



Part One

Leadership and the Business Environment

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CHAPTER ONE

THE EFFECTIVE LEADER

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In the field of leadership, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of pieces authored by thought leaders, business leaders, political leaders, and sports leaders. Most emphasize different leadership attributes, but still it is rare to find effective leaders like Jack Welch of General Electric (GE), Sam Walton of Wal-Mart, or Herb Kelleher of Southwest Airlines. After the collapse of Enron in late 2001, leaders around the world have faced a major challenge in reestablishing *trust* with their employees, stockholders, and customers. Enron's former chairman and CEO Kenneth Lay, once recognized as an effective leader by the press, is now branded as a "liar."¹ But Enron isn't alone. Throughout the year 2002, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on senior leadership's "nonleader" behaviors in respected organizations like ABB, Tyco International, and WorldCom. The biggest price these organizations paid by their breach of trust is their most important asset—people.

I begin this chapter by identifying the crucial characteristics of effective leadership. But it's not enough simply to possess the attributes of a good leader. You must also recognize the importance of the people in your organization and of fostering a workplace environment that challenges them in positive ways and empowers them to succeed as well. After all, if your employees don't succeed, how can your organization?

Let's examine the effectiveness of a leader. Rather than redefining leadership, I have emphasized some of the most critical attributes leaders must possess to be effective:

- Honesty
- Emotional commitment
- Thinking differently
- Taking timely action

Honesty

In their 1995 internationally best-selling book *The Leadership Challenge*, James Kouzes and Barry Posner report that honesty is the number one characteristic of an admired leader. According to their survey of several thousand business and government executives from four continents, nearly 90 percent of constituents want their leaders to be honest; this is a message that all leaders must take to heart.² It is very difficult to measure honesty, as it is a subjective behavior. But people—internal or external—observe their leaders’ behaviors every single day. All too often, business leaders lose sight of the importance of honesty and value as they focus more closely on the bottom line. It seems that the faster we advance toward technology and quick success, the more leaders mistakenly assume that subjective behaviors like value may not be critical. More than ever, customers as well as the workforce will study their leaders’ behaviors more closely. It has been proved time and again that stockholders will punish those leaders who breach that trust. Enron, for example, was once widely referred to as America’s seventh-largest company. But the lack of integrity displayed by CEO Kenneth Lay, who tolerated ethical lapses by subordinates, even overriding the company’s own code of ethics to permit the CFO to form debt-disguising partnerships,³ led to the collapse of the organization. Consider also the obstruction of justice of Enron’s auditing firm, Arthur Andersen, over the destruction of documents related to its Enron audit—a once-formidable accounting firm crippled by poor integrity.

The distinction between being right and being honest is an important one.

Former GE chairman Jack Welch puts it simply: “People may not have agreed with me on every issue—and I may not have been right all the time—but they always knew they were getting it straight and honest. It helped to build better relationships with customers, suppliers, analysts, competitors, and governments. It set the tone in the organization.”⁴ The distinction between being right and being honest is an important one. You cannot always be right, nobody is. But you can always be honest, and in the eyes of your customers, stockholders, and employees, that’s an important characteristic in a leader.

When Honeywell chairman and CEO Larry Bossidy appoints a new business manager, the first thing he discusses is integrity. All companies should be focused on hiring talent who possess a high level of integrity. Especially these days, with such easy access to technology, more and more people may be tempted toward unethical behavior. The World Wide Web alone, accessible by virtually everyone, can easily be exploited for unethical purposes. Just look at the growing number of dubious Web sites, spam attacks, and viruses distributed daily. Something as simple as e-mailing off-color jokes to fellow employees might be regarded as suspect. It may seem obvious, but ask yourself whom you would rather hire: a candidate who has many years of experience but who demonstrates questionable regard for diversity or a recent college graduate who spends weekends volunteering at a nursing home? Of course, it's not always that cut-and-dried, but ask questions during the interview process with the aim of gauging your candidate's values. Talk about hobbies, family, travel, whatever you feel will give you a glimpse of where this person's values lie. The astute interviewer can pick up the signals from such discussions. All companies need to focus more on integrity and appropriately punish breaches of integrity, sending the message to the organization that such breaches will not be tolerated.

