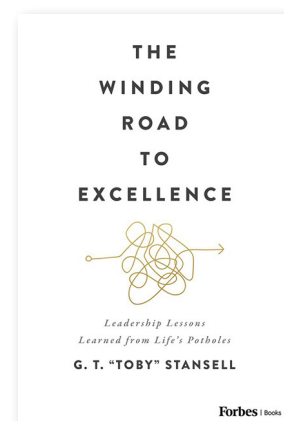


The Winding Road to Excellence

Leadership Lessons Learned from Life's Potholes

by G.T. "Toby" Stansell



Contents

Part 1: Personal and Professional Excellence: People Who Do

Page 2

Part 2: Leadership Excellence: Lead from the Middle

Page 3

Part 3: Organizational Excellence: Culture Trumps Strategy

Page 4

Part 4: Sales Excellence: Customers Don't Want to Be Sold; They Want To Be Served

Page 4

Part 5: Business Excellence: Find Something You Do Well and Perfect It

Page 5

Conclusion: Be Present

Page 5

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Great leaders become the architects of a corporate culture where people at all levels thrive, and organizations achieve consistent success.

By offering a powerful combination of personal experiences and savvy business advice, the book *The Winding Road to Excellence: Leadership Lessons Learned from Life's Potholes* lays out a set of thought-provoking "Mantras for Excellence" that can help you become a truly authentic leader.

Author G.T. "Toby" Stansell uncovers innovative approaches to help leaders address their organization's most pressing issues. Throughout the book, you will uncover valuable insights and actionable steps that can help you spot and capitalize on valuable opportunities, improve financial performance and efficiency, and build a sustainable and positive organizational culture.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to achieve personal and professional excellence as a leader.
- How to become an authentic leader.
- How to hire efficiently and build valuable teams.
- How to build a positive and sustainable organizational culture.

Part 1: Personal and Professional Excellence: People Who Do

Chapter 1: Never Give in to Fear

Never say no to an opportunity because you're afraid. Once you start overcoming your fears, your confidence grows, but not in some overt, "Look at me!" center-of-the-attention fashion. Real confidence is not attention-grabbing. Two of the most important mantras that drive quiet leadership capable of helping organizations and people achieve extraordinary results include:

"Stop trying to draw attention and start paying attention"
"Humility is more important than visibility"

Chapter 2: Making the Most of What You Have

All of us possess about the same number of assets and liabilities. Some people's assets and liabilities are just more noticeable than others. We're always tempted to believe that other people have it better than we do. But we don't have a clue what other people are facing or have faced. Comparing yourself to others is either going to boost your ego or it's going to make you jealous. Neither one is a healthy or endearing trait. What's important to remember is it's okay to be competitive, but don't be comparative.

Chapter 3: It's Either Results or Excuses

There's an old saying: it's either results or excuses. Never allow another person's failure to be an excuse for your own. We can always find reasons for failure or poor performance. To avoid excuses, you have to build a culture that balances empowerment and accountability. A leader is free to make any decision within their span of control, body of knowledge, or area of expertise, as long as the decision doesn't unnecessarily put our *company*, our *culture*, an important *customer*, a significant *contract*, your *character*, or your *confidence* at risk. These are what I refer to as the six Cs.

Chapter 4: People Who Do Simply Believe They Can

The distance between informed and ignorant is really short. Make sure you don't travel too far. Ignorance is nothing more than not knowing. The cure for any state of ignorance starts with a simple commitment to learn things. The biggest difference between people who do and people who don't is that people who do simply believe they can. Leaders not only have an insatiable need to learn things, but the best of them also create practical and innovative ways to move

people and businesses in entirely new directions, even when it is uncomfortable.

Chapter 5: The Test of Personal and Professional Maturity

Overcoming fear and becoming a doer take a certain amount of maturity. Once you begin to believe in yourself, you become intrinsically motivated. When you are unafraid of failure, you have a passion for taking on challenges that you would have previously sidestepped, many of which offer a path to measurable professional and personal success.

Chapter 6: Being Right is Overrated

Being right is overrated. Being together is more important than being right. Good leaders only have to be right 51% of the time. The truth is, it doesn't matter whether you're right or someone else is right. The goal should be to get what you're doing right. You can do the "right" thing in the wrong way or at the wrong time and it can be worse than doing nothing at all. Objectives shift. Priorities change. And unexpected challenges arise. Ultimately, what is "right" is the thing that produces tangible results – in the right way.

Chapter 7: Humility is More Important than Visibility

When you see genuine humility in a leader firsthand, it can be life changing. When I was a teenager, my Dad used to tell me, "Toby, you are competitive and assertive by nature, which means you're gonna do some dumb things you wish you hadn't done. All I ask is that you own it when you do." One of the most important five-word sentences you will ever learn is "Let's do it your way." Its corresponding partner five-word sentence is "It's my fault. Blame me." This is an essential trait in leaders. If people don't know that you are fallible, then you will never be approachable.

