

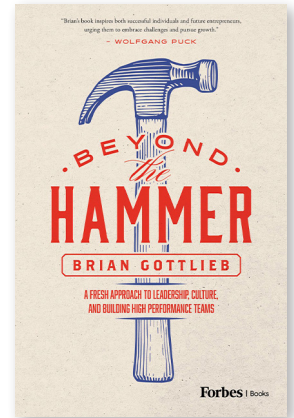


Executive Book Summaries[®]

Beyond the Hammer

A Fresh Approach to Leadership, Culture, and Building High Performance Teams

by **Brian Gottlieb**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

A team that consistently executes at a high level will win in any market, with any product or service, regardless of the competitive landscape. But what are the steps to developing a high-performing organization? How do managers get out of crisis mode so they can effectively lead their team? In *Beyond the Hammer*, these questions (and plenty of others) are answered in two very intentional sections.

First is a familiar picture — a fictional story of George, a business owner struggling with burnt-out employees, high turnover, and frustrated customers. We follow George as he befriends a mentor who shares the five foundational pillars of leadership. In the second part of the book, the narrative shifts from storytelling to strategy, with an actionable blueprint for weaving these five pillars into any business. The book's two-part format has been designed to demonstrate problems and solutions. Written for managers and leaders alike, *Beyond the Hammer* offers a simple, yet powerful approach to creating a team that is aligned and properly positioned to win.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY:

- Explore how leaders can elevate team performance through Five Pillars of Leadership.
- A struggling business owner learns from a mentor how foundational leadership principles can transform his crisis-ridden company culture.
- Practical guidance on building a resilient, purpose-driven team.
- Learn how leadership creates a motivated team culture ready to overcome any challenge.

Part 1: A Business Parable

George, a stressed construction company owner, faces an unending series of challenges: demanding clients, costly project mistakes, and a crumbling company culture that compounds his frustrations.

The story centers around his interactions with a high-maintenance client, Chuck, whose botched kitchen project symbolizes George's mounting troubles. Chuck's relentless criticism and unrealistic demands exacerbate George's anxieties about managing his company, Warren Construction, since taking over after his father's sudden death.

George reflects on his upbringing, shaped by his father's legacy, and the pressures of running a family business. He's frustrated by the lack of accountability in his team, symbolized by his project manager Duncan, who resigns for a competitor.

George's struggles with leadership and finding stability in his company highlight his perceived inadequacy and loneliness in a role he never felt prepared for. These feelings culminate in a crisis of confidence.

Enter Marty, an old friend of Chuck's, who owns a successful contracting company with a strong, supportive culture. Marty sees George's plight and offers mentorship. Through a tour of his own business, True North, Marty shows George how positive, value-based company culture can empower employees and instill accountability, turning around even the most challenging situations.

Marty explains to George that every company has a culture, and that culture is defined as the accumulation of shared values, goals, attitudes, and behaviors - both when everyone is watching and when nobody is looking.

George realizes that leadership and culture-building skills are essential but have been neglected at Warren Construction. He also feels that he is not a natural-born leader, and when he is stressed or upset, he lets his team know that he is stressed and upset through his words and actions.

Over the course of a year, George continues to try to figure out how to improve his now failing business while reaching out to Marty for guidance. At first, George is solely focused on putting out fires, and only wants Marty's advice for specific, tactical issues.

Marty keeps steering George back to think more long-term and look at the big picture. He asks George probing and im-

portant questions to help him get to the root cause of why his business is struggling and why his employees are leaving.

He begins by asking George what the company's mission and vision are, but it's clear that George has not written down - or even thought of - either of these statements.

As they spend time together and throughout their discussions, Marty teaches George about his Five Pillars of Leadership. As Marty explains to George, these pillars can transform a business.

Each pillar is like a support beam, and when all five are implemented, you've built something that can stand up to any storm a business might face. George continues to make mistakes and missteps, but he starts to hear Marty's voice in his head as he's confronted with different issues.

