

## Interview with Bud Bilanich, author of *Straight Talk for Success*

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is pleased to be joined by Bud Bilanich, who is here to talk about his new book “Straight Talk for Success.”

*Bud Bilanich is The Common Sense Guy. His pragmatic approach to business, life, and the business of life has made him one of the most sought after speakers, consultants and executive coaches in the USA! Dr. Bilanich’s work focuses on helping individuals, teams and entire organizations succeed. Bud is Harvard educated, but has a no-nonsense, common sense approach to his work that stretches back to his roots in the steel country of Western Pennsylvania.*

*In addition to “Straight Talk for Success,” Bud has authored six books on business and leadership. He is a regular guest on talk radio and podcasts. He writes two popular blogs: [www.SuccessCommonSense.com](http://www.SuccessCommonSense.com), which focuses on career and life success and [www.CommonSenseGuy.com](http://www.CommonSenseGuy.com) that is devoted to advice for leaders and small business owners.*

*His clients include Pfizer, Johnson and Johnson, Abbott Laboratories, PepsiCo, General Motors, Citicorp, JP Morgan Chase, UBS Financial Services, AXA Advisors, AT&T, Pitney Bowes, and The Boys and Girls Clubs of America.*

*Bud is a cancer survivor who lives in Denver with his wife Cathy. He is a retired rugby player and an avid cyclist. He likes movies, live theatre and crime fiction.*

**Tyler:** Welcome, Bud. I’m glad you could join me today. We all want to know how to be successful. To start out will you tell us what made you feel the need to write “Straight Talk for Success”?

**Bud:** Thanks Tyler. I appreciate you taking the time to speak with me today. As you know, I’ve been in business as a consultant and speaker since 1988. About five years ago, many of my clients began asking me to help them out by coaching some of their senior executives and high potential employees.

As I began my coaching work, I decided that I needed to put together a model of career and life success. I wanted to identify the characteristics that all successful people have in common. After about a year of research—on line, reading every success book I could find, and interviewing successful people—I came up with my five point model of success. This model says that successful people have five things in common.

- Successful people are self confident.
- Successful people have positive personal impact.
- Successful people are outstanding performers.
- Successful people are great communicators.
- Successful people are interpersonally competent.

My coaching clients told me that they found this common sense model to be very helpful. Several suggested that I should turn it into a book. So I did.

**Tyler:** Who do you think will most benefit from and enjoy reading your book?

**Bud:** There are three main audiences for this book. The primary audience is young people, 20 to 30 years old, just beginning their careers. The second audience is people who have just received their first promotion and are beginning to advance in their life and careers. The third audience is people who are feeling stuck in their careers and who are looking for some advice on how to get it moving forward again.

In short, anyone who is interested in becoming more successful in their life and career can benefit from the ideas in “*Straight Talk for Success*.”

**Tyler:** Bud, how will the book help people who feel stuck in their careers, or who are having difficulties at work?

**Bud:** Well Tyler, I’ve learned that the biggest mistake people make when it comes to career and life success is thinking that good performance is enough to guarantee success. Outstanding performance is important, sure. It’s at the heart of the model. However, I have found that the people who become truly successful are more than good performers.

People who read “*Straight Talk*” will learn how to put the other four key success factors—self confidence, positive personal impact, communication skills and interpersonal competence—into play to build a great life and career.

**Tyler:** What do you define as success?

**Bud:** My definition of success is two part. First success means being happy with yourself, your life and career. Second, success means doing something—no matter how small—to make the world a better place.

**Tyler:** Bud, will you tell us a little bit about how the book is organized. Is there a specific path you outline to help a person reach success?

**Bud:** Tyler, as you might have guessed the book is organized into five main sections:

- Self Confidence
- Positive Personal Impact
- Outstanding Performance
- Communication Skills
- Interpersonal Competence

Each section has three chapters.

The self confidence chapters focus on: 1) Becoming optimistic, 2) Facing your fears, and 3) Surrounding yourself with positive people.

The positive personal impact chapters focus on: 1) Developing and nurturing your personal brand, 2) Being impeccable in your presentation of self, and 3) Knowing and using the basic rules of etiquette.

The outstanding performance chapters focus on: 1) Becoming a lifelong learner, 2) Setting and achieving high goals, and 3) Getting organized for success.

The communication skills chapters focus on: 1) Becoming an excellent conversationalist, 2) Developing your writing skills, and 3) Becoming an outstanding presenter.

The interpersonal competence chapters focus on: 1) Becoming self aware, 2) Building long lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with the people in your life, and 3) Learning how to resolve conflict positively.

**Tyler:** Bud, one of the aspects of success you focus on is that a person must have good communication skills. How can a person develop these skills?

**Bud:** As I mentioned, there are three types of communication skills important for career and life success: conversation skills, writing skills and presentation skills.

