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The Dream Manager

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

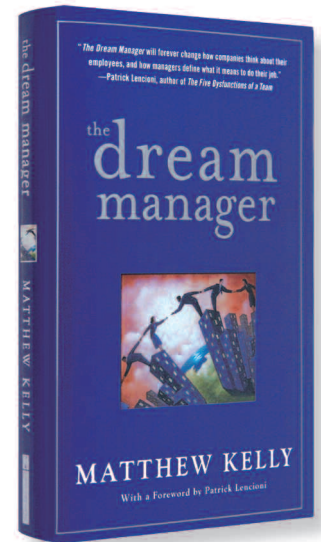
Managing people is difficult. With disengagement and turnover on the rise, many managers are scratching their heads wondering what to do. It's not that we don't dream of being great managers, it's just that we haven't found a practical and efficient way to do it. Until now ...

The fictional company in *The Dream Manager* is grappling with real problems of high turnover and low morale — so the managers begin to investigate what really drives employees. What they discover is that the key to motivation isn't necessarily the promise of a bigger paycheck or title, but rather the fulfillment of crucial personal dreams. They also learn that people at every level need to be offered specific kinds of help and encouragement — or our dreams will forever remain just dreams as we grow dissatisfied with our jobs and lives.

The Dream Manager explores the connection between the dreams we are chasing personally and the way we all engage at work. Taking on the growing problem of employee disengagement, *The Dream Manager* explores the dynamic collaboration that is unleashed when people work together to achieve company objectives and personal dreams.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How a company can become the best version of itself by helping employees become better versions of themselves.
- How to change the way you manage and relate to people.
- How to recognize the dreams of those that you lead.
- How to inspire your people to achieve their visions.
- How to unleash the power of dreams to keep your business going.



by Matthew Kelly

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE DREAM MANAGER

by Matthew Kelly

The author: Matthew Kelly is an internationally acclaimed speaker and the author of *The Rhythm of Life*, *The Seven Levels of Intimacy* and *Perfectly Yourself*. His books have sold more than 1 million copies and have appeared on numerous bestseller lists.

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The Dilemma

The future of your organization and the potential of your employees are intertwined; their destinies are linked.

An organization can only become the best version of itself to the extent that the people who drive that organization are striving to become better versions of themselves. This is universally true whether the organization is a business, school, government, nonprofit or sports team. To the extent that a CEO, an executive team, and a group of managers and employees explore their potential as individuals, so too will an organization explore its potential.

Disengagement

The problem is that the great majority of people in the workplace today are *actively disengaged*. This is the dilemma that modern managers face. To varying extents, people don't feel connected to their work or the people they work with. No single factor is affecting morale, efficiency, productivity, sustainable growth, customer intimacy and profitability more than this disengagement.

If, on average, your employees are 75 percent engaged, disengagement is costing you 25 percent of your payroll every month in productivity alone. The real cost to your business is, of course, much higher when you take into account how disengaged employees negatively affect your customers and every aspect of your business.

The right people are an organization's greatest asset. We may have acknowledged this truth in theory, but we have not allowed it to sufficiently penetrate the way we manage our organizations and, indeed, the way we manage the people who drive them.

It's not that we don't want to engage the people who work with us and for us. In most cases it seems that we simply have not found a practical, efficient and affordable way to do it.

The Dream Manager

The Dream Manager concept provides a revolutionary way of reversing this crippling trend toward disengagement and demonstrates how organizations large and small can actively engage their people once again, thus creating a competitive advantage of monumental proportions.

BusinessWeek reports that, over the next 10 years, 21 percent of top management and 24 percent of all management jobs across all functions, regions and industries will become vacant. Add to this trend an aging population, a shrinking work force and a growing intolerance for the undocumented worker population that provides much of the unskilled labor in the United States today, and you have a talent and labor crisis of enormous consequences across all disciplines — from the highly skilled to the completely unskilled.

But it is not enough simply to hire the right people. The ability to attract, engage and retain talent will be the number one strategic objective of every successful modern leader and organization.

Purpose

A company's purpose is to become the best version of itself.

What is an employee's purpose? Most would say, "to help the company achieve its purpose," but they would be wrong. That is certainly part of an employee's role, but an employee's primary purpose is to become the best version of him- or herself.



