

LET IT  
*FLY*  
**FLY!**

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Defy the Laws of Business Gravity  
And  
Keep Your Company Soaring

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Dedicated to my wife Judy, who not only flies with me,  
but who also travels with me on the Road to Gumption,  
and to our daughter, who kept asking me  
if I was done writing *Let It Fly!* yet.

**Also by Gary Lim**

The Road to Gumption:  
Using Your Inner Courage To Balance  
Your Work and Personal Life

## Introduction

The so-called “war for talent” has been waged on corporate fronts for years. As cycles of the economy ebb and flow, the need to attract and retain talented associates and managers takes on even more importance.

Central to this objective is the premise that some of the best people will be attracted to company environments that allow them to excel at what they do. Someone who is good at what she does typically wants to focus on getting the job done. This person is innovative, responsible, and accountable. She’s not very likely to want to hear that she should be doing things the way someone else wants them to be done. Nor is she likely to enjoy spending an inordinate amount of time repeatedly summarizing progress or explaining what’s next.

I believe most of us are intuitively aware that to “let it fly”, that is, to let our people excel, is the right thing to do. For those associates who we identify as exceptional, we rarely need reminding. But what about the rest of the pack? There are very good people in this group, too. And if we don’t give them a chance to “let it fly” in their own right, we might lose them in the war for talent.

In the parable **Let It Fly!**, the two fictional characters explore these issues in the non-fictional setting of the Pebble Beach Golf Links at scenic Pebble Beach, California. Meet Carl Baxter and Ed Hilland. One is the epitome of letting it fly, while the other is of more traditional management philosophies. During their round of golf, Carl shares with Ed the virtues of letting it fly, along with some tips for implementation.

The core theme is an iterative leadership cycle called **FORE™**. This is an acronym signifying four phases: Focus, Offload, Review, Encourage. In each of the phases, we discover the notion of the **Laws of Business Gravity™**. These are five “laws” that if ignored, will drag a company’s growth to the ground, perhaps even taking the company down as well.

In each phase of FORE, we are made aware of a corresponding Law of Business Gravity that we must try to “defy” to keep our company soaring. The tips to remember are called **Aerial Views™** and serve to remind us to execute the FORE cycle and to try to defy the Laws of Business Gravity.

FORE, Aerial Views, and the Laws of Business Gravity. Like the golf metaphor that is woven into this story, the analogy is there. In golf, defy Newton’s laws of gravity (with high-tech golf balls and clubs), and you keep your golf shot soaring. In business, defy the Laws of Business Gravity (with FORE and Aerial Views), and you keep your company soaring.

I wrote this book with the intent that the lessons be useful at any level of leadership, whether you lead a large or small company, for-profit or not-for-profit, a division, a department, a group, a team, or other entity. Simply replace the word “Company” in “Keep Your Company Soaring” with your entity.

Whether you are a golfer or not, may you hit it long, high, and down the middle. Now let it fly!

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(Note ... for storytelling purposes I took some literary license with the setting. Carl and Ed play an entire round at Pebble Beach Golf Links as a twosome, with no other golfers in sight, either in front of or behind them. You would not likely encounter the same conditions.)

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## Prologue – Two Golfers

The early morning sun shone brilliantly on the white building, glinting off the roof's shingles and peaks, highlighting the white columns on the walls. Over the double doors was a simple yet elegant sign, gold letters on a black background, "The Lodge." Another beautiful morning at Pebble Beach Golf Links, with its timeless Lodge overlooking the storied 18<sup>th</sup> green where, since the early 1920's, so many famous golfers have holed out the last putts of their rounds. Walk through the front double doors, head toward the back porch, and catch the view that just takes your breath away – the spectacularly crystal blue waters of the Pacific Ocean, the sweeping coastline, and the mountains rising in the distance beyond.

In the parking lot across the street from The Lodge, a rental car pulled abruptly into an open spot, the squeal of its tires piercing the morning quiet. Ed Hilland threw open the driver's door and launched his body out of the seat, landing on his feet with a dull thud. A man of average height with a definitively round build, Ed's silver-white hair reflected in the sunlight as he walked back to the trunk and lifted the lid.

