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# Achieving Breakthrough Success

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**Joe Dager:** *Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 podcast. With me today is Dr. Thomas O'Grady. Dr. O'Grady has for 35 years been studying and winning in the game of breakthrough success. He has insights, as well as the underlying pieces, ideas and stories to motivate and carry you through captured in his new book, The Mechanics for Breakthrough Success. Thanks for joining me and could you give me a little background about yourself.*

**Dr. Thomas O'Grady:** Okay. I'll try for a little background. Very quickly, I've gone through, and I grew up with a lot of problems as far as confidence and everything else. Like, there's something happened, something changed, and it was in the military. It gave me the ability to see things differently in a different way, and I've had just a series of tremendous successes that really were, first, coincidence and then other things I just reasoned my way through. Actually writing that book was a suggestion by somebody. He speaks all over the world, and he said, "Gee, there's lots of people who have written a book because they've done something well. You've been eminently successful in multiple unrelated fields. So, how do you do it? You ought to write about it." And, that's what it's about.

**Joe:** *You struggled with confidence in the early stages of your life there and at what age did that change? Was it when you joined the military? Was that the breakthrough moment?*

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**Dr. O'Grady:** No, actually what happened was because growing up my eyes were crooked and everybody immediately, I mean you take a look at comedians, people on TV, etc. they'll do that as a joke and stuff like this. I used to have people, even adults, do that to me. I had junior high school high school teachers that made themselves popular by pointing out things about me or to me in front of other people. I had guidance counselors that every year they would see my test scores, etc., they'd push them aside and say, "Gee, can't really go by test scores." And then, the next words out of their mouth were "You know; not everybody's meant for college. Have you ever thought about sending him to a Trade School?" That was what they were telling my parents.

Of course, I'd be "Oh, no, no, please don't." What happened to me was really one of these, I don't know whether you could put a number like 1 in billion on it because it's so remarkable. Went into the military, as I'm there, they take a bunch of tests, etc. I had joined the security agency in order to avoid war. In the security agency, the third week in basic training, they brought 4 of us over to this little building and had us choose our, what we wanted to do. As I walked up, they said, "Oh, we don't have to ask you. We all know what you want to do. You want to do languages." And, I sat up with my hands to my side, shout and said, "You got to be kidding. I took 5 years of German. I know nothing." And, they said, "No, no, you're good at languages." Well, I turned it down, and they said, "We will, it's so expensive, we will not put anybody in it unless they really want to do it."

Here's what was really lucky. It was over Christmas holidays I was taking a train home, and 2 guys sat next to me and urged me to go to a New Year's Eve party with them. When I went there, they, I told them, and they urged me as they said, "Oh my God, it's in Monterey, California. It's absolutely beautiful, and they'll teach you how to learn a language." Well, I went back and asked them and told them I was going to change my

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mind. Of course, their reaction to that was very funny, and I'll save that, but they called the National Security Agency on the spot because of what I said my score was. They verified the score, invited me in and gave my choice of languages, which I chose Russian.

What happened was, at that school, in the Russian language school, right at the end, the last week as we were graduating, a professor sat down with a student and me and this is what changed me. He said, "You know; you can choose anything you want to do in the future. Medical school and Law school is far easier than what you just did." And, there's no question in my mind that was true, and I say that because they were threatening us and they were going to fail out close to 70% of the people they said. They were threatening us that if we fail out, we'd go across the street for Advance Infantry training and off to war and come back for R&R and go off again. So, there were people that had nervous breakdowns, people who'd committed suicide. Pushing yourself that much, I thought to myself, "Gee, maybe if I'm not even that bright but if, first of all, if the military can make me push myself to this extent for them, can I do the same thing for me?"

I thought, "Gee, you know, if the average brain is supposed to be like 100 and maybe mine's a 90, I had no idea what my IQ was at that time, and we only used 10% of our brain but I worked 20% harder than everybody else, I'm a 10.8, and they're only a 10." Those two, in that way that biologically makes sense or not I had no idea. It didn't matter. Those 2 things motivated me to push, and I spent my time studying, researching, etc., how to learn better, how to learn faster, how to copy some of the learning techniques, etc. that I got at that school, and I just went on and on and on from there.

