

Brad Chandler

The Clout of Common Sense

"That'll be twenty-five cents," said the young entrepreneur.

The customer handed him a quarter, and Brad Chandler proudly passed over a Blow Pop in return. At age twelve, he had just turned a profit of twenty cents—four times the amount he paid for each lollipop when he bought them in bulk from the local drugstore. "I had eighty bucks in change at some point and thought I was rich," Brad laughs now. He likely developed the idea of reselling the lollipops at recess from observing his father, an attorney who had always been self-employed. "At an early age, I came to understand that with money, you can buy stuff—toys, radios, cassettes."

While life has gotten considerably more complicated since the time of his Blow Pop vending, the same entrepreneurial spirit shining through Brad's childhood ingenuity still permeates his character today. As the President and CEO of Express Companies, he approaches business with a very similar mindset and attitude—except nowadays, he deals with houses instead of lollipops.

Express Homebuyers, which is housed under the Express Companies name, was founded in late 2003 and excels at the purchase, renovation, and reselling of properties from distressed sellers, shepherding approximately 200 houses per year. This turnaround figure is especially notable in light of the fact that a typical home needs \$50 to 55 thousand in repairs and takes approximately six months to complete and resell. The majority of distressed sellers today happen to be banks, but this was not always the case. In the past, clients most often were individuals who were facing foreclosure, divorce, bankruptcy, or job loss. Others may have been faced with repair costs that exceeded their means, or who simply felt a lack of interest to work with a realtor.

Along this line, Express Companies also houses Express Realty Services, a full-service realty

company launched in April of 2008. This year alone, they are estimated to engage in about eight hundred transactions totaling over \$100 million in sales, distinguishing them as the fastest growing realty company on record. Considering the vast success of this venture, Brad hopes to add other enterprises to the Express Company name in the future to supplement their current efforts, extending into realms such as lending and construction.

The business-savvy mentality that warranted so much profitability, both in the lollipop industry of the 1980s and in the housing market of today, stems from Brad's ability to consider and wield perhaps the most powerful tool a person can boast—common sense. A vital contribution of this common sense approach to Express Companies has been the development of systems and documentation, allowing a company to standardize its processes and services and then to streamline employee turnover by minimizing the need for active training when

hiring and delegating. The true impact of this common sense approach also seeps into his leadership philosophy, which focuses on empowering rather than disciplining. Oriented around the core values of candor, speed, innovation, and accountability, his employees are motivated by the fact that they work to support an enterprise of integrity and inspiration. Brad achieves this through a management style that is oriented much more around what he can do to make his employees satisfied rather than what they should be doing to keep him satisfied—a unique yet effective perspective. "If you've got a good employee, make sure they're happy," he advises. "Err on the side of going above and beyond for them."

In reviewing these pivotal aspects of success, one would be fascinated to learn that so



many of the techniques Brad employs today are not the product of formal schooling. "It's amazing how much they didn't teach us in business school," he remarks. "The only differences between you now and you in five years are the people you meet and the books you read," he continues, quoting a popular adage. In fact, he learned many of the most powerful aspects of leadership and business management not in the classroom, but through books. In ninth grade, he came across the book *How to Buy Real Estate with No Money Down* by Bob Allen. Enraptured by the idea of unlimited earnings potential, he pursued a degree in Residential Property Management at Virginia Tech with a concentration in Real Estate. He had worked hard to achieve his real estate license promptly upon graduation and went to work for a small property management firm in Waynesboro, Virginia. As the youngest property manager, he helped turn around distressed property and stockpiled the experience that would later bring so much success with Express Companies. Then, after receiving his MBA from Wisconsin University, he assumed employment with a developer who bought run-down apartments, fixed them up, and sold them as condominiums.

Though Brad reflects on this time as an excellent tutorial in corporate American culture, he knew he wanted something more from his professional life but couldn't quite put his finger on it. Then, in late 2002, his neighbor's house was purchased by an investor that Brad happened to chat with one day. The man explained how he purchased houses below market price, fixed them up, and then resold them—a novel concept that Brad had never even thought possible. "I made up my mind that that was what I was going to do," he reflects. Partnering with Jud Allen, a colleague with similar entrepreneurial goals, the concept of Express Companies first came into existence. "Every month that went by, I got more persistent. I saw more investors and knew that if they could do it, I could do it," he says.