Here's some simple, common sense advice on each of them. Questions are the main secret to conversation skills. If you ask other people questions, you will become known as a great conversationalist. Writing is easy. Use the active voice, small words, and simple sentences and you'll become a clear concise writer. Practice is the key to making dynamic presentations. The more you practice, the better your talks will be.

**Tyler:** You also talk about self-confidence. How does one go from feeling fear, for example, of public speaking, to being self-confident?

**Bud:** My suggestions for dealing with fear are also simple and common sense. To best your fears you need to do four things. 1) Identify it. 2) Admit it. 3) Accept it. 4) Confront it and take action.

So, to use your example, if you're afraid of public speaking, making as many presentations as you can is the best thing you can do to overcome this fear.

**Tyler:** What about interpersonal competence? How do you define it, and how does one master it to become successful?

**Bud:** Interpersonally competent people excel at three things. First, they are self aware. They understand themselves. They use this self understanding to understand better the people in their lives. By understanding how others are similar or different from them, interpersonally competent people are able better to alter their communication styles. This helps them relate well to all sorts of people.

Second, interpersonally competent people are good at building strong, mutually beneficial relationships with the people in their lives. They do this by using their conversation skills, and by being willing to help others with no expectation of anything in return. This giving mentality allows them to make regular deposits into the emotional bank accounts they have with others. When you make regular deposits, you have enough emotional capital to make the occasional withdrawal.

Finally, interpersonally competent people resolve conflict in a positive manner. They do this by identifying the points where they agree with someone with whom they are in conflict. They use these points of agreement—no matter how trivial to build a solution that is acceptable to both parties.

**Tyler:** How would your advice for achieving success differ if for example, you had a male college student who views success as being a well known brain surgeon, versus a senior citizen woman who views success as staying physically active?

**Bud:** Not much. I believe that career and life success are a function of the five factors I've mentioned several times as we've chatted: self confidence, positive personal impact, outstanding performance, communication skills and interpersonal competence.

Successful brain surgeons need all of these, just like my mother—who is a senior citizen, suffering from COPD – that's Chronic obstructive Pulmonary Disease, what they used to call Emphysema.

**Tyler:** "Straight Talk for Success" contains many stories as examples. Would you share one of these stories with us?

**Bud:** I love stories because they make the points I want to make in the book come alive. Here's a favorite because it is about a time that my self confidence helped me succeed against some pretty tough competition.

Mark Twain once said, "All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, then success is sure." I love this quote. To me, it says you'll be amazed by how much you can accomplish (success) if you don't know (ignorance) how hard

it is to accomplish it. If you don't know that it's hard or impossible to do something, you are more likely to be able to do it.

Here's an example from my life. When I was a junior in high school, the local paper sponsored a writing contest. The winners got to spend two weeks at Kent State University during the summer participating in a seminar sponsored by the High School Press Institute. Only two students from all of the high schools in our county would win the contest. I decided I was going to win—because winning was the only way I was going to get to go to the seminar.

Funny thing is, I thought that two students from each *school* in the county were going to be selected. In other words, I was ignorant about the difficulty of winning. I was sure that I was one of the two best writers in my high school; I was sure to win if I wrote the best essay I possibly could. I wrote a kick-ass essay, sent it in, and waited to hear that I had won.

Which I did. However, I was shocked when I realized I was one of two kids from the whole county—not just my school—to win. It was just like Mark Twain said. All I needed was ignorance and confidence. I was ignorant of the difficulty of the competition—we had about 25 high schools in our county. It was 25 times more difficult to win than I thought. And I was confident. I knew the competition in my school, and I was pretty sure that if I wrote my best essay, it would be better than the essays of the other kids (I knew this because I was editor of the yearbook and newspaper and regularly edited their writing). My ignorance allowed my confidence to flourish, and I wrote well. Had I known that I was in a county-wide competition, I might have been more tentative in my writing, and I might not have won.

The common sense point here? When you are faced with a challenge, focus on your skills and talents, not how difficult it is—and you'll be likely to succeed.

*“Straight Talk”* is filled with these types of stories.

**Tyler:** Bud, would you say success also depends on listening to yourself and not other people? If people had started to tell you that you had a slim or no chance of winning, would that have stopped you?

**Bud:** Success absolutely depends on listening to yourself. That's why self confidence is the first point in the model. All successful people are self confident. They believe in themselves – even when others tell them that they can't be successful.

The 2008 Super Bowl is a good example. If the Giants had listened to all of the experts, they wouldn't have even made the trip to Arizona. They would have just conceded the championship to the Patriots. But they believed in themselves, and ended up winning the game in one of the biggest upsets in Super Bowl history.

**Tyler:** I mentioned earlier that you've written several other books in your career. Will you tell us a little about them?

