

# Filling the Glass

## An Interview with author Barry Maher

By Robert Peterson

Barry Maher finishes his keynote presentation, and the audience comes to its feet applauding. Clearly they enjoyed every word. The conference and trade show are off to a perfect start. Normally it would be time for the speaker to pick up his fee, check out of the hotel and hustle off to his next engagement.

But as the applause finally dies down, there's an announcement. "You can meet and greet Barry Maher at the XYZ booth today from 4 to 6pm. Stop by and ask questions or just say, 'hi.' And he'll be giving away autographed copies of that new book of his, *Filling the Glass: The Skeptic's Guide to Positive Thinking in Business*."

The audience knows about filling the glass. During his presentation Maher had picked up a glass of water, drunk from it then held it up for inspection. "Half full or half empty?" he'd asked.

"Half full," they answered dutifully.

"Call it what you will," Maher said. "It's still only three ounces of water... The person I want to be, the person I want to hire and the person who will be more useful to his company, his society, his family, his friends, his dog, his parakeet and himself is the person who looks at that glass and isn't concerned with whether it's half empty of half full, but with figuring out what he or she has to do to fill it up ..."

And he said, "In order to be truly successful—on our own terms—we have to find a way to make peace with those aspects of our careers, our products, our companies or ourselves that we consider to be negatives. That means, first of all, we need to know that it's okay to acknowledge those negatives. It's not only okay, it is vital: for our sanity, our sense of honesty, our integrity."

Maher offered a number of strategies for filling the glass. Many of them were novel, some even counterintuitive. A couple were familiar: "things you might already believe to be true but probably haven't gotten around to making part of your lives," he said. "Maybe we can find a way to get you started."

Here's a taste of Barry Maher on *Filling the Glass*—a few quick highlights from the presentation and the book.

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Robert Peterson is currently working on a new book, *Traveling Days*, which should be out in summer 2002.

### Make the Skeleton Dance

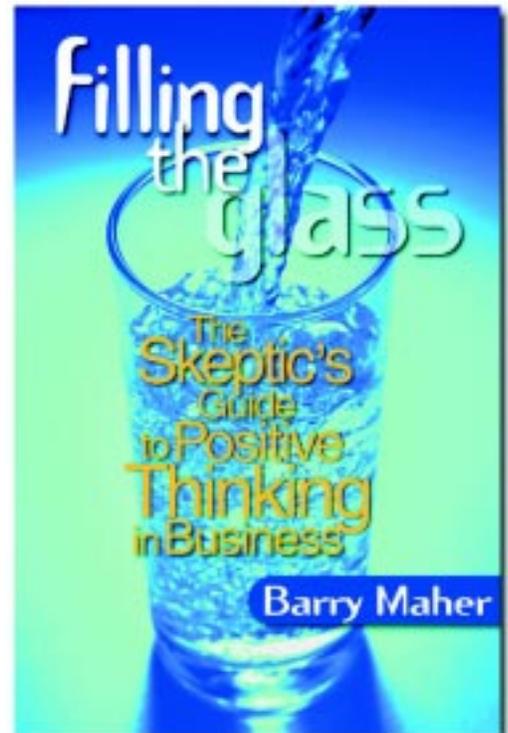
"Truly great companies, truly great leaders, truly great salespeople and truly great managers never hide potential negatives, and they certainly don't stumble through them. The truly great use potential negatives as selling points. They even brag about them. As George Bernard Shaw said, "If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance."

"If you can brag about a negative, you've made peace with it. Often the secret to making peace is to find a way that you can honestly brag about it.

"For example: Are my hourly consultation rates expensive? Absolutely. And why do I charge so much? Because I can. Because my clients are not just willing but happy to pay those kind of rates because of the results I generate for them.

"Can you hire somebody else to do the job for less? Absolutely. But why do you think they charge less? Do you really think they would charge less if they could charge more? They're not humanitarians. They charge less because that's what they can get—because that's what their clients are willing to pay for the results they generate.

"And in one form or another,



you can do that with great many of the negatives we all face in business. Truth is the ultimate sales trick.”