Chapter 8: Your Greatest Weakness May Be an Unprotected Strength

Admitting your weakness is one aspect of humility and humility is largely about self-honesty. Real retrospection allows us to separate ego from our ego strength (the part of us that says, "I can do this no matter how hard it seems"). Remember, your greatest weakness is many times an unprotected or misguided strength.

Chapter 9: Failure Is an Early Indicator Of Impending Success

You rarely learn something new when you experience repeated success. After all, if you achieve success in an endeavor, you will generally execute the same process in the same way the next time you encounter a similar challenge. But when you experience failure, you get the opportunity to discover better ways to execute it. Doubt kills dreams more than failure ever will. So, instead of being afraid of failure, see it as an indicator of impending success.

Chapter 10: Responsible Decision-Making

My observation is that most of us make decisions emotionally and then build a case to support them rationally. We need to instill a business culture that facilitates the opposite, where we intellectualize our decision-making and do so based upon reliable data. However, we should not become robotic in our decisions. You can teach an animal right from wrong, but you can only teach a human wise from unwise. The best leaders make the best decisions. It's that simple. You must be comfortable and confident in your own judgment. Trust your values and your instincts, don't react with emotion, keep the six Cs firmly in mind, and make the decision.

Chapter 11: The Four Cs of Teamwork

The four Cs of teamwork include *Communication*, *Cooperation*, *Collaboration*, and *Coordination*. When any of these elements are missing, the result is a disjointed organization or an inefficient effort. True communication begins when at least two parties speak with each other, not to each other. Cooperation is always about finding a solution that can be accepted by all parties. Through cooperation, we are then able to collaborate, working together to identify who did what best. By coordinating our approaches and building off existing organizational strengths, we can create a multiplier effect that can accelerate the impact on the communities we commit to serve.

Part 2: Leadership Excellence: Lead from the Middle

Chapter 12: Everybody from The Janitor to The King Deserves to Be Treated Well

Every person in the organization plays an important role in fulfilling its purpose, achieving its vision, and accomplishing its mission. Therefore an authentic leader embraces inclusivity and eschews exclusivity. If a team member fails to rise to A-level performance or makes decisions that don't land well, a good leader will pull them aside (alone), and then

discuss the situation diplomatically. Conversely, when team members have delivered excellent work, an authentic leader will acknowledge it openly.

Chapter 13: Authentic Leaders Measure Results, Not Style

Authentic leadership is always preceded by authentic living. Authentic living starts with having integrity, which is simply doing what we say we're going to do. Instead of making false promises, authentic leaders follow through on commitments. Customers want products and services that perform exactly as they expect. Shareholders and owners want measurable results that put dollars in their pockets. The true test of an authentic leader is whether they deliver the desired results on a consistent basis. No matter how charismatic you are as an individual, you can't talk or hype your way to authentic leadership; you must earn it by generating results.

Chapter 14: An Organizational Chart May Give You a Position, But Only People Can Grant You Power

Most of the world's greatest achievements required more than a single individual to get the job done. It took a team. So, while organizational charts may give you a position, only people can grant you power. In business, however, it is not about having a handful of superstars who overshadow everyone else. It is more about making sure:

- People are good at what they do
- People like what they do (when they don't like what they do, they don't do it for long)
- They like doing it together

Good executive leadership creates an environment that is the ideal balance of empowerment and accountability.

Chapter 15: Great Leaders Learn How to Think Beyond

Most businesses, like most people, expend a great deal of time and energy looking backward. They seem constantly to focus on fixing the last problem rather than anticipating the next one. A better term to describe how we should act might be "anticipatory." Being anticipatory – looking ahead or thinking beyond today – is the best way to avoid future negative surprises. Great leaders, and the great teams they lead, think beyond the moment. They anticipate problems and challenges that might arise and prepare for them before they occur.

Chapter 16: The Test of Authentic Leadership

Your legacy of leadership will be defined by how others remember you, because of what they became, did, or achieved as a result of the relationship that you had with them and the positive influence you exerted in their lives. If the culture of the businesses we run encourages our people to strive to be their best, then the business has a chance to run at its best. Whatever job you hold, it must be about the five Fs. A job needs to provide enough *financial* reward and *free* time (the first two Fs) to invest in the three Fs that are genuinely important: your *faith*, *family*, and *friendships*.

Part 3: Organizational Excellence: Culture Trumps Strategy

Chapter 17: Culture = Organizational Personality

Great leaders help construct a positive, productive, and cohesive culture to drive their organization toward optimum performance. The traits they bring to the table include: a culture of service, encouragement, empowerment, accountability, inclusivity, discipline, respect for all levels, rules, and individuals within the organization, and a culture of innovation. To make these traits achievable, we must have the right people performing the right functions in ways that showcase their passions and strengths.

Chapter 18: The Seven Seas (Cs) Of Hiring

If people are key to building a successful organization, how do you hire the right ones? The answer lies in the seven seas (the seven Cs) of hiring: *Competency*, *Character*, *Calling*, *Contribution*, *Commitment*, *Collaborative*, and *Chemistry*.

