLOW BELT //



I just received the following email from Tathra, who has registered into The Money Workshop (a two-day program I run).

Hi Peter, Thanks for that. It’s a really important time for me to be doing this. I started my own business 7 months ago, and have reached a point where i need to look for a part time job to supplement my income. I’m very financially stretched and it’s worrisome. I look forward to examining my relationship to money and am aware of lots of resistance too!

I had a look at Tathra’s website [Audacious Leadership](#), and saw a lot of the White Belt errors that we have been discussing on the forum.

A key plank of the Million Dollar Expert methodology is to start with one message, one market and one mode, and stick to that until you get to White Belt. Only then should you add a second “cluster” (a cluster is the combination of message, market and mode) to take you to Yellow Belt. The modes we distinguish are speaker, author, trainer, mentor, facilitator and coach.

I made White Belt errors in all three parts of this equation — message, market and mode -for years. My message “Love Your Business” wasn’t a message the market wanted to hear, or pay for. My market — small business — was much too broad. And I had three modes, coaching, mentoring and training, not one.

Tathra has courageously agreed to be a live case study, and work with us publicly to refine her message, market and mode to be more commercially successful. Which I think is a great example of her own audacious leadership, and a real demonstration of Tathra walking her talk.

How will this work? Please go and check out [Tathra’s website](#), and then jump onto the [discussion forum](#) and give some feedback. Be generous and straight.



I'll also post my thoughts, and then in a couple of weeks I'll hold a mentoring session with Tathra where we'll review the feedback, and go to work on her message, mode and market.

We can then all support Tathra to implement some changes, and see what happens.

Market Narrowly, Deliver Broadly

Day 43 — *YELLOW BELT* //

One of my mantras is “market narrowly deliver broadly” (along with hire slowly, fire fast ... but that's a story for another day). I stole it from someone way back when, and can't remember from whom, so I can't take the credit for it.

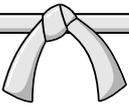
The first part of the message is market narrowly. When we are starting out we don't want to cut anyone out, so we market broadly. We cast the net wide. Unfortunately it doesn't work. Paradoxically, the more targeted and the narrower the marketing is, the more effective it is.

I made this mistake for years as a business coach — I was out to help small- to medium-sized businesses. I figured there were lots of them, I could help any of them, so why cut any out.

Problem is there are lots and lots of other people out to help SME's. It doesn't make me special.

If I was a business coach who specialised in helping bookkeepers grow their bookkeeping business, I would have been much more successful. 99% of prospects would have dismissed me as they weren't bookkeepers ... but then they weren't calling me anyway. However any bookkeeper looking at 50 ads for business coaches in the yellow pages would have called the one specialising in bookkeepers. A bookkeeper is much more likely to take a call from someone who is all about helping bookkeepers grow than a generic business coach. I would also get more referrals — people don't say I know someone in business





(even though everyone does) but if I tell people I specialise in helping bookkeepers, people will say I know a bookkeeper you should talk to. Just about everyone I come across who is starting out (and many who are a fair way down the track) doesn't market narrowly enough.

Tathra makes the same mistake on her [website](#). She says “Audacious leadership supports organisations to cultivate an authentic and lasting relationship with sustainability”. In this case the target market is simply organisations... which is just about everybody. Not large organisations or small organisations, or organisations within a particular industry or geography, or particular people in an organisation, but all organisations. It would be more effective to have a much narrower market — as Michael Neaylon suggests, this could be as narrow as HR managers in the public sector. The second part of my mantra is deliver broadly. That means you can deliver beyond the segment you market to. From my example earlier if I have been coaching a bookkeeper for a while, and she's rapt with how it is going and says “by the way my sister is running a architect business and needs someone to help, can you talk to her?”, I would say yes. I would then coach the architect, or anyone else who I came across who I could help. I just wouldn't target them in my marketing.

In Tathra's case if she did decide to target HR managers in the public sector, and someone from a private company rang up, of course she would still have a meeting and try and get a gig. She just wouldn't be targeting them in her marketing.