### Be Your Own Guru

“With all the money we spend on self improvement in this country, you’d think we’d be darn close to perfect by now. But when it comes to motivation, all the finest boss, the most inspiring leader, the greatest guru can ever do—all anyone else can ever do—is to talk you into motivating yourself, to sell you on the idea of motivating yourself. You have to do the heavy lifting, you have to do the work.

“No one else can motivate you. And Stephen Covey can’t be with you every moment of the day, when all the thousands of little decisions that lead toward or lead away from that goal have to be made.

“You’ve got to be your own guru, your own favorite motivational speaker. Start thinking of that as part of your job description, part of what you have to do. Part of what you’re being paid to do. Part of what you want to do.”

### Fail Toward Success

“There are those who will tell you that you can do whatever you think you can, that you have no limits. That can work, until you run head-first into one of those limits, and crash and burn. You get discouraged, lose self-confidence and maybe quit altogether.

“You have limits. I have limits. We are human beings, we are limited, we are fallible. That’s reality. Never mind the pat little sayings that try to convince us otherwise.

“Here’s my not-so-pat little saying. *You can do far more than you think you can.* You have limits but they’re expanding limits: and running up against them can be great practice for expanding them in the future. In all likelihood you’ve never pushed those limits anywhere near as far as they can be pushed. Most of the time, we’re stopped by the limits we impose on ourselves long before we’d ever be stopped by the limits imposed by reality.

“I don’t know what your potential is. In all likelihood, neither do you. Maybe it’s time you should try to find out. With the possible exception of daytime TV, potential is the most useless thing on the planet—if it remains only potential.”

### Changing the Scale

“Thirty thousand dollars is a fortune for a Hyundai, but it’s dirt cheap for a Rolls Royce. You can turn big numbers into tiny numbers by demonstrating value—the Roll Royce could be a much better deal than a Hyundai—and by changing the scale.

“Perspective is everything. My problems are monumental because they’re so close to me. Yours are farther away; they’re not nearly as serious. But we can change the scale to put our own problems in perspective. For example, if you’re 45 or 55 and filled with regret over the chances you’ve let slip by, imagine being 85 and how much you’d give to be 55 again with another 30 years of opportunity.

“Think of the most stressful thing likely to happen to you at work this week or this month. Then imagine that right before it happens, you find out that the person you love most has only an extremely limited amount of time to live. How stressful is that big meeting likely to be?

“Guess what? The person you love most does have only an extremely limited amount of time to live. You too.

“That’s changing the scale.”

### Enjoy

“Business is like life: if you’re not having fun, you’re not doing it right. And the converse is also true: if you’re not doing it right, you’re probably not having any fun. Here’s my dictum: he or she who has the most fun, wins.”

### Barry Maher on Trade Shows

So, after attending so many trade shows as a speaker, what advice does the author of *Filling the Glass: The Skeptic’s Guide to Positive Thinking in Business* have for trade show professionals?

“Too many exhibitors still don’t approach trade shows professionally,” Maher says. “Their people give away a few key chains, talk to a few prospects, collect a few business cards and offer a prize that has nothing to do with their business to anyone who happens to wander by.

“On the other hand, one company I worked with recently not only sponsored the opening keynote speech, they participated in selecting me. We spoke extensively beforehand about the theme of the conference and my presentation. Then they tied their booth, their promotion, their demo and their giveaway into that theme. Of course their giveaway was linked to their product, so anyone who entered the drawing was a genuine prospect.

“Asking me to ‘meet and greet’ attendees in their booth after my speech was just one more way of putting themselves and their exhibit at the center of the conference. It helped promote me as well, so I was happy to do it, as most speakers would be, even if the company hadn’t sponsored the keynote. It cost them nothing. And believe me, I know how to gather a crowd. Which gave them an audience whenever they felt like doing their demo. Instead of being just another exhibitor, they practically owned the show. They were true trade show professionals.”

Barry Maher is a speaker, consultant and author of *Filling the Glass: The Skeptic’s Guide to Positive Thinking in Business*. (Dearborn Trade Publishing, 2001, \$19.95). He can be found on the web at [www.barrymaher.com](http://www.barrymaher.com) and reached at P.O. Box 2126, Santa Barbara, CA 93120, 805/962-2599. His e-mail is [barrymaher@barrymaher.com](mailto:barrymaher@barrymaher.com). ❖