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Contrary to unwritten management theory and popular practice, people do not exist for the company. The company exists for people. When a company forgets that it exists to serve its customers, it quickly goes out of business. Our employees are our first and most influential customers.

Finding a way to create an environment that helps employees become the best version of themselves, while at the same time moving the company toward the best version of itself, may seem impossible to many; to others, these purposes may seem diametrically opposed; but in reality, they are astoundingly complementary.

This is the story of how one leader and his executive team set out to transform a business by actively engaging a disengaged work force. ●

PART ONE: DESPERATION

Something was wrong and Simon Roberts knew it. Meandering slowly through traffic on another cloudy morning, he started wondering where life was going, and his thoughts quickly wandered to his job. It seemed so transactional now, and that left him feeling flat and unmotivated. Simon wasn't a lazy person; he loved a good challenge. But lately he'd found himself disengaging from his work, and that bothered him. Something needed to change — he just wasn't sure what it was, or where to start.

He had joined Admiral Janitorial Services four years earlier because solving problems and working with people were the two things Simon was passionate about.

His business card read "General Manager" but as Simon reflected on the past four years, it seemed he had spent most of his time dealing with recruiting issues. "Lead Recruiter" seemed more accurate since, truth be told, 75 percent of his time was spent dealing with issues directly related to turnover.

Admiral Janitorial Services had an annual turnover rate of 400 percent, just above the industry average. Needless to say, team spirit and employee morale were low.

How Much Is Turnover Costing Us?

"It's costing me a fortune," Greg said as he charged through the door. He never had learned to knock, but then again, he owns the company.

Greg founded Admiral when he was just 17 and, over the past 25 years, he has grown the business from a one-man operation to a small army of around 400 employees.

"What's costing you a fortune?" Simon volleyed, though he knew exactly what Greg was talking about.

"Turnover!" Greg said, visibly exasperated.

Coaches and CEOs

A football coach's number one priority is to attract, develop, nurture, organize and motivate the franchise's talent. Coaches and team owners are intimately aware that the future success of their organization depends on the talent they attract, engage and retain.

Finding and nurturing talent is their number one priority. Why should the priorities of a CEO or manager be any different?

"It's hard to know how much this is costing us," Simon said. "We are having to hire for some positions three times a quarter. And it's not just recruitment costs. Turnover affects morale, efficiency and customer relationships. I've been telling you for 12 months that it's a big problem."

Greg nodded. "I know, I know. It's just that now we're starting to lose clients over it. I had a call from Charlie down at P&G today, telling me we're getting a warning letter putting us on a 90-day probationary period. He says our work has been sloppy and they've noticed a constant flow of new faces, and they feel like things are falling between the cracks."

"I wish a pay raise would make them stay, but I'm not sure," Simon replied. "Let's find out what's causing the turnover. Let's find out why they're leaving."

"How will we find that out? Greg asked.

"We'll ask them," said Simon.

Ask Your Employees

The next morning, Simon and Greg met at First Watch to talk more about their turnover problem. It was a relaxed environment.

"So you're just going to go around and ask them why people are leaving?" inquired Greg, half serious and half sarcastic.

Simon replied, "The employees know things about our business that we don't. We should do a survey and ask them why they think so many people come and go. You'll be amazed at what they'll tell us. Nobody knows the business like those who work in the trenches of it every single day. Ask your employees. They know more than you think."

The Initiative

The number one reason people didn't stay at Admiral: transportation.

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“They don’t live near where they work. Many don’t have cars or even a driver’s license, and they’re often working at hours when public transportation is either not available or just too dangerous. Would you want to stand around waiting for a bus in some parts of town?” Simon explained to a disbelieving Greg.

“OK, so what do we do now?” Greg asked.

Simon explained, “My team has thrown around a few ideas, including coordinating a carpooling system, but it’s too unpredictable. What we need to do is put together a shuttle system to bus our employees from their neighborhoods to the job sites.”

“All right,” Greg agreed reluctantly, “but if you’re wrong ...”

Simon cut him off. “No more threats, Greg, because the truth is, I’m miserable the way things are. If we can’t get at this turnover issue, you won’t have to fire me — I’ll quit.”