Emotional Commitment

Commitment with emotion is key to success. In India, it is called *sadhana*. When the famous sitarist Ravi Shankar was learning sitar from his guru, he didn't leave his room for many days until he learned the basics. He devoted all his time to sitar. That takes emotional commitment. Throughout history, you see the greatest successes coming from those who exhibited undying commitment. This is more visible in history and the arts, but effective leaders like Michael Dell, Rick Wagoner, and Bill Gates are also emotionally committed to their endeavors. They have to be—they have their own mission and commitment. Rather than randomly jumping into different initiatives, effective leaders focus on their own beliefs. It's their emotional commitment that has helped them succeed. Think about it. If they did not have this commitment, if they did not love their work, could they possibly have achieved their present success?

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Sumner Redstone, CEO of Viacom and author of *A Passion to Win*, says, “I’ve always wanted to win. I think winning is everything. Throughout my life I’ve had an obsessive drive to be number one. That doesn’t mean I’ve always been number one. But that’s what drives me—a desire to be the best at what I do.” He tells of the hotel fire in which he was badly burned—and then of being in the heat of negotiating and deal making—and yet at age 78 of being in perfect health. “The question isn’t whether you are subjected to adversity and conflict during your life,” he says. “The question is how you deal with it. If you really want to succeed, you have to be passionate and have a commitment to excellence in performance. If you have both of those, and some intellectual capacity, nothing is impossible.”⁵

Successful leaders want to create organizations that will dominate the economic landscape. They are passionate about making a contribution to society and creating a business culture of enlightenment. They want to create and deliver real value to their customers and shareholders. They have a “love it or leave it” philosophy. They don’t do things only because they want to hit revenue numbers; rather, they “just do it” because they have emotional commitment. Michael Dell had a dream of beating IBM while IBM was the giant in the computer market. Without emotional commitment, he could not have succeeded.

The success of GE is largely credited to retired CEO Jack Welch’s leadership; his strategy included creating an “emotional bond” with his employees. GE’s Six Sigma initiative is not just a CEO-driven quality initiative. It is a management philosophy from top to bottom. Everyone has been learning the language of Six Sigma’s revolutionary five-step process: define, measure, analyze, improve, and control (DMAIC). Welch personally made sure that the Six Sigma philosophy was understood all over the company, from the very bottom to the very top. The results suggest that it works. GE reported record results in 2000: revenues grew 16 percent; earnings grew by 19 percent.⁶ The point is not that Welch implemented Six Sigma; the point is that he was passionate about what he was doing and that passion seeped into the organization in a big way.

Emotional commitment makes the difference between typical managers and effective leaders. Average managers are nine-to-five performers; effective leaders strive for excellence regardless of the clock. They want to be winners in everything they do, whereas average managers may not share that winning mentality. Traditional managers are contractually obligated to do their jobs; effective leaders are mentally obligated. Leaders are risk takers, whereas traditional managers are risk averse. Above all, effective leaders are always emotionally committed.⁷ And fostering this commitment throughout your organization only makes it stronger.

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Most managers don't have a winning mentality because they don't have a sense of ownership. If you own something, then you don't want to lose it. Profit sharing, reward, recognition, and bonuses are key ingredients to seed ownership within employees. In GE's Six Sigma initiative, "black belts" receive rewards for completing projects successfully and saving GE's bottom line. Contrast this level of commitment with that of many failed dot-coms whose founders admitted to starting a business just to go public or to be bought out. How could they succeed with this mentality?

Thinking Differently

There is tremendous competition for everything, and the only way you can compete is to do something different or do something common differently. The strong comeback of Apple Computer is mostly credited to its effective leader, Steve Jobs, who characterizes himself as well as his organization with a simple motto: "Think Different." No other computer manufacturer had ever thought of using multicolored plastic bodies for personal computers before Jobs's iMac. Its success is not necessarily due to the product innovation or better performance but rather to the "think different" strategy. Upon the same strategy, the United Kingdom's most admirable entrepreneur and leader, Anita Roddick, built her cosmetics empire, The Body Shop. Roddick's world headquarters lobby in London displays this declaration: "Small chest, flabby thighs, large hips, thick lips, BIG DEAL—love your body."

