

# What's Your Best and Highest Use?: An Interview with TEC Speaker Andy Birol

For many CEOs and business owners, focus represents the biggest obstacle to growing their companies.

Not a lack of focus, but the tendency to focus on the wrong things.

In the following interview, TEC speaker [Andy Birol](#) talks about his copyrighted process -- which he calls Best and Highest Use-- for focusing with laser precision on the key elements that drive entrepreneurial success.

**MyTEC:** What do you mean by "best and highest use," and why should business owners and CEOs know about it?

**Birol:** Best and Highest Use-- (BHU) is when a business owner and his or her company are focused on what they are good at doing, what they like doing, and what the market has valued them for doing. Finding the overlap between these three elements is critical because without it, companies tend to lose focus on what their customers and the market truly value.

**MyTEC:** How so?

**Birol:** Conventional marketing (i.e., business school and large corporation) wisdom says that you should focus on what the marketplace wants and then evolve your company in order to meet it. But in entrepreneurial companies, so much of the character and personality of the business is unique to and is a function of the owner or CEO. As a result, many business owners fail to take into account all that is special about themselves and their companies, what they like doing every day and what the marketplace values them for doing.

BHU serves as a focal point and rallying cry, not just to determine what you want to do in the marketplace, but what you as a company want to fortify and reinforce. In entrepreneurial companies, the owner/CEO should focus on his or her best and highest use and not waste time focusing on everything else. This means that when you focus on BHU, you do not focus on your competition nearly as much. Why? Because for most small companies, competition is irrelevant. What's relevant is being critically focused on pointing your best and highest use at meeting your customer's needs.

**MyTEC:** That seems to contradict what many experts say about studying the competition.

**Birol:** Maybe so, but how many small businesses enjoy a truly meaningful share of the demand in their markets? The reality is that most small businesses have between 100 and 500 customers that really matter. In most cases, that represents a very small fraction of the actual demand for product in the market. Why worry about your competitors when you can have a lot more impact by focusing on being relevant to your customers' needs and enjoying as much share of their wallets as possible? And if your business sells a higher-ticket item or service, you probably only need about 40 new customers a year. Don't waste your time worrying about who is getting the other 40,000 customers in your market. Instead, focus on the 40 you need.

**MyTEC:** How do you go about figuring out your BHU?

**Biol:** By taking a hard look at everything that you like doing, what you're good at doing and what the marketplace has valued you for doing and finding the point where they overlap and intersect. The best way to do that is to have an outside third party look at these things for you.

**MyTEC:** Why is that?

**Biol:** Because people inside the company, including those at the top, can't see the forest for the trees. If you ask any company what they sell and then interview their customers to ask what they buy, it's never the same thing. Most companies *think* they have a good grasp on what their customers are buying. But the reality is that when you ask that question of customers, 99 out of 100 times they will give you a different answer or express it in a different way. In order to determine BHU, you have to reconcile what the company does best with what the target market identifies as their pains and opportunities.

**MyTEC:** Isn't that what the marketing function is supposed to do?

**Biol:** Yes, and to some extent it does. But when it comes to determining BHU, you can't get an objective point of view because sales and marketing people are inherently biased. Salespeople always see things through the lens of their role in the distribution channel. If only the product, pricing or promotion were different, then they could sell more. Similarly, the marketing department always looks at things from the standpoint of features and function. If only the product had this feature or that function, then they could distribute it at a given price. When you take into account that in many entrepreneurial companies the owner/CEO is also the chief sales person, it makes it impossible to get an objective view of the situation.

**MyTEC:** What happens when you rely on a flawed internal perspective?

**Biol:** Usually, companies end up overestimating and overemphasizing things they are proud of but the market doesn't value. For example, take the company that proudly proclaims they are "family owned for 50 years." If you go to buy a new car from a dealership, do you really care if that dealership has been family owned for 50 years? Of course not. You buy the car because it provides the form, function and perception that you want to convey, which has nothing to do with how long the family has owned the dealership.

So from the company's perspective, it's very difficult to be objective as an insider about what you think you do well. At the same time, don't expect your customers to tell you the truth either. In general, they will say that you're OK because they like you. Or, they're so upset with you that they're already checking out and you will never know why they left. That's why it's so essential to have that unbiased, objective, third-party point of view.

**MyTEC:** Can you give us a couple of examples of BHU?

**Biol:** Certainly. One of my clients runs an advertising and marketing firm. We identified their best and highest use as not just providing media and PR services, but teaching their clients how to do it themselves. Their BHU involves not just giving people fish, so to speak, but teaching clients how to fish.

Another client recently made a beautiful transition into a company that provides a wide range of services. Based on the knowledge they developed around the molded rubber production process, they went from focusing solely on manufacturing rubber to providing all the services around creating molded rubber products. They opened a plant in China and are providing project management, design and engineering services beyond simply producing the product.

**MyTEC:** What tends to get in the way of implementing BHU?

**Biol:** Too often, companies focus on the customers they like, not the ones that pay them the most. Or, they confuse what the owner is comfortable doing with what the organization is evolving into. They take their eye off their customer so that their BHU no longer overlaps with what the market values.

**MyTEC:** Tell us more about that.

**Biroi:** As companies grow and evolve, their BHU begins to migrate away from the changing needs of the market. Or, what the CEO likes to do or is good at no longer aligns with what the company needs him or her to do. This goes back to the importance of having that objective third party, someone who can reconcile and return the company's BHU to the point where it is consistent with their target market and the pain and opportunity resolved.

**MyTEC:** So a BHU can change over time?

**Biroi:** Absolutely. In fact, when the market changes and the company's BHU doesn't, you end up with massive failure. General Motors represents a perfect example of a company that has lost it. They don't have the cost structure, design or customer loyalty the market values, so they're desperately attempting to fortify their decaying BHU by cutting price. They're practically giving their cars away, which may provide a short-term boost to sales but will not correct their BHU in the long run.

**MyTEC:** What's the one key point business owners should know about BHU?

**Biroi:** Your BHU is bigger than whatever product you sell or service you provide. It's bigger than whatever customer you happen to have at the moment. When you get it right, it becomes a framework and a guiding principle not just for the current health of your company but for the future as well.

*TEC speaker [Andy Biroi](#) will be presenting a workshop at the [International Leaders Conference](#), Oct. 28-30 in Washington, D.C. For more on how to identify your Best and Highest Use, see the article "[Realizing Your Best and Highest Use: Your Key to Success as a Company, Executive or Consultant](#)."*

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