One Message... But What Message?

Day 50 — *YELLOW BELT* //

I wrote in an earlier blog: A key plank of the Million Dollar Expert methodology is to start with one message, one market and one mode, and stick to that until you get to White Belt. Only then should you add a second “cluster” (a cluster is the combination of message, market and mode) to take you to Yellow Belt. Today I'm going to focus on the message part of the equation.



For seven years I went to market with the wrong message. My coaching business was Love Your Business, and my message was I'll help you, your customers and your staff love your business.

Great message — and I was out to save the world with my message. The world needs more love and less fear, and organisations, corporations and businesses need it more than anyone. If I could show them that looking after how people feel was actually a better way to make money etc etc then I could transform business globally. (Cringing slightly as I re-read that paragraph).

Problem with the message is it's all about what I want, and has nothing to do with what my target market is after.

There are no business owners lying awake at night thinking I need more love in my business ... if only there is someone who can help me do that. My target market has two primary issues, not enough money and not enough time.

I would have been much more successful if my message was all about growing your business. Ironically my content could have been pretty much the same. When I started working with a client, I could have said that customers make purchasing decisions based on how they feel, you need to build emotional engagement with your team etc, and that's how we'll grow your business. But the one message that sits at the top needs to talk into the customers world.

Tathra's key message on her [audacious leadership site](#) suffers from the same issue. She says "Audacious leadership supports organisations to cultivate an authentic and lasting relationship with sustainability, from a holistic and deep ecology perspective. "Again no one is lying awake at night wondering how they can cultivate an authentic and lasting relationship with sustainability. Which means Tathra has to first sell a prospect on the idea that they need to do that, and then convince them that she is the best person to help them.

A pitfall for us as thought leaders is we get so impressed by our own thinking that we wrongly assume it's what the market wants, what it needs and what it will pay for. When you are crafting your message, make sure its something that your target market already wants and will pay for. And test it — check it out with a few of them before you become too wedded to it and get it tattooed across your nether regions.





Green Belt!!!

Day 56 — GREEN BELT

I am now officially a Green Belt! July was my first \$30k month — \$30,840 to be precise.

I've been a bit unorthodox in how I've gotten to Green Belt in that I've got four separate clusters, and they are fairly disparate. A cluster is a combination of message, market and mode.



The four clusters that have contributed to my Green Belt are:

- [Love Your Business](#) — Business coaching micro and small business leaders in growing their businesses
- [Inventium](#) — Training corporates in innovation and idea generation
- Financial Independence Company — training and mentoring Gen-X'ers in mastering personal finance and becoming financially independent sooner
- [Pure Bookkeeping](#) — Speaking to bookkeepers and from the stage selling them a system to grow their business

The more conventional approach is to have a stronger link between the different clusters so that it's easier to cross-sell between them. Green Belt would usually also come from three clusters rather than four. Over the coming weeks and months I'll unpack each of my clusters and let you know what's worked to generate revenue in each.

And obviously these were all already underway when I started my White Belt to Black Belt challenge. I've been going hard to commercialise stuff that I've already developed — my challenge hasn't been coming up with new content, but making money from the thinking I've already done and from the IP I've already developed.

And while I wouldn't recommend spending 9 years at White Belt like I've done, one of the definite advantages is it gives you a lot of time to develop and refine your IP.

If you are developing the content along the way it will clearly take longer to progress through the belts.



Darren Hill – Black Belt Under the Microscope



Day 64 — *GREEN BELT* //

I interviewed [Darren Hill](#) to find out more about his journey to Black Belt.

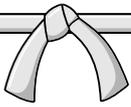
[Click here to read the transcript.](#)

Getting to Black Belt is a Marathon, not a Sprint

Day 71 — *GREEN BELT* //

I just got home from spending the best part of three weeks in Bali. This is the view from my desk (it was a working holiday).