Dell Computer Corporation is one of the world's leading manufacturers of computer systems. One key to its success lies in its direct business model. Michael Dell, of Dell Computer Corporation, comments:

A lot of favorable economics occur when you take time out of the process. Dell's model has about eight days of inventory. One competitor has 81 days of inventory and 40 more days of inventory in their distribution channel—16 weeks more than our eight days. A competitor with that level of inventory can't compete with Dell and make any money doing it. As a

result, our business is growing fast, and our profitability exceeds that of all of our major competitors combined.

We define the customer experience from the order delivery process, to the setup, use, and operating experience. We've developed a set of metrics that take these customer measures and tie them to our goals and to every employee's profit sharing and incentive compensation. The next frontier of competition is in the area of customer service quality. We're constantly looking for breakthroughs, such as our direct business model, that change the dynamics of the game. Finding a new way to deliver a better customer experience and more value at less cost is a good strategy.⁸

You have a lot to learn from those who report to you.

One way to achieve a new perspective is to reach out to your employees and listen to what they have to say. Do not restrict their thinking. Instead, be open to all employee suggestions, whether they differ from yours or not.

Trust that your employees, regardless of their position, have gleaned their own competency through experience and that they bring varied, and valuable, knowledge to the table. You have a lot to learn from those who report to you. Spend some time listening to your employees and understanding why they think the way they do. By doing so, you may be able to look at your product or organization from a new perspective.

Taking Timely Action

The most important thing that effective leaders do is take “timely action.” Leaders can be successful if they act on their unique idea at the right time. The secret of success is not necessarily the idea itself but rather the implementation of the idea. The attitude of “Just do it”—the slogan of Nike’s founder and chairman, Phil Knight—is necessary for success, regardless of the industry you’re in. The value of a great idea without implementation is zero. If you have a powerful idea, and you are talking about it but taking no action to implement it, someone else will likely have a similar idea and win while you remain stuck in place. If you are not an implementer, find a partner who is. The leader who takes timely action often does not have to tell people what to do but rather asks the right questions so others can figure out what they need

to do. Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan call this process *execution*. In their recent book *Execution*, they state, “Leading for execution is not about micromanaging, or being hands-on, or disempowering people. Rather it’s about active involvement—doing the things leaders should be doing in the first place.” They define *execution* as a discipline and integral to strategy, as a core element of an organization’s culture, and as the major job of the business leader.⁹

Chrysler’s PT Cruiser and 3M’s Palm Pilot are still the leaders in their product lines due to timely action. Many companies may try to copy them, but none has had similar success. Proactive actions characterize market leaders. Michael Dell comments, “We’ve learned that we can’t just follow the other guys. That approach won’t create a lot of value. We try to find our own way and do things better. We are building our own path.”¹⁰

The action at Dell is centered on customers, as Michael Dell reports:

We maintain an intense focus on the customer, even as we grow. Today, Dell is still ranked number one in customer satisfaction surveys. Our account teams work face-to-face with all of our large customers. We work with our suppliers to deliver materials on a pull basis. Instead of waiting to build a machine until we have all the materials in the warehouse, and then guessing what people will buy, we focus on how fast the inventory is moving. If we can shorten that time, not only will we save our customers a lot of money, but also they’ll get a superior product that meets their precise requirements.¹¹

If you are passionate about your idea, regardless of what it is, you must act on it, or chances are, you will lose it. Many people have ideas, and some have more relevance than others. But once you establish that your idea is worth pursuing, move forward with it.

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Now that we’ve discussed the leadership attributes of an effective leader, let’s reexamine the two other critical elements with which leaders must deal every day: people and the workplace.

Effective Leadership and People

Leaders must know their talented people, and leaders must have the right talent at the right place. Jack Welch emphasized, “Getting the right people in the right jobs is a lot more important than developing strategy. This truth can be applied to all kinds of businesses.”¹² Sumner Redstone of Viacom is known as the consummate champion of talent and content. “I believe that talent is king because people don’t watch TV, they watch talent, content, programming. The way you manage talent is to let them run their businesses to a large extent. If you have confidence in the talent of your managers, you do not intrude every time they make a decision.” Beyond capability in talent, Redstone looks for character and loyalty. “I look for someone I can trust, and who trusts me. And, I look for confidence, competence, and commitment.”¹³

You always want to hire the best talent with the highest level of integrity you can find.

