

1

THE PATH TO EXCELLENCE

If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, "Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well!"

—*Martin Luther King Jr.*

Excellence is a word used frequently, but its quality is rarely attained. *Webster's* dictionary defines *excellence* as "that which is of the best and finest quality; that which is superior, outstanding, and first class." It is going the extra mile and going beyond the call of duty. Therefore, excellence is a quality that is to be modeled. I contend that excellence is not only a quality but also an attitude! It is an attitude that makes you want to do more, to be more, and to achieve more!

Aristotle said: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” I want to help you make excellence a habit rather than a once in a while occurrence.

DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE: CREATING A FIVE-STAR ORGANIZATION

Have you ever been to a five-star resort, a five-star hotel, or a five-star restaurant? If so, how did it make you feel? Did it make you feel good? Did it make you feel special? Did it make you feel important? Did you want to go back again? Did you wonder about the types of people who could afford that lifestyle and how it would feel to always live that kind of life? That is the nature of the five-star success system, and that is what this book is all about.

To achieve five-star success is to operate in an environment of excellence; we go to five-star resorts, hotels, and restaurants because they are the best of the best. I have discovered five secrets that can lead to five-star success in your business or organization as well as in your personal life. Although I touch on them here, I will give you great detail about each of these powerful secrets a little later in the book. So keep reading and get ready, get ready, get ready!

Attitude of Excellence Secret #1:

Dynamic Leadership Development

Create leaders at every level of the organization. Five-star organizations recognize the power of developing

leaders at every level and empowering employees to do whatever is necessary to serve their customers. Great organizations recognize that before you can lead many, you must be able to lead one—yourself!

Attitude of Excellence Secret #2:

Proactive Change Management

Recognize that change is an ally, not the enemy, and develop skills for managing change. If you embrace the components of change, challenge, and choices, you can learn to succeed as you “GROW,” not just “GO,” through the changes.

Attitude of Excellence Secret #3:

Dedicated Teamwork

Embrace the incredible power of teamwork. Those who think like a team and work like a team are those who win like a team! Keep in mind that great teams care for each other, cover for each other, and encourage each other. Everyone is an MVP—a most valuable and valued player—because the chain is only as strong as the weakest link.

Attitude of Excellence Secret #4:

Wow Customer Service

Wow the customer with amazing customer service and your business will grow! As you grow your people, you will grow their capacity to serve, and great people tend to give great service. Remember that the greatest leaders are always the greatest servants.

Attitude of Excellence Secret #5:

World-Class Attitude Enhancement

Develop a positive attitude and a positive outlook, in-look, and up-look! Learn to see that change is good when your attitude is great! When it's all said and done, it's *all* about your attitude!

THE POWER OF ATTITUDE, APTITUDE, AND APPETITE

Let me ask you a couple of questions: “Do you want to win? Do you *really* want to win?” I ask these questions at the beginning of my presentations, and I always get the same response: “Yes, I really want to win!” While I believe most people do want to win, the definitive questions then become: “How badly do you want to win? Are you willing to do what is uncomfortable? Are you willing to stretch? Are you willing to do some things differently and to do some different things? Are you willing to change in order to win?” The concept of truly wanting to win is one of the main premises to begin with as you create an Attitude of Excellence.

Bill Russell, former all-star center for the Boston Celtics, is an example of someone who learned the secrets to winning and made his team better by helping them learn to win as well. He was a five-time winner of the National Basketball Association Most Valuable Player award and a twelve-time All-Star. He created a culture of excellence whenever and wherever he played. He went from winning a championship his final year

in college to leading the Celtics to eleven championships in thirteen years—the most championships won by any team in NBA history!

What is most amazing about Bill Russell was not that he was a prolific scorer but that he was a player who focused his energy on creating a winning culture. Russell said he was not about scoring, he was about winning! In his book, *Russell Rules* (NAL Trade, 2002), he wrote: “Everyone can win, but it takes teamwork. Then you must add three key ingredients . . . Attitude, Aptitude, and Appetite!”