**Joe:** *Did you recognize at the present moment, what was going on right there. I would picture you that you're 19 to 20 at that age or 22?*

**Dr. O’Grady:** Actually, I didn’t really recognize so much as fear got you to work astronomically as far as how much effort and all you put in. And then, when I got to the end of the school and he said that to me, I decided, “Gee, maybe I could do this and I’ll get myself ready and prepared for college and what do I have to do that.” I spent a lot of the time in the military the next 3 and half years working towards getting myself ready. And then, I took the same kind of techniques learning. By this time I had studied how to study, how to prepare, how to, you know, things you’re supposed to do, and I just did exactly what was supposed to be done when I went back to college, etc.

**Joe:** *So, did that confidence factor then sustain or how did that transfer into your professional life?*

**Dr. O’Grady:** Well, actually, I still didn’t have the confidence. Everything that I was thinking of doing, the confidence was in not my ability but rather that I had learned some of the techniques, and I knew that I could push myself. But, all of it was geared on the confidence of I’m learning how to do it better, how to do it faster and how to push myself to unreasonable, what most people would consider unreasonable lengths. What actually changed my confidence was I went through and, at Hofstra university, I did extremely well. I was offered the Danforth Rotary, and Rhodes Fellowship nominations got one of them. As a student, I was one of the 2 faculty representatives to a Board of Trustees. I was on the committee to, just like the new President, etc. There are a whole bunch of things I did there, as well as my grades and got admitted to the University of California Berkeley for the Ph.D. program in Mathematical and Statistical Economics. That’s a huge jump. It’s kind of like going from high school to the NFL.

There again, I had to compete because everybody else was coming in. They had been at Harvard, MIT, Yale, Princeton, Cornell, Berkeley and Stanford and me, Hofstra University,

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who had never even exposed to a graduate course, let alone they all had sat in or taken it, again, pushing myself. It wasn't 'til the third year, Gerard Debreu, a Nobel Prize winner, was walking back from a coffee room alongside me, we're chatting, and he's urging and asking me to do a dissertation under him. Normally, you run around begging for this. Well, instead of, sorry, I can't help but laugh at this point, instead of just saying "Wow, thank you. I'd love to." I was arguing with him. I was telling him I'm not good enough, and he's saying "Yes, you are. I had you last year." I'm saying "Well, no, I did well in your class 'cause you're a good teacher, not that I'm good."

It wasn't until the next morning. I woke up, maybe because I was relaxed or something, all of a sudden it dawned me, "Hey, maybe I'm not so bad." That's where I started developing the confidence and my ability versus just the pushing, but it was that combination of things that taught me so much about breakthrough success 'cause I had many breakthroughs along the way.

**Joe:** *Is confidence something that you gain and always have or do you need that constant reinforcement to maintain your confidence?*

**Dr. O'Grady:** Continuous success, of course, maintains it. Realizing that there are things that you're not going to do well or that you're going to miss out on but it's the way you approach them, and that's part of the process there that I explained in the book.

Here's a very simplified example but it's one I've used on a couple of occasions. I can have this great lawn around my house and what I do is I don't bother to spend much time on it at all and hear all these other people spend a lot of time, a tremendous amount of effort and their lawns are not good. What happens is they never get to anything until they're ready to "tackle the lawn" and they take their entire weekend. They've lost a weekend.

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What I have is that basically there's, almost every single task that's involved, like I need to put down lime, or I need to put down moss killer, or I need to mow the front or mow the back, notice I split those into two, I look at those as all separate different distinct tasks. If I run outside and just trim the tree or put down the moss killer, I've completed something. In a sense, that's success.

All of these things can be done in spare time and spare moments. If you're doing something, like you're tackling, you're learning a programming language, if you try to "I'm going to learn the language" rather than you're learning, you're looking at it, or you're breaking it down into pieces, you have repeated successes and the things that you fail at, you get a chance to do them again tomorrow. It's kind of like a game. Life itself is a game. If you treat it that way, you're a lot better off.