Despite the fact that he had for a long time been looking forward to playing the Pebble Beach course, Ed was not in a particularly good mood. He had already spoken to his East Coast office, where the corporate-owned manufacturing company he had been president of for the past 10 years was located. Whenever he

traveled, Ed usually called in at least a couple of times a day, with his first call today at 5 o'clock in the morning, California time. That made it 8 o'clock Eastern time, and Ed was irritated that the receptionist wasn't there to answer the call. It didn't matter that hers was a planned absence, and that someone else answered the call just as promptly.

Ed liked calling at 8 o'clock sharp, just to see who was in the office on time and who wasn't. He was of the old school, where you were supposed to be at your desk, ready to work, at the appointed hour.

Touching base by phone with all members of his company's management team, he wanted to hear what each manager was going to accomplish during the day. If Ed didn't like something he heard, he told them so, issuing instructions on how certain things should be done. By the time he hung up the phone about 90 minutes later, he was on a slow burn, shaking his head at the things that always seemed to drop through the cracks whenever he was away.

In the last two or three years, profitability had become more and more difficult to achieve, as the marketplace for the company's products shifted with the changing economy. Growth had been there in the early years, but lately had leveled off. Financially, it felt like they were only treading water. For these reasons, Ed felt he needed to personally monitor most of the operations. He was just frustrated that if he was away from the office for even a short time, it appeared that some things didn't get done.

During the past few months Ed had not been able to sleep well at night, worrying about the business. Though he didn't like to admit it even to himself, he was not sure what to do next. The company's growth had been flat in recent years, and he wasn't sure where future growth would be coming from. There were rumors that the corporate parent might be seeking to sell the company, and those rumors just made Ed that much more nervous about his job security. The hourly employees didn't care to go the extra mile, asking about overtime for any minute worked beyond regular hours.

Ed was finding himself in a dilemma that appeared only to get deeper. With the company's lack of growth, even as president he felt like he had little control over his destiny. Company issues and problems were determining his actions. He could stay the course and continue to fight fires, but he couldn't figure out how to get around the lack of motivation on the part of his employees. On some days he thought he was the only one in the building who cared. Maybe even on most days.

Trying to get away for a few days' vacation time, Ed and his wife traveled to the San Francisco Bay Area since she had never visited. The round of golf at Pebble Beach was a gift from his wife, and also a convenient excuse for her to go shopping in nearby Carmel.

Ed muttered to himself as he started to unload his golf bag from the trunk of the car, thinking about the morning's earlier phone conversations. "Can't those guys ever get things right. I have to set them straight each and every time." He shook his head again and

started to change into his golf shoes. When he was finished, he slung his golf bag over his shoulder, locked the car and stomped off in the direction of the pro shop to sign in for his round.

**M**oments later, a few spaces down from where Ed had parked, another rental car drove into an open spot and came smoothly to a stop. Carl Baxter got out of the car and strode to the trunk. Tall, athletic build, with dark hair, he had the air of calm, understated confidence about him. Lifting the lid, he started to unload his golf gear.

He too, was on vacation, from the distribution company he owned in the Midwest. Starting with just himself and a partner 12 years before, he built the business steadily, adding the right kind of people when it was the right time to do so. After a few years, the firm grew to a level of revenue and headcount where he could afford to take at least 3 weeks off each year, sometimes more. Today Carl's wife chose to remain in San Jose to visit with some of her relatives while Carl lived his dream, playing at Pebble Beach Golf Links for the very first time.

Whenever Carl went away on vacation, his personal rule was to never call his office. He didn't even really look at his BlackBerry all that much either. If it became necessary, his managers could call Carl's cell phone, but they knew that would have to be an extreme case. In the last 5 or 6 years, Carl had never been called. He wouldn't want to receive a call anyway, because

something pretty serious would have had to happen for his management team to call him while he was on vacation.

As Carl sat on the rear bumper of his rental car putting on his golf shoes, he paused for a moment and took in the early morning sight of The Lodge with its pristine white walls, the bright green of the surrounding grass, and the brilliant blue of the ocean beyond. “Boy, what a view,” he said softly to himself, pursing his lips in a silent whistle.

Carl stood up, locked the car, picked up his golf bag, and headed toward the practice putting green to stretch and warm up.

## Chapter 1 – FORE!

The starter in the Pebble Beach pro shop looked over the list of tee time reservations for the morning. It wasn't a terribly busy morning, but there would be a steady stream of golfers, though well spaced. That would allow the golfers to play at a comfortable pace and enjoy themselves. He looked up as a tall man, dressed for golf, approached the counter and spoke.

“Good morning ... I'm Carl Baxter, and I have an 8:03 tee time, I think.”