As mentioned previously, you always want to hire the best talent with the highest level of integrity you can find. But hiring the best talent isn’t easy. I have identified seven secrets of talent, which you can easily remember using the acronym *SECRETS*:

1. *Search for the dream.* The dream is the vision. Talented people celebrate each success but then quickly move on to the next challenge, the next dream.
2. *Evaluate your strengths and weaknesses.* Talented people are not afraid to acknowledge their weaknesses. It is the only way they can be addressed and turned into strengths.
3. *Cultivate discipline and determination.* Without these two qualities, even the best ideas may fail. Talented people understand this. They make disciplined decisions and exhibit determination to see them through.
4. *Render ideas and actions inseparable.* This is related to taking timely action. Talented people have an idea *and* a plan of action.
5. *Embrace positivity.* This is straightforward. Talented people reject negative characteristics such as envy, dishonesty, and greed. Instead, they focus on the positive side of any situation. Getting stuck on the negative side prevents people from achieving success.
6. *Take a never-give-up attitude.* Confidence and determination are the keys to a never-give-up attitude. Talented people don’t give up because they have the confidence and drive to succeed.

7. *Show a “next” mentality.* Most talented people aren’t content unless they have their eyes on the next success. There is always something new to be achieved.¹⁴

Of course, hiring the best talent isn’t the only factor; you must also keep your talent challenged and stimulated enough so they stay. Using a combination of the ideas you will gather from this book will help you create an environment in which your talent sees the value you place on their abilities, their importance to the organization, and your commitment to their success.

Effective Leadership and the Workplace

An effective leader must create a workplace that fosters a challenging environment. The more successful an organization is, the more challenging its culture. “Challenge your colleagues, challenge your subordinates, challenge your boss, and challenge yourself” is becoming the new mantra for success. Challenge does not mean humiliation or criticism. It means support and encouragement. Internal challenge helps people to face the tremendous competitive challenges outside the organization. It is difficult to keep talented people without positive challenges.

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Positive Challenge

An effective leader can attract and manage talent, but the question at the end of the day is, “Are your talented people growing, or do they feel that they don’t need to grow?” This is a growth rule that applies to all people, however talented. Many people are afraid to challenge their bosses. Historically, this has not been a winning attitude. In a challenging workplace, if you don’t believe what your boss says, you do not have to accept it. Sometimes, bosses may not challenge talented people due to their own lack of knowledge: they are not always up to speed with what their subordinates are doing, and therefore, they cannot find ways to challenge their teams. To foster a challenging environment, leaders should stay informed on what their team members are learning and accomplishing so that they can use that knowledge to create positive challenges.

Most managers talk about challenge, but few really practice it.

Most managers talk about challenge, but few really practice it. When I speak to groups of middle and senior managers, they talk about creating a challenging environment, but when I ask them individually, “How many times do you challenge your boss? How many times do you say that what you’re doing should be done differently?” I mostly find that managers never challenge their bosses. An environment of fear will stifle people’s creativity, with bad processes continuing as a result. Talented people respond well to positive challenge. If somebody challenges me, I can learn something from it, and I can do something better.

Positive challenges enhance people’s performance. Challenging someone based on knowledge represents a positive challenge. Sometimes, bosses criticize their subordinates without having the proper knowledge or data—a negative challenge. Managers often act as if they know something but really don’t and then cannot respond appropriately in a challenging situation. Putting a subordinate on the spot without understanding the subordinate’s role or involvement in the situation can only backfire. On the other hand, when colleagues challenge one another successfully, they learn from one another and share their knowledge.

When people share their knowledge, it grows faster within the company.

When people share their knowledge, it grows faster within the company. Intellectual assets appreciate faster. A continuous learning environment is created, bureaucracy is limited, and trust is built, allowing people to share more with one another.

Every corporation faces competition in every aspect of business, and this competition will only increase in the future. Positive challenges help a company face challenges from competitors by increasing efficiencies, performance, and worker knowledge. Positive challenges foster a sense of urgency to create something better.