The following week, the shuttle bus system was announced. Three weeks later, it was fully operational. During the day, Admiral would bus employees to and from certain locations in four key neighborhoods, and at night they would bus them to and from their homes.

The results were almost immediate.

One Year Later

Over the next year, employee turnover fell from around 400 percent to 224 percent. Real progress had been made. A record profit had been posted, and Simon and Greg both knew that the reduced turnover was the biggest contributing factor. And the other factors were all derivatives of having addressed the turnover crisis.

It was also interesting to note that sick days were down 31 percent from the previous year and lateness had been reduced by 65 percent.

Simon left a report outlining these results on Greg’s desk, and left the office.

The next morning, Greg came into Simon’s office with a bonus.

“I want you to know I doubted you at every turn, but the survey and the shuttle bus ideas were great. I actually see the reduced stress among people. It’s more enjoyable for me to come to work and, even though at times I can be rude and impatient, I want you to know that I am grateful.”

Simon could barely believe his ears.

“I need you to do another survey!” Greg barked.

Simon just about fell off his chair. “You hate my surveys.”

“I know. I know. But that was in the past. I hated

your surveys when they were costing me money. Now they’re making me money. Find out what’s next on the list,” Greg said.

“What list?” Simon asked, toying with him a little.

“The ‘Why people leave Admiral’ list!” Greg insisted. “And hire another assistant. You’re going to need one. We are going to get to the bottom of this turnover thing and build an extraordinary team.” ●

PART TWO: THE INITIATIVE

Simon was determined not to lose the momentum. He called an executive meeting to ask the question ... again. “Why do so many people leave Admiral?”

Most just shrugged their shoulders and said, “If we could pay them more, they would stay.”

Sandra Anderson was Simon’s new assistant and he had asked her to sit in on the meeting with him. Not easily intimidated, she spoke up, saying, “The problem is, they don’t see any future in it. It could be a dead-end job, or we could make it a stepping-stone.”

Everyone in the room knew that. It was the obvious answer. But the leadership team had become immune to it. It had been overlooked because they believed they couldn’t change it.

“These people all have dreams,” Sandra explained. “We need to find a way to connect their job today with their dreams for tomorrow. I’ve been studying the turnover reports all week, and it seems that, on average, we keep an employee for about six months. A year ago, the average was three months. Imagine if we could increase that to three years. That alone would radically transform our whole business model.”

“She’s right,” interjected Simon. “I think we can help our employees build a bridge between their NOW and a better FUTURE. Dreams are the bridge. We need to convince them that this is not a dead-end job, and the only way to do that is to demonstrate that working here can help them get where they want to go.”

Dreams Drive Us

Nothing was resolved when the meeting came to an end. Simon trudged back to his office a little deflated. The past year had been filled with great progress, and that had been both fulfilling and exciting. But he knew he was up against another brick wall. This time it wasn’t with Greg — it was with the team.

“What are you thinking?” Greg asked, poking his head into Simon’s office. He sat down and Simon began to speak.

“If you ask people to talk about their jobs, they usual-

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ly reply with a rote answer or a sales pitch they've given a thousand times before, unless they are really doing something that they're passionate about. But if you ask people to talk about their dreams, in most cases you'll see a remarkable increase in their passion and energy."

"So what are you saying?" Greg asked.

"I think Sandra is on to something here. Dreams drive us! We have to find a way to make a connection between people's daily work and their dreams," Simon explained.

Making the Connection

The following week, with Sandra's help, Simon put together another survey.

They called it the "Dream Survey." It was specifically designed to develop an understanding of the employees and their dreams.

"We've asked them about our business, and we've asked them why they think people leave Admiral. Now we need to know what drives our employees," Simon explained to Greg and the rest of Admiral's leadership.

The Dream Survey had only one question: "What are your dreams?"

Some employees wanted to go to college, others wanted their children to go to college. Some wanted a car, others a vacation. What was the most common dream among the employee responses?

Home ownership. More than 60 percent of those who turned in their surveys included the desire to own a home as one of their dreams.

Seeking a Dream Manager

"We need a Dream Manager!" Simon announced.

"Who or what is that?" Greg asked, in a tone that wavered between curiosity and sarcasm.