During the hiring process, a leader must make sure that diversity and chemistry are fully symbiotic when it comes to the assembly and operation of any team. After all, what makes us different should make us stronger, and better.

Chapter 19: Digital Communication and The Demise Of Genuine Dialogue

We may live in a digital world, but we interact and work with humans. No matter how much we may depend on digital technology, our business will still be driven by our people, and that means we must master communicating both humanly and digitally. Learn to match the communication medium with each type of situation you encounter to maximize clarity, knowledge transfer, and productivity while minimizing ambiguity, inefficiency, and hurt feelings.

Chapter 20: Technically Priceless But Practically Worthless

It used to be that the common business model for optimization was PPT: people, process, technology; now, it is PTP: process, technology, people, with process and technology running together virtually concurrently. The technologies we apply, including informational technology, must be measured by their ability to improve operational and financial performance, and that means our people must not only be able to apply them but also to extract the full potential out of the tool or technology being employed. If that's the case, then we may be falling in love with shiny objects that we can't put to work.

Part 4: Sales Excellence: Customers Don't Want to Be Sold; They Want To Be Served

Chapter 21: The Reverse-Negative Selling Model

All good sales approaches contemplate the fact that people love to buy but hate to be sold. That reality has led me to what I label the "Reverse Negative Selling Model." This model involves spending time to identify your problem and then approaching it from the exact opposite way convention tells us we should. Going against convention isn't about being different, but it is about thinking in different patterns. As an authentic leader, don't be afraid to think counterintuitively. Figure out what your unique value proposition is, and always express it in terms that matter to your customers.

Chapter 22: Sales Is A Science, Not A Science Project

Use the NTSB acronym as a first-level filter for qualifying a prospect. NTSB in sales translates to Need + Timing + Sponsorship + Budget. Does the prospect have a legitimate need for a product or service? Is the timing right? Is there sponsorship and support across all influencers and decision-makers? Will the budget prospect's budget support expenditure of the necessary magnitude?

Once your prospect passes the NTSB test, MEDDIC is the next acronym to adhere to. MEDDIC represents a few critical elements of a sales process that are mandatory and that cannot be trivialized. These include Metric, Economic buyer, Decision process, Decision criteria, Identifying pain, and Champion. In short, consistent sales success requires nearly flawless planning and execution. One without the other is useless.

Part 5: Business Excellence: Find Something You Do Well and Perfect It

Chapter 23: Crooked Wire Value

When our value proposition is undifferentiated from our competitors, then our customers will simply extract our straight-arrow and replace it with that of our competitors. But when we provide solutions that are both irreplaceable and drive quality results, it can be almost impossible to get us out. Crooked wire value results from the provision of innovative products and services that are unexpected by the customer and unmatched by the competition. Ask yourself: three years from now, what is it that your market and your clients will be dying to have? Figure that one out and success will soon follow.

Chapter 24: Decision-Making by The Numbers

The three-step process – called the 3-2-1 decision-making model – to help leaders make effective decisions includes:

1. To not take any action or engage in any activity that is illegal, immoral, or unethical.
2. A leader's behavior, both at work and away from work, should reflect and reinforce their brand values and brand culture.
3. To determine which decisions we can make on our own and which ones require additional counsel. Unless the decision has the potential to damage one or more of the six Cs, it comes with a lower risk and must be made. If the risk is significant, it's best to get someone else in the boat before taking the final step.

Chapter 25: Many Times, The Things We Want to do the Least Are the Things We Ought to Do the Most

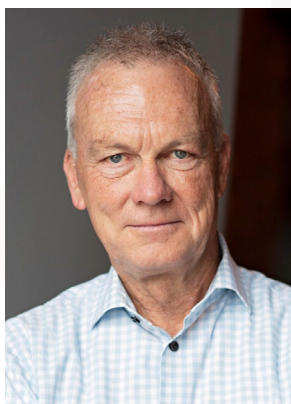
Difficult decisions are not supposed to be easy, and they're certainly not fun. It is easy to drag our feet on those decisions and to tell ourselves that we will deal with it next week. But two mantras come to mind:

1. Never make peace with a weakness
2. When is the best time to fire somebody? The first time you think about it.

So it's best to hit the hard things while your mind is relatively uncluttered and before others begin to make demands on your time that compromise your ability to accomplish the truly important objectives.

Conclusion: Be Present

As leaders, we can achieve excellence by first becoming mindful of who we are and what we expect of others. By being a living model of the principles and values that are at the core of your nature, you will create consistency in your patterns of decision-making and predictability for how you treat others. That, in turn, will expand your sphere of influence. We need more good leaders. Be one.



G.T. "Toby" Stansell is the Chief Executive Officer of Cargo, LLC, a business strategy and marketing consultancy. Prior to joining Cargo, Toby served as a Principal with Cherry Bekaert's Digital Advisory Service Line after leading Acumen I.T., LLC as President and Chief Operating Officer and as president of OOBE, Inc. He previously held senior sales and marketing positions at IBM, Jobscope Corporation, Right Source, Western Data Systems, and Factory Logic.

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