To maintain a challenging environment, leaders must create organizations that:

- Bury bureaucracy and rigid hierarchy
- Attract and keep talented people
- Support continuous learning

- Reward performance
- Encourage fearlessness

To maintain a culture of innovation and creativity at Viacom, Sumner Redstone cultivates creative talent. “Where does great content come from? Creativity. And where does creativity come from? From people who work in creative environments and associate with creative leaders. We maintain a high degree of innovation and creativity because we also have a high degree of financial discipline—and one works right alongside the other. Money is never the driver. Most talented people are not motivated by money but by the desire to achieve, to win, to be the best, and to try to make a positive difference every day through their work. They have a sense of mission.”¹⁵

As a leader or manager who doesn’t get challenged, you may not know whether what you believe is right. What happens if you do not know the solution to a specific problem? If you have been constantly challenged, you will know to whom to go for the right answers—the honest answers. Challenges help validate or refute beliefs. You have a team whose ideas and opinions you value. The team will help you solve your problem. But when you face a challenge, you will have to prove your viewpoint based on knowledge and performance. Challenge is also a way of finding talented people or understanding what level of talent you have in the organization. Nontalents avoid challenge because they fear that if somebody challenges them and they don’t have an answer, they might lose their jobs, or their boss won’t be happy. You have probably seen the “I don’t know” dance. The challenged person dances all around the question or challenge without responding directly to it in an effort to cover his or her ignorance. You can create an environment that has just the right challenge. Every talented person has to be held accountable for performance, knowing that the organization needs a high return on talent.

Create an environment with little bureaucracy. Yes, you will still have a boss, but you can open your boss’s door or send him or her an e-mail anytime. If you believe you have a better idea than your boss, then your boss should be open to it.

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Redstone is a prime example as he continues to lead Viacom at age 78. “I’m surrounded by brilliant people, many of whom could run Viacom. I respect their views, and I want to hear them. If they disagree with me, I want to

hear that too. And they don't hesitate to tell me. Naturally if they disagree, I want them to have some solid reasoning behind their position or point of view. But I respect and trust my team. I know I can trust them, and they know they can trust me. Mutual trust is the most important element in running a company. Without it, you lose."

Unfortunately, much of the time, the boss is not open to new ideas that challenge his or her own thinking. The boss may even withhold rewards for exceptional performance. If people perform much better than expected, they should be rewarded for that performance. When nontalents see that talents are bringing challenges to the environment and that they are being rewarded for it, then the nontalents will either improve or self-select out of the environment.

Grassroots Education

Grassroots education involves training the entire staff, without discrimination. Often, leaders neglect the lower levels. At one U.S. manufacturing facility, managers were changing the spreadsheet analysis software from Lotus to Excel. Although the managers were trained in using Excel, none of the other employees were, even though they would be the main users. Six months later, the trained managers were no longer using the new program and passed it down the line to those employees who had never been trained in the first place. The company spent millions of dollars on this change, but ultimately, the proper people did not get the training, and so it didn't work.

Leaders can't train all employees equally, but they can provide minimal education to all employees. For example, in a Six Sigma program, managers can't train all the employees as a black or green belt, but they can provide basic knowledge of Six Sigma to all employees. When all workers have a basic knowledge of any program, they will find it easier to accept that program.

Leaders must monitor the results of training programs rather than delegating the job to someone else.

Leaders must monitor the results of training programs rather than delegating the job to someone else. Corporations spend millions of dollars on training programs, but the positive outcomes of those training programs are often limited. Leaders should monitor how much the organization spends on training and how much it gains from that training. Leaders can monitor the results of training by:

1. Creating project-based training
2. Applying the training on a project where employees can show results
3. Implementing the training program to create an immediate benefit and ensure viability
4. Creating a measurement system (metrics) that tracks the results
5. Selecting the right people to use this training

Train the right people—people who can implement the ideas learned from the training. Create hands-on training. Provide resources to apply the learning and give employees the freedom to do so. Classroom training without mentored, on-the-job application of the content is incomplete. Classroom training is the precursor to developing expertise in the subject. Expertise is developed through practice under the guidance of a mentor. Learning to read music and the location of keys on a piano does not make you even a novice piano player. You learn to play the piano by practicing under the guidance of a piano teacher.