Instead of reacting the way he usually does, he begins to approach his challenges in a different way. He has to make some difficult and uncomfortable decisions, but with the five pillars as his foundation, he understands that these decisions are not only for the betterment of his construction company, but also for the people who work for him.

At the end of this story, George feels better than he ever has about his company. He's keeping everything moving in the right direction thanks to his implementation of the five pillars.

These Five Pillars of Leadership are:

1. Belief is Transferable
2. Leaders Shape Culture Through Purpose and Direction
3. Leaders Are Aware of the Echo of Their Voice
4. Leaders Model Their Business as a Training Organization
5. Managers Need a Checklist.

Lessons Learned:

Accountability and Ownership: Successful projects depend on team members who take responsibility. Building this mindset requires a leadership culture that values ownership and empowerment.

Importance of Culture: A company's values and sense of purpose impact every layer of the business, from employee retention to client satisfaction. Strong culture can prevent issues and help retain talent.

Remember that negative voices are louder than positive ones.

Leadership is Developed, Not Inherited: Effective leadership is built through experience, mentorship, and deliberate practice — factors George lacked in his journey but can now seek to address with Marty's guidance.

Empathy and Belief: Leaders transfer their belief to others. Showing faith in team members' abilities encourages them to rise to challenges and builds a positive, resilient team.

Ultimately, George learns that transforming Warren Construction will require more than project management; it will take a purposeful commitment to culture and leadership. Marty's mentorship and the five pillars of leadership provide George with a transformative perspective on running his business.

As he sees at True North, leadership isn't about managing projects alone — it's about creating a sustainable culture where employees feel valued, empowered, and motivated. Implementing these pillars requires a shift in George's mindset, from simply putting out fires to building a strong foundation based on belief, purpose, accountability, growth, and resilience.

Part II: The Five Pillars

As Marty explained to George in Part I, there are Five Pillars of Leadership:

Belief is Transferable

When you believe in someone, truly and deeply, you light a fire in them. You can believe someone into success. A positive belief about yourself will inspire a limitless mindset.

A negative belief can be lethal. As leaders, we can, and we must, help others recognize their potential and encourage them to journey toward it. The idea that Belief Is Transferable is easy to understand, but not always so easy to implement.

Here are five things to keep in mind when helping a team member who is experiencing FUD (Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt).

Remember that negative voices are louder than positive ones. Leaders can help overcome this by transferring posi-

tive belief to their team frequently, consistently, and authentically. Make your belief evidence based. Try using the concept of "belief-because."

Remember to read the room. Watch your team members for signs of FUD, rather than waiting for them to tell you about it. The whispers of FUD that live in people's heads can be drowned out by a leader's louder voice positivity.

Belief is Transferable goes beyond title and position. When individuals are not aligned around a shared team purpose, it's easy for negativity and interpersonal conflict to creep in. On the other hand, when team members have a shared purpose and direction, they will feel good about their role and will want their peers to feel good as well.

Try to frame feedback using a center and a sphere. The idea is to raise awareness of areas for improvement so that an individual feels inspired and empowered to grow.

If there are performance gaps that need to be addressed, the goal is not to terminate the person, but to "coach up" and tell them:

1. Why we believe in them.
2. What they need to work on.
3. Why we're confident they can successfully incorporate the feedback they've just received.

Numbers 1 and 3 are the sphere and Number 2 is the center. In other words, the sphere is why you believe that person can improve, and the center is the need for improvement.

Leaders Shape Culture Through Purpose and Direction

Before talking about how to use your mission to shape culture, let's define what culture is. One simple explanation reads: "the attitudes and behaviors of the employees within an organization." Moving on to Mission and Vision statements, a mission statement describes why an organization exists today, and a vision statement looks to the future.

A vision statement should answer the questions "what does

a business want to become?” and “how do you win?” It should be noted that while a mission statement is timeless, the vision statement should be revisited every few years.

A clearly defined mission and vision woven deep into an organization will act like jet fuel for igniting individual and team performance.

There are five ways to shape company culture with purpose and direction.

Start with onboarding. New team members should be exposed to your purpose and direction on their first day.