**Bud:** All of the other books I've written have been in the leadership arena. I'll give you a quick list of the titles here:

- *4 Secrets of High Performing Organizations*
- *Supervisory Leadership*
- *Using Values to Turn Vision Into Reality*
- *Leading With Values*
- *Fixing Performance Problems*
- *Solving Performance Problems*

I've also written an e book called *“Star Power: Common Sense Ideas for Career and Life Success”*. It was sort of a rough draft of *“Straight Talk.”*

Besides that, I've contributed chapters to several books:

- *Conversations on Success*
- *One Great Idea*
- *The Handbook of Business Strategy*
- *180 Ways to Walk the Customer Service Talk*

**Tyler:** Besides writing books, Bud, you teach success through coaching. Will you tell us a little bit about that work?

**Bud:** I began my career as a trainer. From there I moved into consulting and speaking. Speaking is a lot like training. You just have less time to make your point. Most of my talks last 45 minutes to an hour. Most training courses are usually a full day at a minimum. My coaching is done one on one. My typical coaching engagements last six months. During that time, I usually meet face to face with the person I am coaching three or four times. I speak with him or her via the phone every week, and I am available by email to answer questions as we go forward.

As I mentioned before, the five points in "*Straight Talk for Success*" are the starting point for my coaching. I begin by assessing how well my coaching client is doing in each of these five areas. Then, we jointly develop objectives for the coaching and a plan to make sure we meet those objectives.

**Tyler:** Bud, do you plan to write any more books?

**Bud:** Sure. I'm planning a follow up to "*Straight Talk for Success*." I'm thinking about calling it "*More Straight Talk for Success*." I've been interviewing thought leaders in the self confidence, personal impact, high performance, communication and interpersonal competence fields. My plan is to make the new book a compilation of the best thoughts of the best people in these fields.

**Tyler:** Bud, you've obviously been extremely successful yourself. To what do you attribute your own success, and what put you on the right path through life?

**Bud:** My parents gave me a great start in life. Their greatest gift to me was a strong work ethic. Also, I've been blessed with a good mind and a love of learning. However, most importantly, I attribute my success to my self confidence, positive personal impact, outstanding performance, communication skills and interpersonal competence.

**Tyler:** Bud, how did you get to be called The Common Sense Guy?

**Bud:** As you know, Tyler, a strong personal brand is an important element of the second success factor, positive personal impact. Several years ago, I decided to create a personal brand. I began by asking people close to me—friends and clients—what came to mind when they thought of me. The term "common sense" came up a lot. I agreed that common sense is one of the terms that defines me pretty well. I also thought that it made sense as a brand because it differentiated me from my more theoretical competitors.

Once I settled on common sense as the core attribute of my brand, I had a little trouble coming up with the third word. Common Sense Guru sounded too pretentious and new age all at the same time. I considered Common Sense Doctor—a play on my educational credentials, but it ran the risk of being confused with a medical doctor.

I settled on Common Sense Guy because, when you come right down to it, I'm just a regular guy. Common Sense Guy struck the right chord with me because it captures the essence of who I am as a person.

**Tyler:** Will you explain the role of common sense in becoming a success?

**Bud:** I think that we tend to overcomplicate things. I believe in looking for time tested principles and applying them. That's where common sense comes in. Most common sense has stood the test of time—that's why it's called common sense.

My five success principles – self confidence, positive personal impact, outstanding performance, communication skills and interpersonal competence—resonate with people because they make sense. They’re just common sense. The hard part is putting them to work. You have to commit to doing the work necessary to reap the rewards that will come from applying them.

Thomas Edison once said, “Most people miss opportunity because it comes dressed in overalls and looks like work.” The same is true for common sense. Most people know what to do in most situations. Their common sense tells them. However, many people don’t do what their common sense tells them for any number of reasons—it’s too much work, they may make someone angry, it takes too long.

So to me, the role of common sense in becoming a success is simple. Listen to what your common sense tells you—and then do it, no matter how hard, or unpleasant.

**Tyler:** Thank you, Bud, for joining me today. Before we go, will you tell us about your website and what information readers can find there about “Straight Talk for Success”?

**Bud:** I have three websites:

- [www.BudBilanich.com](http://www.BudBilanich.com)
- [www.CommonSenseCoach.com](http://www.CommonSenseCoach.com)
- [www.CommonSenseKeynotes.com](http://www.CommonSenseKeynotes.com).

Common Sense Coach has the most information about the ideas in “*Straight Talk*.”

Also, my blog, [www.SuccessCommonSense.com](http://www.SuccessCommonSense.com) is a great place for people to go to learn more about the five success factors in “*Straight Talk*.” I write about one of them every day: Monday, self confidence; Tuesday, personal impact; Wednesday, performance; Thursday, communication skills; Friday, interpersonal competence.

**Tyler:** Thank you, Bud. If our readers want to be successful and they have Common Sense, then I hope they’ll read your book.



[Listen to interview on Inside Scoop Live](#)  
[Read Review of Straight Talk](#)