**Joe:** *I'm sitting here smiling, okay, as I'm listening to you because the Kanban people out there in the Lean software development, where we manage projects with Kanban, we talk about, it's not about what you start, it's about what you finish and breaking things into finishable task is what project management should be all about not what you start. And, that's sort of what you're saying right there.*

**Dr. O'Grady:** A lot of what I've done I've learned from, I always say and I always preach that you learn from everybody and everything. I actually lived in Japan for 2 and a half years. I speak Japanese. I used to live, really think and dream in Japanese, and I was actually offered the position to head Volkswagen of Japan because of my understanding of their system, culture, etc. So, I very much know that, and I certainly have integrated, but when I integrated, I didn't know it was Kanban. I didn't know some of the terms and things like that. I was, there was, it's a matter, much of that is a matter of their culture rather

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than just the manufacturing system.

**Joe:** *There, you talked about life changing events. Are these events something that we should strive to recognize or do we have to make them happen ourselves?*

**Dr. O'Grady:** Well, in general, we have to make them happen. Let's think in terms of, since you've read the book, the idea of the comfort zone and one of the things that I don't like in what a lot of people talk about is they talk about pushing the envelope. If you continually try to push the envelope which is the edge of the comfort zone, by the time you'd die maybe, you'll have gotten some place. What you really need to do is make the effort to literally jump outside and do things that you haven't done before. You may have to do that and protect that environment.

For example, I'll say something that's very controversial, and I'm sure you're going to get a bunch of listeners that'll say, well, that will condemn me for it but everybody that says they want to learn how to speak, they'd say, "Oh, go to Toastmasters." And, I say, "No." Go take a Dale Carnegie course but in a neighborhood a little further away that you know nobody and the reason for that is you'll be willing, and that's actually what happened to me, I went through, as I was graduating from graduate school, from the Ph.D. program, I went on a tour, and there was one place that I went, and I was a shoo-in. They gave me, I mean my professor knew them. They loved him, etc., like this. I was going to get an offer from there anyway. But, I was going to get out of there soon. There were other reasons I wasn't going to accept it, but I won't get to that. What happened was they asked me the simplest of questions. It was so simple. I froze.

I realized afterward; I'm going to have to learn how to speak in front of people 'cause I would shake. I would be nervous in front of anybody making a presentation. And, that's

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what I did. I went to a Dale Carnegie course. I'm sitting there. I'm listening how they're going to give out these awards at the end of each class, and they were mechanical pencils and wrote on their impromptu speaking, most improved, etc., etc. and there were like 7 or 8 different ones. Well, during that class, I had an introduction, I'm listening, I'm thinking, "Gee, wow." I'm looking at all these other people. They were all outgoing. They were all talking together at each other, and I'm sitting here by myself thinking "Gee, maybe after a few of them get it, towards the end of the course I'll be able to get most improved for the week."

it turns out that what I did as I sat there and I look at them, I said, "I don't know any of these people, none whatsoever. I can do whatever they ask. If they ask me to crawl on the floor like a snake, they didn't, but if they, whatever they ask me to do, I'm going to be the best one that they can possibly imagine. I'm just going to put my whole body and heart and soul into it. I'm never going to see them again." Really, reach out and learn. Well, what happened was I actually one every single thing except most improved and I got most best overall for the entire course and when I gave in my, I gave out my speech at that time, at the end I was supposed to give a speech on, how wonderful the class was and I told them and told them where that came from. It was an amazing experience for me. It really reinforced the idea of how peer pressure in getting outside your comfort zone we are not influenced by the people around you. You're not influenced by your family and friends and people who might think very well of you and may like you, but they also want to protect you, and they don't want to see you take risks, but you've got to do that.