Create an awards program. Try thinking about a recognition program that goes beyond KPIs. Include categories like “Top Mentor of the Year” or “Coach of the Year.”

Weave the mission into conversations. The idea is to take a small phrase from your mission statement and pepper it into different conversations. This consistent reminder of the mission of the company will make it “sticky” and better understood by employees.

Review team members according to the vision statement. Each department needs its own vision statement. It acts as a North Star for the employee and a valuable tool for the manager. This helps everyone stay focused on their department’s - and the company’s - purpose and direction.

Use cause marketing to develop company culture. Cause marketing aligns a team around serving others and helps your brand. Team members feel inspired when they feel like they are part of a greater purpose of an organization, regardless of their role.

A meaningful mission statement and a well-crafted vision statement serve as the beating heart of a company, embodying its core values and aspirations.

Leaders Are Aware of the Echo of Their Voice

Recent studies have shown that 60% of employees have left a job to get away from a manager. If a leader comes across as stressed or angry, the team will be stressed and angry.

If a leader comes across as if they are steering the ship, and it’s all under control, then the team is going to feel safe - especially in times of turmoil. In front of employees, leaders don’t get to have bad days.

There are many examples of echoes that tear people down. Let’s talk about Echoes that Build.

The echo of staying present.

Whether it’s an informal or random conversation, or a structured performance review, staying present means you’re “all in” during the moment at hand. This shows your team that you value them and creates more authentic human connection, and it also inspires them to do the same.

The echo of being immaculate with your words.

If you make a statement as a leader, it needs to be true, and if you make a promise or a commitment, you need to keep it.

The echo of body language.

Your physical presence is a powerful tool to show you are interested and open to what people have to say.

Leaders who are aware of their echo intentionally stay engaged in the meeting, not just until they understand the information, but until every last person in the room understands it too.

The echo of clarity.

Recognize your echo and make sure you communicate clearly. For example, as a leader if you are kicking around ideas and say something in a meeting like: “We really need to bring social media in-house instead of outsourcing it” - your team might take this as a directive where you only intended it as a starting point for a brainstorm.

A better approach would be to ask “What does everyone think about bringing social media in-house?” Always recognize your own echo and make sure you are being clear in your communication.

The echo of intent.

There are many different types of meetings, and the most productive meetings happen when each person in attendance knows what type of communication to expect ahead of time.

When you have an organization where leaders and managers are aware of their echo and communicate effectively, your culture will be stronger, and your business will be better because of it.

You will not only attract more top talent, but you will retain them, too, because the reverb of your echo will reveal itself in the satisfaction, productivity, and commitment of those on your team.

There's a difference between handing someone an employee manual and modeling your business as a training organization.

Leaders Model Their Business as a Training Organization

There's a difference between handing someone an employee manual and modeling your business as a training organization. Training organizations don't view training as something with a start and end date. Instead, it's a mindset, and the value of training is woven into the fabric of the business. Training organizations are always sharpening their blades.

Zappos is a training organization.

Their philosophy was to succeed by inspiring team members rather than just giving them a paycheck. Customers regularly wrote emails, blogged, and even created videos about Zappos level of service. In 2009 the company was sold to Amazon for \$1.2 billion.

Training organizations document their systems and processes.

Envision a customer's journey through your company from the first touchpoint to the final interaction, How many times is someone engaging with them? What do you want those communications to look like? Each of these touchpoints is an opportunity for friction, and therefore is an opportunity for training. By documenting a vision for every engagement, you will create an impactful learning tool.

Is training structured, or is it organic?

Some organizations have a dedicated trainer where content and cadence are planned and delivered with consistency. Others prefer to empower the team to conduct their own training at the time and place of their choosing. Which is better? Somewhere in between where the organization has both structured training as well as allows for - and encourages - more organic, team member to team member training.

Hire for ETHER.

ETHER stands for Ethical, Trainable, Hungry, Energetic, and Reliable. Candidates with the right balance are the ones you want on your team. But keep in mind that not every role requires the same amount of all these qualities.

