

Outside the Box: Ships Ahoy! The pirate is coming

By Scott Taylor, Ottawa Business Journal Staff

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When our Outside the Box was created, it was hoped that some unique, perhaps even odd, businesses would be discovered. It would be a change of pace from the dollars and cents stories that make up the vast majority of the business world.

This week, we may have our first Hall of Fame candidate.

Welcome to the world of Captain Bob the pirate.

Shiver me timbers if he didn't just walk into this office with the full getup, including patch and parrot. The parrot doesn't say much because he's stuffed from too many crackers, but Captain Bob –

also known as Robert Garrow – is a professional speaker, leadership expert and author. It doesn't take long to realize Bob's no fool even if he does carry a plastic sword.



Pirate Bob, aka Robert Garrow
(Darren Brown, OBJ)

You see, he hit upon this idea while writing a newsletter in what can almost be described as a different lifetime.

The newsletter hit its readers on the funny bone and the proverbial light bulb blinked on. He wrote his book, *Ahoy Mates! Leadership Lessons from Successful Pirates* in 2003 hoping it would educate people to the tactics that made pirates good leaders. After all, they not only had to capture ships and divvy up the treasure, they had to lead a crew of scurvy dogs that would have little problem with mutiny at the first sign of weakness.

The first time he donned the costume, he was to one of six speakers all of whom were normal and there was him. By the time it was his turn to speak, the crowd was ready for something completely different and the fun began.

What he talks about, though, is no joke. Captain Bob is an expert in coaching, planning, strategy and leadership.

"It's leadership, not the size of the company or the amount of available capital that limits the growth of the business," he explained. "Look at what Ford did almost a hundred years ago. There was no mass market for cars until he created it. You have to focus on your chosen destination or vision and know what business you're really in. Maybe the market has changed and sales are dropping. Sales may be growing too rapidly for the business to keep up and you have to narrow your focus, or there might be new technology that has left you behind. These are all leadership challenges."

He helps managers and entrepreneurs identify these problems – sans pirate costume – and many others, guiding them through choppy waters to commit to a shared purpose, mutual respect within the ranks as well as ensuring all lines of communication are open.

"Do that and everyone will share the treasure," he promises.

One man who has seen Captain Bob in all his glory is Home Business Association vice-president Barry Bockus. His organization books about 30 speakers a year, but he remembers Bob vividly.

"He was humorous, memorable, informative and energetic, what more can you ask?" he laughed. "Anyone with the courage to walk into a room of strangers with a parrot on his shoulder gets my respect. Seriously, though, he's very good."