**Joe:** *Change is tough because a lot of times the environment around you doesn't want you to change. I mean your co-workers want you to be the same. Even for organizations, your vendors don't want you to change? To move out of your comfort zone you may need to explore new areas to maybe learn and accelerate that.*

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**Dr. O’Grady:** Exactly, new areas, new people, new friends, and family and that’s where you’ve heard the expression, and there’s a chapter in the book I think it’s referred to as ‘People, family and friends how they can be harmful to you’ and that’s really the case. Even if they mean well, they can be harmful because they’ll restrain your growth. When I was in the military, my roommate, we were good friends, and we did a lot of things together, etc., and I was with his friends more so than he was probably but he was black from Watts right after the riots. We never talked about that, any of the things related to that but, and by the way, he was brilliant. But, what happens at the end of the military? Does he go back? And, if he does go back to his own neighborhood and family, etc., what kind of potential does he have because of that peer pressure, expectations in that environment? We have to break out of our environment.

**Joe:** *Before we get ready to break out of our environment, how important is understanding yourself? In business, in Lean, we always call it creating a current state. Should we do that for ourselves, take inventories?*

**Dr. O’Grady:** Oh yes. Oh yeah, yeah, take inventory and really look at a reflection of ourselves in a variety of different ways. But also, what are your dreams? What do you want? And, where do you want to go? And then, as you’re doing that, you also have to take a look at, as I say, sort of like unrestrained. Don’t think about “Well, yeah, I’d like to do that, but I’m not good at Math.” Anybody can be good at Math. It’s really a mindset more than anything. I’ve talked many, many high school students, etc., through it and a year and a half later they say, “Oh, no, no, I’m really good at Math” and they thought they were horrible at it.

It really is different; it’s not really so much what they can do but rather what people

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project to them that they can't do, which is unfortunate. Know your weaknesses. Everybody's telling everybody to run around and figure out and just work on your strengths, don't worry about your weaknesses. Well, quite frankly, if you can't speak well and that's not speak good folks, that speaks well. Sorry, I couldn't help myself. But, if you can't speak well, if you can't figure out some basic logic, you need to learn some of that stuff. If you don't have good manners, if you don't know how to eat in public, I mean you're out, you see, when was the last time you saw somebody who became an executive that's grasping their fork with a fist. They don't do it. You can't, you know, you have to have certain basic things. That is all. And, maybe you have to write well. You have to be able to do some calculations. You might have to, you might know how to type, but you may need to learn how to do it better. Why, because you need to do it on your computer terminal.

**Joe:** *How does the book coincide with like the idea of setting goals and creating an action plan? Is there a formula laid out in the book like a step by step method?*

**Dr. O'Grady:** Well, I'm working on something related to that but what it does do is it gives you the steps and the ideas and the concepts. For example, as I said before, one chapter I talk about you're setting goals and really unconstrained, 'what do you want to be,' etc. But then, you can't just go from there because, and this was actually started or inspired by somebody asked me at a major event, they said, "Hey, would you speak" and this looks like 10 minutes before they wanted me on stage and I said, "What, on what?" He said, 'Oh, whatever you want.'" They had talked a lot about things like developing your 'why', your vision, etc. I said, "Well, what I want to do is I want to discuss your 'why not.'"

What I mean by this is you have to have burned inside you some ultimate desire to spring out that you're trying to get away from. Ninety-five percent of people have New Year's

resolutions. They never make it to the third week. If a New Year's resolution, which is sort of dumb stuff, it's kind of like 'I want to lose 10 pounds', 'I want to eat better', 'I want to exercise regularly', if they can't do that do that for 3 weeks, how are they going to make a life-changing goal? So, what you need to do is you need to be really pushing yourself and reminding yourself why you're leaving.

What I did when I got back to Hofstra University from the military is I wasn't in a great neighborhood but not a bad neighborhood either. And, the neighborhood next to me was a little bit worse but, well, you know, the houses were nicely kept. The grass was all nice and stuff like this. Nice neighborhoods but I purposely going home would drive those neighborhoods for the purpose of reminding myself why I wanted to get away. They were all in a working environment, 2 weeks vacation a year but not making enough to go anyplace really on that vacation. Most of their vacations would be having a barbecue a couple weeks in the backyard or maybe they'd go down to the beach once or twice. That would be their vacation. That was a constant reminder to me what I was pushing myself towards because otherwise, I was going to end up and stay there. That's motivation. In a sense, I am using a little bit of fear, actually a lot of fear to get myself to say "Okay, I'm really going to push myself." Just like back in language school, pushing myself knowing I didn't want to go across the street and learn Advanced Infantry and go off to war.

