



## What Can 'Bar Rescue' Teach Us About Consulting?

BY JOHN BRUBAKER



One of my former student-athletes, Owen Benjamin, is a professional comedian/actor and he was recently featured on the season finale of the television show Bar Rescue. I tuned in to watch him and the show reminded me a lot of the relationship between consultant, client and business.

If you haven't heard of "Bar Rescue", it's the Spike TV reality show in which host Jon Taffer and his team descend on a failing bar or club and attempt to "rescue" it. The host is a no-nonsense, hard-edged leader who isn't afraid to give owners and managers tough love. As a matter of fact, often instead of thanks for helping them turn their business around, Taffer is the object of the failing bar owner's contempt.

In this year's season finale Bar Rescue attempted to save Standup Scottsdale and its failing manager Howard Hughes. The club was in a high traffic location in an upscale market and had a great history but had fallen on hard times and wasn't achieving anywhere near its potential. Does this sound like any client you've ever had? In short, it was "a winner disguised as a loser".

*"Everyone you meet is a potential winner; some are disguised as losers. Don't be fooled by their appearances."  
– Ken Blanchard*

Management guru Ken Blanchard first used this expression in reference to people and it has become a popular expression among financial advisors. When my broker makes a recommendation to me he often says "let's buy XYZ Corp., it's a winner disguised as a loser."

These are companies with upside potential whose stock you can buy near its 52 week low and sell high. Much like Standup Scottsdale, they are often undervalued simply due to a short term problem that haunts them in the eyes of market analysts.

"Bar Rescue" brought in a pair of consultants if you will: Franky Marshall, an award-winning bartending expert and Owen Benjamin, one of America's most popular young comics.

The two are charged with making changes in their respective areas of Standup Scottsdale. Meanwhile, Taffer made the operational and branding modifications to the facility.

To make a long story short what made its initial turnaround a success were some simple changes to the menu, layout, green room and better staff training. The Takeaway for YOU: A consultant's expert eye on detail can put processes and systems in place that will account for a significant improvement in a business's bottom line. That's also the easy part; we can identify

issues and devise solutions for any organization.

The kicker with this show was that immediately after the required 60-day period, Hughes removed all of the improvements Taffer made to the exterior and set the interior back to pre-Taffer layout. Turns out this is the case with many other bars during each season of the show.

Howard's behavior is a great cautionary tale that there is no such thing as easy, quick fixes. Real change tends to be messy, painful and takes time. In order to gain and sustain a level of competitive excellence the client must be open to ongoing coaching over the long term. Otherwise it is easy and convenient for the business to return to its "default settings" which got them into the mess to begin with.

To this point, after the show Taffer was quoted as saying "I'm not sure that I got through to him. He had some deep issues. I always say this should be renamed "People Rescue" because I'm always more worried about the people than the business. Fixing a comedy club is easy, fixing Howard was a whole other story."

This tends to be the hard part for us as consultants too. Rescuing the business itself is easy. Rescuing the leader from himself... that's where the real work lies. People can be either an organization's greatest asset or biggest liability; especially when we're talking about leadership.

When I began my consulting career in 1992 my mentor Dr. Robert Chell explained to me that "the people who need your help the most are the ones who never ask." His wisdom has proven to be spot on time and time again:

*"Why don't they ask? I believe there are four major reasons: fear of failure, fear of success, blind spots and ruts."*

❶ **Fear of Failure:** What if I get help and it still doesn't work out. I will be labeled a failure. It's safer to just not even try.

❷ **Fear of Success:** This was Howard's case in Bar Rescue. What if I change and things go really well? There will be a new pressure to maintain success,

which I don't think I can handle.

❸ **Blind Spots:** You simply just don't possess the self-awareness to know what you don't know and ask for help.

Rescuing the business itself is easy. Rescuing the leader from himself... that's where the real work lies. People can be either an organization's greatest asset or biggest liability; especially when we're talking about leadership. Often the people who need your help the most are the ones who never ask."

❹ **Ruts:** When habits go unchecked in our lives they become ruts. People often become too embarrassed to change ruts in their life.

It almost doesn't matter at all which of the four categories any particular individual falls into, they all lead to being married to mediocrity. I believe everyone has phenomenal talents and abilities hidden inside them.

The winners disguised as losers just need our help identifying and activating these talents for the betterment of themselves and their organizations. I've seen this phenomenon play out too many times in my coaching career to be fooled by appearances.

When we can get past their appearances and also help them identify and move past their own appearance that is when we can be catalysts for long-term change, and help our clients rescue themselves.

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John Brubaker is a nationally renowned performance consultant, speaker and author. Using a multidisciplinary approach, Brubaker helps organizations and individuals develop their competitive edge. Brubaker is the author of the books: *The Coach Approach* and *Seeds of Success* and co-author of the book *Leadership: Helping Others To Succeed*. He is also the host of *Maximum Success: The Coach Bru Show* on NBC Sports Radio Boston. He can be reached at [www.coachbru.com](http://www.coachbru.com).

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