What does a working holiday in Bali look like? I still did mentoring and coaching over the phone back to Australia, worked on websites, did some planning, developed programs, worked on my IP and did some writing. I was fairly productive.

The focus at Green Belt is Activity

I also did some first class relaxation and rejuvenation ... and escaped Melbourne's winter for a bit (looks like I picked a good time to do that too!).

I was reflecting on the importance of that while I was there — particularly given that I am now at Green Belt. The focus for green is activity, which means right now I am going hard. But I'm going hard like the middle part of a marathon, not going hard like a 100m sprint.

Running a practice as a thought leader takes endurance. One of things that you need to ask yourself when you are making the decision to go for Black Belt is do you have the stamina and endurance to go the distance.

If you decide you do, then you need to manage your energy along the way. Make sure you eat properly, exercise, relax and give yourself the best possible chance to be able to produce the level of activity required.

And personally I can't think of a better way to do that than a stint on a tropical island. But that's just me.

Engaging my Business Manager

Day 78 — GREEN BELT //



You might recall on day 29 I wrote a blog [The Good Oil on Getting a Business Manager for Your Practice.](#)

I'm thrilled to report that I've engaged Donna as my business manager. Donna has been my virtual assistant for a few months, and she's been fantastic. When we started working together I told her what I was planning to do with my practice, and that I would be looking for a



business manager when I got to Green Belt. At the time she was excited about the possibility of the role.

From my perspective it's been a great way to get going. We've had a chance to get to know each other, and make sure we like working together. I know the quality of her work, how she responds to instructions, and how efficient and committed she is. I've also been able to ramp up her hours rather than having to take the hit of a full time employee in one go.

When I hit Green Belt, and it was time to go from having ad hoc support from a virtual assistant to a business manager, I had no hesitation in telling Donna the job was hers if she wanted it. And fortunately she did. She is now training someone else to manage her VA business.

A business manager is much more than a glorified PA. Donna's job is to run the practice, and she is my partner in hitting our sales targets and getting to Black Belt. She promotes what I do to people she comes across — I love that! Donna is also constantly looking better ways to do things, and suggesting opportunities and solutions.

I'm already wondering how I got by without her.

Article in Herald Sun about Thought Leadership (and me!)

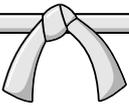
Day 86 — GREEN BELT //

Yesterday I was featured in the *Herald Sun* business section. Paula, the business journalist, read my blog about thought leadership about six weeks ago. She called up and asked if she could interview me. I considered the request for about a millisecond before saying yes. This is the result.

The content of the article is:

When global chemical distributor Univar launched in Australia in 2007, the company realised a dash of creativity was essential to thrive.





The traditionally conservative industry was stable and well established in Australia.

“We needed to offer value above and beyond what was already in the marketplace” general manager Leighton Hopper said.

So the company went in search of creative and innovation training and stumbled upon the concept of thought leadership as a marketing tool for small business.

“This business is not just about giving customers a drum of product” Mr Hopper said. “Value is also generated by supplying our customers’ knowledge requirements — from how to formulate with the chemicals, to environmental issues including the safe handling and disposal of the product.

“Through thought leadership, we can meet our customers’ needs and establish a point of different between us and our competitors”.

Melbourne-based thought leaders mentor, Peter Cook said thought leadership in any field meant extending the thinking in that area.

Part of Matt Church’s thought leaders’ network, Mr Cook helps small and medium-sized enterprises use the concept as a marketing tool.

“You elevate key staff as thought leaders and use that positioning to grow your business”, Mr Cook said.

Thought leaders are coached to prepare white papers on a topic and to speak about their area of specialisation at conferences.

“They ultimately become known as go-to guys,” Mr Cook said.

‘And they get to visit clients — not just to flog them something — but to give them information and advice they will find helpful.’

But thought leadership would only help a business success if it addresses the needs of its target market, Mr Cook said.

As a global distributor, Univar has specialist knowledge in logistics and purchasing efficiency. As both are important to its customers, the company plans to help key employees establish thought leadership in these areas.