"A Dream Manager is someone who will help our employees achieve their dreams," explained Simon. "The Dream Manager will meet with employees, discuss their dreams and help them put together a plan to achieve their dreams. Once a month, they can meet with the Dream Manager, assess their progress and discuss next steps. As for finding one, I'm thinking it should be a cross between a life coach and a financial adviser, because most dreams involve a financial component.

"We have to give our employees an opportunity to progress and advance," Simon continued. "When people feel they are progressing, they are much less likely to start looking around for another job. It is when they don't feel that they are advancing that they start to get restless."

"So will the Dream Manager offer career counseling?" Greg asked.

"Once every six months, an employee will have the option to invite his or her supervisor to their monthly Dream Session. During that session, the Dream Manager, the employee and his or her supervisor can discuss a vision for the employee's future — but particularly, what the next career step is and how long it will take to achieve that next step," Simon explained. "They will stay because, for many of them, this will be the first time anyone has ever really sat with them and helped them map out a future. The whole point is that, because of the Dream Manager, the job is no longer dead-end. It becomes a stepping-stone. The Dream Manager Initiative will create a connection between the fulfillment of their dreams and their work."

The Arrival

The following week, Simon interviewed 27 people for the position. Sandra had placed advertisements in all the local job-hunting outlets and the applications had been flowing in.

Sean Evans was the candidate that Simon and Sandra finally agreed to present to Greg as their number one choice. He had a degree in business, had been working as a financial adviser for nine years, had a history of drive and excellence, and his community involvement suggested he was interested in helping people.

Greg took Sean to lunch after a brief get-together with Simon and Sandra. When he returned, Greg announced that he agreed that Sean was the man for the job.

The House

Simon had known from the beginning that it was important to help some employees achieve some big dreams. He knew some early success stories were pivotal to the overall success of the program, because he knew the quicker some dreams were accomplished, the more Admiral's employees would get involved in the Dream Manager Program.

With that in mind, Sean had focused on helping Rita, an Admiral employee, find and buy a house. He was with her at every step in the process, and now it was going to become a reality. In the first few months, there had been several dreams accomplished, but this would be the first big dream to be realized.

Sean had arranged to go with Rita for the closing at the bank, and then Simon and Sandra had joined them to take Rita to her new home. As they drove into the driveway, Sean said, "Well, now it's yours!"

Rita was next to him in the front seat, beaming.

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One hundred and thirty-two days after her first meeting with the Dream Manager, Rita was in her new home. With no money down and a monthly payment just slightly higher than her rent, Rita moved into the first home her family had ever owned. Rita became a living, breathing advertisement for the Dream Manager Program.

After Two Years

By the end of the second year, 11 employees were living in new homes they never thought they'd own and more than 100 employees had fulfilled the first dream on their list.

Turnover was down from 400 percent to just over 50 percent in two years.

The profits were staggering.

Greg took Simon, Sean, Sandra and their spouses to the Caribbean for an off-site strategic planning session. It was a combination of work and reward. They spent five days in Antigua. The beaches were beautiful, the weather gorgeous and the synergy among team members and their spouses was extraordinary.

Each morning, they met for breakfast and then took the meeting to Greg's suite.

Profit Sharing

Greg opened the first session by explaining how successful the Dream Manager Initiative had been and how he wanted to give some of the profits back to the employees.

He further explained that he wanted to redistribute a portion of the profits in three ways: by raising wages and salaries, creating a new bonus system and enhancing the Dream Manager Program.

Greg said, "The truth is, we should ask the employees how they think we should enhance the program. We can't underestimate how important it was that the employees got to have a say in the beginning. We shouldn't shut them out now. Let's keep them involved in the process."

"I was thinking the same thing," said Sandra. "I think it's time for another survey."

Sean stepped in now, saying, "We can put together a short report of the ideas we have come up with, ask the employees to comment on them and assign priority to each of them and let them add any other ideas they have."

They had discovered what they had already known, and found it to be as true as ever. There is no substitute for involving everyone in the process. ●

PART THREE: EXPANSION

Since getting back from the Caribbean, everybody had been asking Simon what the team had decided while they were away. Simon explained that they hadn't decided anything, only that they had come up with some new ideas for the expansion and improvement of the Dream Manager Program, and now they wanted to have the employees' input on these new ideas.