Change is more difficult without grassroots education of all employees. When leaders try to introduce change, people may be fearful or resistant. People fear that change may eliminate their jobs, so there is a tendency not to want to accept the change. But if leaders can teach every employee why this change is important, leaders can change anything. Grassroots education helps to bring about proper implementation.

Whether you must implement a new computer system or a new company strategy, you need education and training to ensure proper implementation. Some organizations spend millions of dollars training employees in the use of specific tools, and yet these employees do not use these tools in their jobs. That's like throwing money away. Leaders then wonder why no benefit comes from the money they spend on training.

Grassroots education creates a common language in an organization. One reason why the Six Sigma program is so successful at General Electric is that everybody understands the basic principles and speaks the same language.

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In any organization, you must teach a common language. Recently, I met with the vice president of quality of a European automaker. I asked him, "Do you have a quality slogan?"

He said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "What is your quality policy? What do you aim to do with quality?"

He said, "We want to produce the best results, the best-quality products."

I said, “OK, fine. There are four people who report to you, right?”

He said, “Yes.”

I said, “Do you mind if I ask each of them separately one critical question?”

He said, “Fine.”

So I spent five minutes with each of those four people and asked them, “What is your quality policy?” Each of them gave me a different answer. That shows the lack of a common business language. Here is the top leader of quality in the corporation and the four senior managers who report to him, and they give me five different answers to the same question. Each of them was telling me, “This is what the company wants to achieve.” They had no quality goals. This is a good exercise for any organization. Take five different people from your team and ask them individually what your product/service goal is. If you get variant answers, then you need to start thinking about implementing some sort of education program to keep everybody focused. Without a common understanding of what your primary goals are, individuals can get lost in activity that might not contribute to your mission.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, I discussed some of the critical elements of effective leadership. Two of the most important terms used repeatedly throughout this chapter are *trust* and *people*. An environment that is not built on mutual trust is not a healthy environment and is almost certainly doomed to failure. We have seen examples of once-respected organizations brought down by their leaders’ lack of integrity, including Enron, WorldCom, and others. These organizations paid dearly not only by the collapse of their stock values but also by the cost of their most important asset—people. Thousands of people were laid off. These are the same people who once trusted their leaders but ended up paying the price for a crime they didn’t commit. Honesty is the most important characteristic of an effective leader.

Another is emotional commitment. It’s infectious, and it’s the biggest difference between effective leaders and typical managers: traditional managers do their jobs from nine to five out of contractual obligation; effective leaders are mentally obligated. This doesn’t mean that they work 24/7; it does mean that there is passion in what they do, and they are not just going through the motions. If you have emotional commitment, you strive beyond all else to succeed, as do your employees, especially when they have something at stake, too.

Thinking differently and taking timely action are the two other key attributes of effective leaders discussed in this chapter. Steve Jobs of Apple created

the personal computer with the very first Apple I, but without timely action, would Jobs's innovation have made it out of his garage? If he had waited, perhaps somebody else would have stepped in first. This is the stage at which most ideas die because of the fear of risk. Almost everyone has good ideas, but how many are acted upon? Commitment to fast action is the key to success. Effective leaders embrace risk and follow through on the ideas they feel strongly about.

And finally, an organization does not just consist of leaders. Effective leaders realize that their employees are indeed their most important asset. The goal is to attract and keep the best and the brightest—the most talented. To do this, you must project an image of trust first and foremost, and then you must let your teams do their thing. Provide them with the right mix of positive challenge and training and let them succeed. If they disagree with you about something, hear them out—don't shut them out. They need to know they can come to you with their ideas, even if those ideas conflict with yours. This is a healthy environment and keeps people motivated to continue doing the best they can. Cultivate a positive atmosphere and you're well on your way to effective leadership.

As Jack Welch boldly states, “Being a CEO is the nuts! A whole jumble of thoughts come to mind: Over the top. Wild. Fun. Outrageous. Crazy. Passion. Perpetual motion. The give-and-take. Meetings into the night. Incredible friendships. Fine wine. Celebrations. Great golf courses. Big decisions in the real game. Crises and pressure. Lots of swings. A few home runs. The thrill of winning. The pain of losing.”¹⁶ Yes, Welch is right. That's what effective leadership is all about.