“It’s really exciting to be on the cutting edge of innovation and that’s where we believe we are in this industry,”



Mr Hopper said. “Thought leadership is opening up new areas of potential for us to achieve above-market growth.”

Mr Cook said thought leadership could also improve the culture and morale of an organisation.

“The team is much more engaged because they see themselves as experts and thought leaders, as well as sales people,” he said.

But the concept might not apply to some businesses, for example, franchises or simply retail or food outlets.

At Univar, management hopes thought leadership will help it tap into customer needs more closely.

Hanging onto green by the skin of my teeth

Day 92 — GREEN BELT //

Last Monday, the second last day of August, I wrote the following, intending to post it this week:

I need your help. I’m not sure what colour belt I am anymore. Let me explain.

August was a great month. You may recall back in June I wrote about a rookie error that almost cost me my Yellow Belt that month, when a training day dropped out at the last minute. Well I’ve been calling the company every couple of weeks since, and the money finally hit our account! We still don’t have a date for the workshop, and I think it was almost to the point of “if we pay you will you stop calling us”, but I have been paid.

I also had two weeks in Bali (where I did a lot of writing and thinking, but not much dollar productive delivery or sales), and had a very productive second half of the month when I got back. Not to mention that September looks like it could get me to Blue Belt if a couple of things fall into place.





Show me the money

Day 106 — GREEN BELT //

I had a great conversation with Donna (my business manager) about what to prioritise in our practice. Did I mention how fabulous Donna is? I highly recommend getting to Green Belt and getting a business manager ... but I digress.

We were talking about priorities. A couple of days earlier I had spoken to a prospect for one of my programs when I was driving, and he said he was in. Great I said, Donna will give you a call, get your details and register you into the program. When I was meeting Donna a couple of days later he was on her list of calls to make today. I have to say that's not surprising — we are completely swamped, there is much more to do than either of us could possibly do, so we are constantly choosing what to prioritise.

What I said to Donna is that the highest priority is always closing the sale, and bringing in the money. A sale isn't made until the money is in, and the longer we leave it between someone saying yes, and that person paying us, the higher the chances of the yes becoming a maybe (and needing to be sold again) or becoming a no.

It sounds a bit mercenary, but I'm very clear that our practice is here to make money. If there is money that we can get this week instead of next week, I want it this week. If we have someone's credit card details, I want it processed today, not tomorrow. And I want my team thinking the same way.

Where does bringing in the money sit on your priority list?

*My Business Manager
is my partner in hitting
our sales targets!*





Seeing Red

Day 114 — RED BELT



September has been a breakthrough month — I've had my first ever Red Belt month.

The cluster that's taken off in September is my Thought Leaders Mentor cluster. (Read my earlier [blog about clusters](#) if you're not sure what I'm talking about). We're holding the Million Dollar Expert Program in a few days in Melbourne, and we've had a great response.



Early on in my White Belt to Black Belt in 365 Days Challenge I came up against my fear of failure ... public failure in particular. What would happen if I didn't pull it off? What would it be like if I was still a Yellow Belt in 12 months? And I have to say that fear was quite motivating, not wanting to fail publicly.

Now that I'm actually ahead of the curve, I'm coming up against what it means to win the game. I never thought I had a fear of success, but it's been in my face. Strangely enough I've also had to come to terms with making decent money.

My parents are both in helping professions — my mum's a doctor and my dad was a teacher. There is no real history of entrepreneurship in our family. For a long time I have been almost apologetic about being in business. I ran a coaching business called Love Your Business, with an idealistic vision of creating a more loving world through helping business owners create businesses that they love, their staff love and their clients love.

At some level I was telling myself it's OK to be in business because really I'm still trying to make a difference, and make the world a better place. I'm not just out to make money. And at the same time I've done a lot of things to raise money for The Hunger Project, done pro bono work and sat on the board of charities.

It's been a long journey to get to the point where I'm OK in my bones about making money, and really going for the money. To really embrace the game of business.