The only thing the group had set in stone while they were away was that they needed to reach full participation in the Dream Manager Program as soon as possible. At this point, only 65 percent of employees had been initiated into the program. With Sean's workload the way it was, it would be up to a year before the rest of the employees who wanted to participate were active in the program.

This backlog meant hiring at least one, and maybe two more Dream Managers. But they wanted the other employees' feedback on this, so the full-participation idea was included alongside their other ideas.

More Survey Results

The surveys went out and came back in record time and with a record level of respondents. The overwhelming majority of employees listed full participation as the number one priority of the Dream Manager Program over the next three to six months.

Greg, Simon, Sean and Sandra had come up with some great ideas, but they had missed something that might not have occurred to them had they spent six months in the Caribbean, instead of five days.

The number one request from the employees in the survey was that their children be able to meet with the Dream Manager.

"Our children need a Dream Manager," or similar phrasing, appeared on 71 percent of the surveys returned.

Culture of Dreams

Simon and his team at Admiral were building a culture of dreams. The notice board in the employee lunchroom was now covered with photos and other evidence of dreams achieved.

Each month, when the employees came to headquarters to meet with their Dream Manager, they were encouraged to stop by and check out what was happening in the lives of other employees.

The executive team had been having a series of meetings to discuss a new bonus system.

It had been 11 quarters since the birth of the Dream

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Manager Program, and profits every quarter had steadily increased. Greg had been pouring money back into the program, but nowhere near as much as the profits had been increasing, and now he wanted to give back to the employees in some way.

“I don’t want this to be a one-time thing,” Greg said to the team. “I want us to create a structure whereby a percentage of increased profits will go to the employees every year.”

“What did you have in mind?” Simon asked.

The Proposal

“Well, I was thinking we could do three things. First, an across-the-board pay increase for all employees. Next, I thought an annual bonus system based on company and personal performance. In this case, we could allocate a certain amount to each team or department, based on profit, and they could decide how to divide it among themselves. Finally, I would like to start a Dream Fund. A percentage of profits each quarter will go into this fund. Each employee can apply for a grant from this fund for the fulfillment of a specific dream. The managers and employees can vote to say who gets the grants. We could assign categories, perhaps \$500, \$1,000 and \$2,500 to begin with.”

The Dream Bonuses and pay increases were, needless to say, a huge hit with the employees, and they provided yet another injection of enthusiasm. Anyone who thought this was going to be a passing fad was now convinced that the Dream Manager Program was here to stay.

Today

Today, five years after the birth of the initiative, more than 98 percent of Admiral employees participate in the Dream Manager Program. Home ownership among employees has tripled in five years, consumer debt among employees has been reduced by 40 percent — and 2,785 significant dreams have been accomplished.

Turnover has fallen from 400 percent to just 12 percent over the five-year period, and Admiral’s internal placement program accounts for 70 percent of that turnover. Gross revenue has tripled, and the number of employees has risen from 407 to 742, including 11 Dream Managers. Profits have risen every quarter since the program was initiated.

Once a month, employees meet with the Dream Manager in order to take time to dream up a richer, more abundant future for themselves and their families.

Today, the children 12 years and older of Admiral employees can meet with a Dream Manager once a

What’s Your Dream?

Dreams are invisible, but powerful. Think for a moment of electricity. You cannot see it, but it keeps everything going.

Should you doubt that electricity keeps everything going, turn off the electricity at your office tomorrow! You will find that little if anything gets done and that most of your employees will go home for the day.

So it is with dreams. They are invisible but powerful. You cannot see them, but they keep everything going.

month to discuss their future and their dreams.

At the last annual dinner for employees, Greg said in his speech, “Why are so many people so amazed by what we do here at Admiral? I ask myself this question all the time. Why is it so surprising to people to discover that if you treat people like people, they respond like people? Dreams are at the core of every person. It is there that our passion for life is ignited.”

The temptation is to convince yourself that your employees’ dreams are not relevant to your business. That is only true if your employees are not relevant to your business — and if that were true, why would you employ them?