After months of determination, Brad received a call from a woman living in a three-bedroom house with five or six kids who had failed to pay her mortgage. He had spoken with her several months before and had made an offer, but to no avail. Now, however, the house was to be auctioned the following week, and she had nowhere else to turn. "I understand you're an

expert at this," she said over the phone. "Can you buy my house?" Bereft of funding, his mother loaned him \$20,000 for the transaction. Under the tutelage of the gentleman who had first introduced him to the business, Brad then succeeded in buying and reselling the house, generating a profit of \$43,000 on that single property alone. Not only was his hard work paying off monetarily, but he had improved his client's quality of life as well. "She was able to move her family to a much nicer, newer house that she rented out West," Brad reminisces. "She had told me that their only other option had been homelessness. She absolutely loved me." After the initial purchase of this property in July of 2003, he purchased five more by September, and the early stages of Express Companies' success had begun.

Among the most compelling aspects of the business's development to date is their initiation of professionalism into an industry that traditionally operates with a more mom-and-pop style mindset. While many of his competitors hide behind 800 numbers and refrain from even offering a physical business address, Brad has always aimed to build a culture of openness, honesty, and systematic reliability. Perhaps it is for this reason that Express Realty Services has risen to the number one team in Keller Williams out of 76,000 agents in North America.

Another vital piece to Brad's success puzzle is the utilization of systems building that his strong commitment to common sense led him to pursue. "We've been about systems since day one," he explains. Developing set processes and procedures has allowed them to dramatically improve upon one of the industry's major weak points: taking advantage of internet leads. Today, Brad reports, only two percent of internet leads are responded to in the home buying and real estate industries. Recognizing this vulnerability, Express Companies maintains a call center that is staffed seven days a week, ten hours per day, with aims to become a 24/7 operation. Calls are answered immediately, and an in-house lender is on hand to assist with any caller who is not pre-approved. "We have really upped our level of service," Brad confirms. In fact, Express Realty Services was first fashioned to capitalize upon the leads generated by Express Homebuyers, exemplifying Brad's innovative approach of identifying and filling the holes that have prevented similar companies from achieving success.

In addition to its strong systems focus, Express Companies was also founded with an indelible passion for marketing. In the early days of Express Homebuyers, Brad was working a full-time job and parenting a newborn son but still found time to sit at his kitchen table to hand-address hundreds of envelopes advertising his services. The company's current task force, comprised of a marketing director with thirty years of experience supplemented by three support personnel, two marketing coordinators, and a social media expert, utilizes a wide array of venues to broadcast their message. While their bread and butter over the years has been TV advertising, they also boast an incredible internet presence which Brad has been cultivating since the company's inception. Additionally, Express Companies is currently preparing to launch an aggressive radio campaign that will be supplemented with a thorough direct mail campaign, emphasizing a marketing strategy that is both eclectic and comprehensive. "It's one of the things that makes us so unique, and has been a big factor in our rising success," Brad confirms.

With this success in mind, Brad's vision for the immediate future is crystal clear: to become the first agent team to ever sell a billion dollars worth of real estate in one year. "We chose not to participate in the recession," he explains, in mock nonchalance. While the words are said in jest, the incredible reality at their core cannot be denied. Brad has steered the tremendous growth and success of Express Companies amidst a terrible economic climate and through one of the worst real estate markets history has ever seen. At the rate things have been going, he believes this goal can be achieved within five years. If, however, he

succeeds in developing some of the strategic partnerships currently in the works, that annual sales figure could double.

The incremental yet rapid growth chronicled in these goals is structured to achieve Brad's ultimate goal for the company, which is nothing short of universal acclaim. "I would hope my professional legacy to be that Express Companies becomes one of the most admired and respected real estate companies in the world," he says. Young entrepreneurs should be especially encouraged by the grandiose quality of his vision considering the humble beginning from which it stems—common sense. When combined with quality coaching and an unwavering will to succeed in your passion, one can expect the kind of triumphs out of life that Brad's story so inspires.

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President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit www.BernhardtWealth.com and [Gordon's Blog](#).