What I love about the Thought Leaders model is that the thinking comes first, then the commercialisation. I've done a lot of thinking, and developed a lot of great stuff. Now when I go hard at sales and go



hard at the money, there is an integrity to it for me. I am still out make a difference to people, and make the world a better place. I'm doing that by delivering really cool programs and being commercial about it.

One of the things that has enabled me to move quickly through the belts is the years of work I've done on myself while a White Belt to get to the point where I don't have any internal conflict between making money and making a difference. I'm now ready to be commercial, and ready in myself to be successful.

*The highest priority
is always closing
the sale*

Having said that, it's still confronting for me doing this all publicly. But I am enjoying the journey.



Day 125 – Black Belt!!!

Day 125 – *BLACK BELT* //

Today I sold my good friend and fellow mentor Nigel another mentoring program, and hit Black Belt 125 days after starting this journey. It is fitting that it's Nigel as he was the first person to get Thought Leaders Mentoring from me, the day after I declared my White Belt to Black Belt in 365 Days quest.

The picture by the way is me on the day I got my other Black Belt.



After my Aikido Black Belt grading I felt that I had given everything of myself. I had nothing left to give. Straight after doing my own grading I was asked to partner Kevin, who was also going for his Black Belt. This meant I had to attack him for 20 minutes and get thrown all over the mat. I was already completely spent ... and yet I had to dig deep and find enough to keep going. You only get to do your Black Belt grading once in your life — this was Kevin's moment to show our teacher what he had learned and who he was.

Every time I got thrown and hit the mat, I'd take a breath and think to myself "only one more time." Then I'd get up and attack again ... and bang, I'd be back on the mat.

At the end I knew I'd kept nothing in reserve. It was a great feeling ... I'd given everything I had. In Aikido that's the way you honour your teacher — you give all of yourself. It's an experience that is very rare for me — in just about everything else there is always something in reserve.

I feel the same way about the last 125 days — that I've given it everything.

I think that's the spirit you need to bring to your Thought Leaders Practice — especially if you want to take it to Black Belt. I don't think you need to work on it seven days a week like I have. I do believe you need to bring all of yourself to it — your best thinking, your best effort, your fears, your doubts and your genius. Don't hold anything back.



Afterword

A lot of people have been asking me how I moved through the belts so fast, so I thought I'd share ten things that helped accelerate the journey.

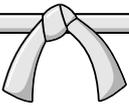
1. **Ten years at White Belt.** One of the advantages of having been at White Belt for so long before embarking this journey was having a lot of intellectual property (IP) already developed. This meant that I could go hard and fast in a couple of directions without having to spend a lot of time thinking and developing IP and packaging it up.

However this does not mean that I am suggesting you wait 10 years as a strategy to do White Belt to Black Belt quickly! It just means that if you haven't done that, it may take you a little longer than 125 days. In other words it's taken me 10 years to become an overnight success.

2. **Appropriate Angst — and a powerful decision.** Another benefit of the 10 years was what Matt calls appropriate angst. I felt like my practice owed me. I left Accenture ten years ago, and if I had stayed I'd be a partner on more than \$500k a year by now... I had some catching up to do! So when I did Million Dollar Expert, and saw the model I made a very powerful decision that I was going to do whatever it takes to get to Black Belt.
3. **Hard work.** I've never been afraid to roll my sleeves up and get to work, but over the last five months I've taken that to a whole new level. When I was on "holiday" in Bali I only had one day where I wasn't working. Since getting back I've been working seven days a week every week. Of course this isn't sustainable — and both my wife and my mum have told me they are worried about how hard I've been working. What I'm working on now is maintaining the income level with a saner amount of work.

But make no mistake, one of the main reasons that I moved so fast was I did the amount of work that most people do in a year in 125 days.

4. **Looking after myself.** To be able to maintain my output and productivity, I've had to look after myself, stay fit and healthy. I've made sure I eat well, exercise, sleep and have quality



relaxation when I'm off. Ivan Waters, my good friend and fellow mentor has been a critical part of my team, and has stayed on my case to make sure these things don't drop out.