You can ignore people’s dreams, but it will be at your peril. You will pay an enormous price if you do. ●

Getting Started: Applications and Tools

You have your own dreams to dream and your own adventures to pursue. Some time today, *drag yourself* away from all that occupies your daily attention and write down your dreams. Make a list of 100 dreams. If you absolutely cannot do it today, at least take a moment to schedule it for tomorrow or the next day. And if you find yourself putting it off, ask yourself why.

Just start writing. Don’t place limitations on yourself. Dream and write from that stream of consciousness, as if anything were possible.

As you write your Dream List, here are 12 areas to stimulate a good cross section of dreams: physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, psychological, material, professional, financial, creative, adventure, legacy and character.

For the next week, take 10 or 15 minutes each day just to read through your Dream List. Other dreams

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may come to mind — add them! You may decide some dreams are not really you, or not that important to you. Delete them from the list if you wish, or leave them there so you can look back in time and see what you thought was important to you.

After one week, go through the list and apply one of the following three categories to each of your dreams: short-term (within 12 months), mid-term (one to five years) or long-term (five years or more).

The next step is to get a Dream Book. Start to write down your dreams and ponder them from time to time so that you don't lose sight of them in the midst of your daily activity.

Changing Expectations

A new breed of corporate loyalty is both possible and necessary. We simply need to change our expectations. No company can keep an employee that doesn't add value and help that company become the best version of itself. Simple economics demands that such an employee cannot remain. At the same time, a company cannot reasonably expect an employee to be loyal if that company's demands and expectations consistently lead an employee to become a lesser version of him- or herself.

The new breed of loyalty will be based upon an understanding between employees and companies of one another's purpose — to become the best version of themselves. Some may scoff and beg this conversation to return to reality — but consider the companies that find themselves on *Fortune's* elite list of the best companies to work for. Of course they strive for and achieve better than average profits, but if you glance down the list of criteria, you'll discover a list of company initiatives that, directly or indirectly, help employees become better versions of themselves. These companies believe that if they help their employees become better versions of themselves, the company will necessarily become a better version of itself.

Corporate Loyalty

Walk through the hallways of these companies and you will see a highly evolved form of corporate loyalty emerging. These companies understand that if they help their employees achieve their purpose as individuals, the employees will in turn be more passionate about helping the corporation achieve its purpose and goals.

This new breed of corporate loyalty is the clay from which a highly evolved and cohesive type of team can be built and managed. The “us versus them” mentality that has been fostered for hundreds of years in the workplace desperately needs to be replaced by a spirit of

dynamic collaboration. This level of collaboration can only be achieved when both managers and employees are convinced that each has the others' best interests in mind.

When a company's culture opposes its employees' purpose (that is, hinders employees from becoming the best version of themselves), the employees will consciously or subconsciously oppose the company's goals and objectives. This in turn will prevent the company from achieving its purpose (that is, becoming the best version of itself). The individual purposes of employees and companies are inseparably linked.

The 21st Century Manager

Many people have been putting together strategic plans for their organizations or departments for decades, but they have never created a Personal Strategic Plan.

Teach people the importance of strategic planning in their own lives and they will understand its importance in the life of your company. The same is true for dreams and goals. If you want to engage employees in corporate dreams and goals, you must first engage them in their own personal dreams and goals.

Dreams provide fascinating insights into what drives people. This is indispensable knowledge for a manager of any kind. Use employee reviews as an opportunity to take an interest in the dreams of the people who report to you.

Take an active interest in the dreams of the people on your team and in your life, encourage them to move boldly in the direction of their dreams and have the courage to share your own personal and professional dreams with them. Over time, the people who surround you will begin to do the same among themselves, and you will witness a new spirit of collaboration — and the unrivaled power of a culture of dreams.

It is a different approach. Different is exactly what is needed in the corporate arena if we are going to engage employees and build dynamic teams. So, don't be ordinary. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Dream Manager*, you'll also like:

1. **Outsmart!** by Jim Champy. Jim Champy identifies the counterintuitive lessons learned by companies that have been able to sustain super-high growth for at least three years straight.
2. **Ideas Are Free** by Alan G. Robinson and Dean M. Schroeder. The authors provide the road map for totally integrating ideas and idea management into the way companies are structured and operate.
3. **Built to Last** by James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras. This business classic shows you how to surge ahead with audacious goals, preserve your ideology, create a cultlike culture and ensure your organization's future.