**Joe:** *What's the most important take away from The Mechanics for Breakthrough Success? Maybe answer is the book for the average Joe or do I need to be striving to have great success?*

**Dr. O'Grady:** It truly is for everyone. Actually, at some place towards the end of the book, I point out the thing that 'the road to success or the ride to success is like you're on a train through life'. And, like everything, there will be an end point in time, and you can

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decide at any point to take a break and to stop, get off the train and watch the birds and do whatever else you want to do and then get back at a later time. But, if you get on at a later time, you probably will not get as far, and you probably will arrive a lot later. So, you've got to make those decisions. But, the definition of success for each person is different. Your definition of success and mine is, and I can't tell you, this is the economist in me; I can't tell you what your success should be.

I would sit very often next to some young guy that was a ski instructor on ski patrol on a lift, and he would be telling me what he did and this, you know, this was what his job was in the winter and the summer, he either went to South America and skied or he was a scuba instructor. Well, that's great success for him. But, when he gets older, he's not going to have the things I have. At the same time, I will never have his memories. Why, because once I'm too old, I can't really ski the way he does. I can't live the way he's able to. So, I'll never be able to have his memories. He's got to be able to treasure those and be happy with them later on because that's what he's going to have and not have jealousy about somebody who has more things, stuff or a better lifestyle because they gave up their initial investment in their life at the early on. Whether you want to be that, whether you want to be an athlete, it doesn't matter.

Actually, my editor used the book to help his twin sons as they were starting college. It really is, in a sense, for everybody and I've had some people that are executives in their 50s turn around and be very happy with some of the ideas and thoughts in it. It really isn't a path to a particular thing but rather to scope out and get you where you want to go but you choose it. If you do the assessment early on, which is what I refer to as the first section, and the next section is action, and you could really take 5 or 6 of those chapters and just implement those and many of those can be applied to anything. There's one on copying well which basically is find your mentor and copy exactly what they're doing, and I

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explained that.

It's very much in Japanese terms, which you'd appreciate because that's what the Japanese did. That's what they did when they went to decide they were going to go into electronics. They copied the stereos, etc. in Germany. And then, they copied watches in Switzerland, and they got speakers, etc., they got cars from where they studied in America and then also Europe. They did all of these things. And cameras, again, that was Germany. They copied exactly what it was and only after they perfected what was done by somebody else. Then, they made their adaptations. What I say and actually I've said it a few times is master what the master has already done.

**Joe:** *As I'm listening here, I am thinking, you know, it's just not a book for a person for breakthrough success. I can pull, I can use some of the same things that I learned at an organization, at a team, at a department level within a business.*

**Dr. O'Grady:** Right, exactly. I just drew on a lot of things. It was a lot of fun. I'm very, very pleased with both the book but also the acceptance of it. I mean I was thrilled when my editor told me what he was using it for while he was editing.

**Joe:** *What did he use?*

**Dr. O'Grady:** A combination of things to get his 2 twin sons motivated. But, he was having them set up their thing but also trying to get them to develop some basic fear. And then, also he was looking at a combination of the friendships. There was 5 friends sort of thing; that's where your family and friends can be harmful and then, also, the copying because they were going into some areas that they really needed to master some things and not put their own spin on it. But, think of it this way, I very often have people say to

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me when I say this, I say, "Well, oh, but I like to put my spin on things." I say, "Listen, let's say, now I'm not a golfer, but let's say you're a golfer, and I know names, Spieth and McIlroy, and they're 2 people that are at the top, from what I understand. If you could duplicate exactly the way they perform, why would you put your own spin on it? That's just dumb.