The starter looked down at his schedule sheet and said, “Yes Mr. Baxter, I have you right here. You'll be playing with Mr. Hilland today.”

“Okay,” said Carl, as he fished for his credit card in his wallet. “Hopefully I won't be holding Mr. Hilland back too much!”

“No sir,” said the starter with a smile, reaching out to take Carl's credit card. After taking care of the payment, the starter handed Carl's card back to him. “Thank you, Mr. Baxter. We may actually be running a little ahead this morning, but you still have a few minutes before you need to head to the first tee.”

“Sounds good, thanks very much,” replied Carl. He strode out the door to retrieve his golf bag. Since he had already stretched and taken a few putts, he decided to head to the first tee and scout it out. Carl slung the bag over his shoulder and walked toward the waiting area.

The air was cool, the sun was bright – it was indeed a perfect morning at Pebble Beach.

He arrived just in time to hear the announcement over the public address system, “Next up, Mr. Baxter and Mr. Hilland.” Carl felt a surge of adrenaline, hearing his name echoing at Pebble Beach. If only it were “Next up, Mr. Baxter, Mr. Woods, and Mr. Mickelson.” Another golfer who had already been waiting approached him.

“Good morning, you must be Mr. Baxter,” said the golfer with a smile, extending his hand. “I’m Ed Hilland.”

“Carl Baxter, nice to meet you.” Carl shook Ed’s hand and smiled back. “I have to confess, this is my first time playing here, so maybe you could show some mercy on me.” He laughed.

“Well, it’s my first time, too,” admitted Ed. “So it’s more a matter of whether the course is going to show any mercy on both of us!” His smile turned to a slight scowl. “Besides, my morning already got off to a lousy start, so it can only get better from here, right?”

Carl didn’t know what to say in response, so he just busied himself with his golf bag, pulling out sleeves of golf balls and fishing for tees. After getting situated, he looked over and asked, “So, are you a guest here at Pebble Beach, Ed?”

Ed chuckled, “I wish, but no. We’re staying in Monterey, and this round of golf was a gift from my wife. I’ve always wanted to play here. What about you?”

“Always wanted to play here, too,” replied Carl, playing one-handed catch with a golf ball. “I just haven’t had the opportunity to do so until this trip. We’re staying up in the San Jose area where my wife has some relatives. I got up early to make the drive down here.” Carl put the ball in his pocket and started to gently swing a 3-wood he plucked from his bag.

“What’s your line of business?” asked Ed, pulling out a driver.

Still swinging the club, Carl answered, “I own a distribution company in the Midwest. We’re a full-line distributor of supplies and equipment for the plumbing industry. How about you, Ed?”

With his driver held horizontally behind his neck, Ed was doing some gentle twisting. “I’m president of a manufacturing company back East, owned by a large private corporate parent. We make home furnishings and accessories, mostly ready-to-assemble.”

The public address system came to life again. “On the tee, Mr. Hilland and Mr. Baxter. Enjoy your round, gentlemen.”

The men walked up to the tee box. Carl said, “Ed, go ahead and hit if you’re ready. Believe it or not, I’m actually a little nervous. It’s like I’ve been waiting my whole life for this moment. And there’s not even much of an audience!” He looked around and laughed.

Ed grinned. “Lucky for me nobody’s watching.” He teed up his ball and stepped back to look down the fairway. “So, dogleg right, huh?”



“Yep,” replied Carl, “but you want to stay left because it won’t do you any good to try to cut the dogleg. I think I’m going to aim in the direction of that first fairway bunker on the left.”

Ed turned to look at Carl, his eyebrows arched. “I thought you said you never played here before!”

Carl grinned and pointed to his head. “That doesn’t mean that I haven’t played here in my mind, over and over again.”

Ed took a practice swing then stepped up to address his ball. He hit a low ball that went in the direction of the bunker that Carl mentioned, but well short. Picking up his tee, he looked at Carl, shrugged, and said, “Oh well, off the tee safely anyway.”

Carl moved into the tee box, teed his ball up, and stepped back to look down the fairway and get his line. He took a practice swing, addressed the ball, and took a deep breath. Taking a nice easy swing, Carl launched the ball into the air. His ball landed in the left side of the fairway and rolled along the line he was aiming for. Just the shot he was visualizing all those years.

Ed looked at where Carl’s ball had come to rest, and then looked back at Carl. “Looks like it’s you who should show some mercy on me, Carl.” Ed laughed, a sort of derisive-sounding laugh.