And funnily enough I'm sitting at breakfast in a Brisbane hotel getting ready to deliver a keynote as I write this. There is a big buffet with all sorts of pastries and cooked stuff and pancakes with chocolate drops that you can put on top (I kid you not) and I'm sitting here with a bowl of fruit and a cup of tea.

5. **Writing my blog.** There is something about a big public declaration to keep you going. If I hadn't set out to do White Belt to Black Belt in 365 Days and blogged about it every week, I definitely would have eased off a bit earlier and taken a bit longer.
6. **Immersing myself in the methodology.** The Million Dollar Expert Program is an amazing methodology for capturing, packaging and selling your IP, and moving from White Belt to Black Belt. When I was preparing to deliver the program last month I got blown away all over again by the depth and quality of the content in MDE. And I have immersed myself in this methodology and followed the steps. I did MDE with Matt, did it with him again, blogged about it, got mentoring from him and other mentors and ran the program myself. In short I've lived and breathed it for the last six months.
7. **Running Clusters in Parallel.** And then I broke a couple of rules to speed things up. One of the things we say to do is to establish one cluster (one combination of message, market and mode), make sure that's sustainable, and then launch the next. I launched 3 new clusters pretty much simultaneously, and had income from five different clusters to get me to Black Belt.
8. **Leveraging other people's IP.** To be a thought leader you need to be developing your own thinking and your own IP. However one way that I accelerated things was leveraging off other people's IP in a couple of my clusters. As a Thought Leaders Mentor I'm using Matt's IP, and delivering his stuff in MDE. My Innovation training is delivering stuff that was developed by Amantha, who I am collaborating with in that cluster.

Having said that, I haven't turned off my brain in those clusters. My 90 day White Belt to Black Belt mentoring program uses my



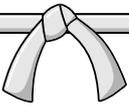
own IP and experience to help people implement what they learn in MDE. I'm developing new innovation programs and IP with Amantha. But not having to develop everything from scratch has sped things up.

9. **Leveraging other people's markets.** Another thing I've done is find people who already have databases and work with them. One of my clusters is about helping bookkeepers grow their businesses. We've had an association of bookkeepers promote us to their members, and fill seminars for us where we've delivered our distribution keynote. Because I don't have a database of people in this market who know and value what I do, leveraging someone else's database made sense.
10. **Think, sell and deliver value.** Final thing has been changing my mindset about what I sell and deliver. Check out Steve Major's discussion group on value models on Thought Leaders Central if you haven't yet — he is the master of this distinction. In short I've gone from selling my time as a business coach to selling value as a thought leader, and charging accordingly. I could write another 1000 words on this one, but I'll leave it at that for today.

A final word. Sean Richardson says in his Black Belt mindset group that we have to remember that this is a game we are playing. When we are playing it, play it like our lives depends upon it, but don't forget it's just a game.

The whole point of the White Belt to Black Belt methodology is to empower us in our practice. If going fast empowers you, go fast. If slow and steady empowers you, go slow and steady. Play hard, and remember it's just a game we are playing. Don't get too significant about it.

I'd love to hear your thoughts (well, read your thoughts at least) — please share them on the White Belt to Black Belt discussion forum.



Want to know more?

If you are an expert who is interested in the Thought Leaders Community or the Million Dollar Expert methodology, here's where you can go.

Thought Leaders Central — www.thoughtleaderscentral.com — its the home of our community, and a great place to have cool conversations with some of my favourite people in the world. Its a bit like facebook for Thought Leaders. Its free to join ... and make sure you look me up and 'friend' me when you get there. Also join the White Belt to Black Belt discussion forum.

Million Dollar Expert — www.milliondollarexpertprogram.com — the home of all things MDE. Find out where our programs are, and what other resources we have.

My site — www.petercook.com — come by and check out what I'm up to. Make sure you sign up for the Word From Pete when your there so we can stay in touch.