**Joe:** *I think at least why people maybe look at Toyota and in the Lean world that if I could emulate Toyota but they do know that they have to make it their own is just one part of success, correct?*

**Dr. O'Grady:** It is and it isn't in some cases. They can emulate Toyota to most of the extent. There are certain things, like for example, Japanese management. People tend to think, "Well, you can't really do it the same way as you do in Japan." Well, they have a misunderstanding of what happens in Japan. They think that they, they think they have consensus in Japan. They don't really. They may go around and, you know, around the table and everybody's deciding, making recommendations and the boss speaks, and everybody says "Yes, that's a great idea. Let's do it that way." because the Japanese are a very hierarchal society.

There are things that they can do because a lot of those similar traits are actually in the United States as well. Although, becoming a little bit less right now with some of the younger workers. But, you can go around and ask people all the opinions, etc. You may have a decision that maybe for legal reasons or whatever that you are going to have to make and you know it's not going to go over well. Well, what do you do? You can turn around and give the mandate and then try to deal with the consequences with employees and customers or suppliers, etc. Or, you can go around and get them, all their input and opinions, letting them know as much as you can about the circumstances without telling

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them, "I have to make this decision no matter what you say." And then, when it's all over, thank them all for their input and tell them, "I don't know who it was, which one or all of you but there are so many of these thoughts and opinions helped us formulate this and you can probably, many of you can probably hear in these your own ideas." And then state it, "You have just gotten buy in." Even though, you knew from ahead of time what you were going to say.

**Joe:** *I encourage people to talk a look at The Mechanics for Breakthrough Success. What's upcoming for you Dr. O'Grady?*

**Dr. O'Grady:** Actually, a couple of things, one of which is I have videos that are about to come out very shortly. I'm going to wait 'til I have a few more set, and then I'm going to start coming out with them. I want to come out with them on a regular basis, just 2-minute videos to give thoughts, ideas, rants, etc. that I think are useful and important. Many of them coming from the basis of the book and other things like that but also things that I see every day. Then, of course, I have my podcast Life Unsettled, lifeunsettled.com. The podcast is doing extremely well. And, that is really geared towards the idea that thinks in terms of all the controversy and all the turmoil that's going on in life today, I'm working hard on that.

What happens is, now let's say somebody's 50 years of age, it applies to people at a twenty somewhat years, but when you're 50 years of age, with us living 90 plus, you have more life ahead of you than your entire adult life up to now. But, when you think about that because people are normally thinking at 50, "Oh, what am I going to do when I retire?" Wait a minute; you have 40 plus years. You've only been working for 32, and maybe if you had college, you've only been working for 25. So, it's a huge, huge potential that you have and we all change our careers every so often, create complete careers.

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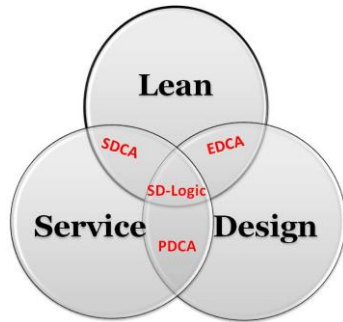
People change between 3 and 7 times during their lifetime.

You certainly can, and you can change whatever you want to do, you can change in the next 5 to 10 years to a completely new thing, and that's part of the concept and the idea behind getting people to think through with the breakthrough, Mechanics for Breakthrough Success. I have my Mastermind and Coaching Program. My Mastermind group is going to be launched in September. That's to work closely with a couple of small groups of people who are trying to develop their own environment businesses or business if they already have a business, and they're looking in a sense for much greater profits, growth, etc. That'll be a different group than people who are trying to do a startup.

**Joe** : *What's the best way for readers to get in touch with you for advice?*

**Dr. O'Grady** : The easiest way is, well, first, I'm very reachable through my website, contact forum on my website, either [ThomasOGradyPhD.com](http://ThomasOGradyPhD.com) or [lifeunsettled.com](http://lifeunsettled.com).

**Joe** : *Well, I would like to thank you very much. The Mechanics for Breakthrough Success was a hit with me. I appreciate your time, Dr. O'Grady. And, this podcast will be available on the Business901 iTunes store and the Business901 website. So, thanks everyone for listening.*



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