Carl grinned sheepishly at the implied compliment. “Thanks, I’m just happy to get my first tee shot at Pebble Beach in the air.”

The golfers gathered their golf bags and started walking down the fairway, falling in step with each other.

“What type of home furnishings do you guys make?” asked Carl.

“Oh, different things you might use in your home,” answered Ed, carefully stepping over a sprinkler head. “End tables, folding chairs, computer desks, bookshelves ... that sort of thing. Pretty much all ready-to-assemble, or ‘RTA’ as we say in our business.”

They both came to a stop near Ed’s ball. Ed surveyed the scene, selected a club, and lined up his shot. He swung, but the resulting mishit sent the ball into the rough on the right side of the fairway, about 75 yards from the green. Ed swore softly to himself, but it was loud enough for Carl to hear.

Ed dumped his club back into his bag, and both men started to walk toward Carl’s ball. “What about you, Carl? What are your products?”

Striding forward, Carl answered, “We’re a distributor for the plumbing industry, so we sell to small independents and some franchise networks. Just about anything you can think of, fixtures, components, supplies, and assemblies.”

They reached Carl’s ball laying in the fairway, where he had a straight shot to the green. Carl selected a club, went through his pre-shot routine, and let the ball fly. It arced gracefully, perfectly visible against the blue California sky, and landed right in the middle of the green.

“Nice shot,” said Ed grudgingly.

“Thanks,” Carl said, as he put his club back in his bag. He looked up to see Ed walking off toward his ball in the right rough.

Taking some quick steps to catch up, Carl asked, “So how’s the economy affecting your business these days?”

Eyes focused on his ball as he approached it, Ed answered, “It’s been challenging, but I think for me it’s less the economy and more the type of employees I have.”

Carl looked at him as they stopped near Ed’s ball. “What do you mean, ‘type of employees?’”

Ed replied, a slight edge creeping into his voice, “You know, it’s like the old saying, you can’t get good help anymore. Lately I’ve been feeling like I have to clean up after my employees all the time.”

He looked down at his ball, up at the hole, and selected a club. Wagging it a bit, he looked at Carl and asked, “Do you have a tough time finding good people where you are in the Midwest?”

Carl waited until Ed hit his ball. It lofted into the air and landed just short of the green, on the fringe.

“Nice shot,” said Carl. “I don’t know that I have a ‘tough time’ finding good people where I am, but I do have to move out one or two people once in awhile if they don’t work out.”

“Well I do that too,” agreed Ed. “We lay off folks when we’re not as busy.”

“No, I didn’t mean that,” corrected Carl. The two men had taken their putters from their bags and were walking onto the putting surface. “I meant that if a member of our team doesn’t work out, we have to move that person out. But it doesn’t happen very often.”

Ed stopped and looked at Carl. “So you don’t do layoffs?”

“No.”

“I take it you haven’t been growing much, then,” said Ed as he started to examine his ball’s path to the hole.

Carl felt a momentary flash of irritation at Ed’s assumption. “Actually, we’ve grown anywhere from 30 to 40 percent each year over the past 5 years,” he replied in a deliberately pleasant tone. “Your shot – go ahead and knock it in the hole, Ed.”

Ed stood over his ball and swung the putter a couple of times before putting from the fringe. The ball skipped a little before settling well short of the hole. He shook his head.

“Well, I guess I’m still away, aren’t I?” he asked. Carl nodded silently. Another putt by Ed brought his ball close to the hole, and he tapped it in. Bending over to pick it out of the hole, Ed said, “Well, it’s good to get the first one under my belt.”

Carl, who had already lined up his putt earlier, stepped up to his ball. As he started his routine, Ed said,

“So how did you manage that kind of growth with the swings of the economy?”

In the middle of his practice stroke, Carl stopped and looked up at Ed. “I’ll share the secret with you in a moment, if you’ll let me take my best shot. It’s not every day that I get a chance to putt for birdie, and at Pebble Beach yet.”

Carl concentrated again on his ball, and stroked his putt. The ball stopped just short of the hole, and he tapped it in.

“Not a bad start!” exclaimed Ed, as they walked to where they had left their golf bags. “Now what’s the secret for growing your business?”

Carl slipped his putter back into his bag, and leaned on the tops of his wood covers for a moment. “I think you said earlier that you had to clean up after your employees all the time. I give direction on where we’re headed, but let my teammates figure out what they need to do for us to get there.”