A willingness to learn.

There are methods to help identify people who are willing to learn. For example, if you have a role that requires script memorization, you can send the candidates a short script to memorize before the interview. The goal isn't to see who does it perfectly, but rather who puts the effort into it. Those are the best candidates for the role.

Getting training to stick.

A training organization needs to measure the effectiveness of the training, in real time. Daily quizzes during training can help with this, and are beneficial to both the trainee and the trainer.

For the trainee, momentum matters. Small, early wins build confidence, create momentum, and fuel a learning mindset. For the trainer, if the students in the class are doing well on the daily quizzes, then the training is working. If they are struggling, then it's clear there is an issue with the training and the course. This allows the trainer to adjust and improve.

Investing in people.

By modeling your business as a training organization, you are not just teaching a skill set, you are igniting a culture of continuous growth and innovation. More than professional development, it's an authentic commitment to every team member's journey towards recognizing their potential.

Managers Need a Checklist

There's a list of the Top 10 Practices of Top-Performing Managers. This list is:

1. Is an effective coach and mentor.
2. Leads with a team vision statement.
3. Practices empowerment.
4. Communicates effectively.
5. Is KPI focused and accountable.
6. Discusses performance and career development.
7. Keeps a learning mindset.

8. Collaborates with other business units.
9. Embraces continual process improvements.
10. Praises performance publicly.

The role of the manager.

Managers handle key operational tasks such as hiring, promoting, training, rewarding, and when required, terminating team members. A manager's approach to these duties will either cultivate a positive, productive, and engaging team culture, or lead to a demotivated, distrustful, and dysfunctional one. A manager's actions directly influence the culture of the company and the mindset of the team.

Mindset matters.

How we think about things - our mindset - affects how we feel about things. How we think and feel impacts how we act, our behavior. It's crucial to ensure your managers are aware that how they approach their daily responsibilities impacts the mindset of their team, and therefore the overall organization.

Managers influence culture.

The CEO, along with other top executives, shapes the culture of a business by providing clarity of purpose (mission) and business direction (vision). It's the managers, however, who are the custodians of the company's culture. Culture and mindset determine the degree of employee satisfaction, commitment, productivity, engagement, and retention for those you work with. The impact will be reflected in how the business performs.

Difference between leaders and managers.

Managers navigate the day-to-day complexities inside a business, ensuring the systems and processes are being

adhered to, while leaders drive change; change in direction, change in mindset, and change in human behavior. Leaders and managers are usually the same person doing different things at different times.

Levers of influence and levers of control.

Sometimes the goal is to coach, motivate, and inspire team members. The practices that require these skills are called levers of influence. At other times, it's about managing processes and systems. Those practices are levers of control. In management, the blend of influence and control is key. Influence without control can lead to chaos, while control without influence can create a rigid and uninspiring environment. The art of successful coaching, and indeed successful management, lives in finding the right balance between these two very different levers.

Levers of influence drive change by shaping attitudes and behaviors in a positive, nurturing way. Levers of control provide the necessary framework and boundaries within an organization, so both the business and the individual can grow together. The best managers are adept at understanding when to use which lever.

To quote Aristotle, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." As a leader, you get to choose what you want to practice, and what you want to perfect. In doing so, you're also modeling the way for those around you. The five pillars, when practiced, can transform the culture of a business, and the mindset of a team. In this newly transformed business culture, people are no longer put in a box where their contribution isn't valued or appreciated. Instead, team members can thrive in an environment filled with meaning and purpose, surrounded by others who believe in them. And in that world, everyone becomes limitless.



Brian Gottlieb is an inspirational business leader who founded a home services business in 2009—on a plastic folding table with \$3,000. When he sold the businesses twelve years later, the organization had expanded across multiple states, grown to 600 employees, and neared \$1B in lifetime sales. The company was recognized by INC 5000 as one of the fastest-growing companies in America. A Harvard Business School executive education alumnus, Brian is an active angel investor, board member, and keynote speaker who inspires businesses and individuals to reach their utmost potential.

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