The two men started walking to the 2<sup>nd</sup> hole. Ed asked, “What do you mean, ‘teammates’? You mean your management team?”

Carl looked at him and answered, “My management team, their team members ... as far as I’m concerned, everyone in my company is my teammate.”

Ed grinned and said sarcastically, “C’mon, you can’t tell me that a guy in your warehouse is your teammate. Your role is a whole lot more important than his is.”

“Absolutely he’s my teammate,” replied Carl, being deliberately patient with his tone as he returned Ed’s gaze. “And there are many times when his role is way more important than mine, because I’m not the one who is getting the shipment out the door.” He walked ahead to the tee box and started to look down the fairway.

Ed pulled a driver from his bag. “Well, my employees are not enough of team players to be called teammates. Most of them are just there to collect paychecks, and I’m the poor soul signing them.” He swung his club a couple of times.

Carl thought for a moment about what Ed had just said. “Out of curiosity, Ed, what’s your growth been like over the past few years, and how big is your company? That is, if you don’t mind telling me. We’re not competing in the same industry, and at the moment we’re alone in the woods here.” Carl smiled and gestured around him.

Ed stroked his chin as he pondered his answer. “To be honest, we’ve been pretty flat the last couple of years or more. That’s why I’ve had to really stay on top of my guys, to make sure they’re doing the right things. My company is running about 45 million dollars in revenues, with anywhere from 140 to 180 people, depending on how busy we are.” He leaned on the end of his club. “What about yours, Carl?”

Carl swung his driver gently as he stood at the edge of the tee box. “We should do over 40 million dollars this year, and I have about 70 teammates.” He bent over

to tee up his ball, then looked at the hole information. “Let’s see, par 5, 502 yards. You have to fly about 200 yards to clear the first bunker.”

Ed pursed his lips and whistled, still thinking about Carl’s revenue. “Not bad – but I’ll bet with all that revenue and so few employees, you’re busy when you travel, keeping tabs on things.” He laughed.

Now in his pre-swing routine, Carl looked down the fairway before answering. “Actually, when I’m on vacation like I am now, my rule is to never call the office.” He swung and launched the ball on its way. It came to rest at the very beginning of the short grass, another shot that he had been imagining all these years.

Ed stepped up to the tee and looked after Carl’s shot. “Nice shot. My turn to lay it out there.” When Ed hit his ball, it flew straight, but landed short of Carl’s.

As they walked toward the fairway with their bags over their shoulders, Ed turned to Carl again. “How can you be away and not call in? I have to call at least twice a day,” he complained.

Carl returned the look. “It’s beginning to occur to me that you have a fairly hands-on approach to managing your business, is that right?”

“Yeah, what’s wrong with that? After all, I’m in charge!” Ed sounded defensive.

“Nothing – it’s just an observation, not a criticism.” Carl kept walking, looking straight ahead as he continued talking. “In my case, I’ve found that delegating to my teammates leaves me with a lot less to

## About the Author

Gary Lim, M.A., is President of Aurarius LLC, the strategic and business management consulting firm he first founded in San Jose, California then relocated to Upstate New York. In addition to Aurarius, he founded CEO PrivateLine, and is a co-founder of HealthcareBusinessOffice LLC. His Fortune 500 experience includes executive and management positions at Hewlett Packard, ROLM/IBM, Xerox, and Novell.

An experienced public speaker, Gary has spoken to audiences in many venues. Cumulatively, his speaking engagements have been attended by well over 10,000 attendees, through keynote addresses, conference workshops, corporate/executive seminars, product launches, and training courses.

Gary's experience and skill set are focused in the areas of helping companies achieve even higher levels of performance. He utilizes his proprietary methodology to take firms to what he calls the **AgileXnt™ Zone** (pronounced a-jil-EX-ent), where organizations are both agile and excellent. In his work with client companies and seminar attendees, Gary is often considered one of the best at assessing an intricate situation, reducing it to a few key issues, and offering practical solutions.

He earned a Bachelor's degree *cum laude* from Princeton University in electrical engineering and computer science, and a Master's degree in organizational management from University of Phoenix. His first book, *The Road to Gumption: Using Your Inner Courage to Balance Your Work and Personal Life*, was an Amazon #1 Bestseller in its category.

For more information on speaking engagements, corporate seminars, or volume purchases of this book:

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