So in order to win, you too must have a *winner’s* attitude, aptitude, and appetite! In other words, you must have an Attitude of Excellence about you and your team!

DO YOU WANT MORE IN THE FUTURE?

Do you want more in the future than you’ve had in the past? Do you want to *be* more in the future than you’ve been in the past? Would you like to make more money in the future than you’ve made in the past? If you answered “yes” to these questions, then please continue to read on. If you answered “no,” you need to read on anyway! I am sure you will get a new insight in the next few pages that will change your thinking for a lifetime!

In a time of endless competition, nanosecond change, and economic uncertainty, it is critical to look to the long term and recognize that excellence is essential to greater personal and

professional success. While many people speak of the importance of “branding,” which is a popular concept used to discuss how people should position themselves in the minds of others, it is essential to create a personal brand of excellence.

To increase our income, it is important to focus on the power of creating a reputation for excellence. The brand, or reputation, for excellence is one of the secrets of those who succeed in life and business. Developing a reputation for excellence is a way to build our personal brands and increase our personal wealth!

History offers us many examples of people and organizations that had quick success and made money in the short term but could not sustain that success. More often than not they failed to sustain their success because they did not make a commitment to excellence. They were willing to take shortcuts, and some of those shortcuts proved to be their undoing! Developing a reputation, for excellence is the best insurance for long-term wealth and success.

Over the last few years we have heard story after story of downsizing, rightsizing, reengineering, and restructuring. Many such stories involve people who were close to retirement after years of dedicated service to a company, but due to circumstances beyond their control, they lost their jobs.

In today’s rapidly changing job market, we must pursue excellence on a daily basis for there is no job security! Virtually no one can guarantee they will stay employed or stay in good standing in their present position. There could be a sudden change in the direction of the company or the industry or the economy that affects your job security. Numerous scenarios,

beyond your control, could impact your present employment. But you will greatly enhance your job security by developing a reputation for excellence! Employers are always looking for talented individuals with a desire or hunger to learn. They are always looking and waiting for excellent people to become available. While there is no such thing as job security, excellence is the best remedy for a changing and challenging marketplace.

I didn't grasp the full significance of this phenomenon until I was older and saw examples of people who always seemed to be in demand, even when others were losing their jobs. A friend who had worked at the same company for a number of years was concerned about her job prospects when the owner of the company decided to retire and close the business. She thought she would have a difficult time finding another job since she was older and most of the workforce in her industry was so much younger. Yet, as soon as the word got out that her company was closing, she was bombarded with offers—from companies who knew of her reputation for excellence and wanted to have her on their team!

This can be seen in other areas too, especially the sports industry. Imagine, for example, that after winning numerous championships in basketball over recent years, the Los Angeles Lakers were bought by a new ownership group. And imagine that the new owners decided they wanted to start over with their own group of players and coaches, so they fired the coach, Phil Jackson, and the star player, Kobe Bryant. How long do you think it would take for Coach Jackson and perennial All-Star Bryant to get new jobs? About a nanosecond! Why? Because they both have developed reputations for excellence.

Today, there are excellent workers who, through no fault of their own, have lost their jobs because of economic conditions. Companies that were once market leaders, like Woolworth's department stores, or Lehman Brothers, lost market share and laid off workers or closed up shop completely. Without question, the workers who had developed a reputation for excellence were always the first to get hired by other companies. Why? Employers are always looking for great talent and seeking people who have a reputation for excellence.

The secret, though, is to develop a reputation for excellence before you need it! As the old saying goes, "It is always best to dig your well before you are thirsty!"

THE POWER OF A REPUTATION OF EXCELLENCE

My childhood friend Biddy and I started college together at American University in Washington, D.C. During her sophomore year, Biddy got married, left school, and started working in the federal government as an entry-level employee. Her job was to answer phones and to make photocopies of policy manuals. Yet she did her job with such zeal that she quickly became a hit in the office. She would answer the phones by saying, "It's a great day! How can I serve you?" And she did that from nine o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the evening. She would even answer the phone with that same enthusiasm after hours while she waited for her husband, Dexter, to pick her up. She often worked an extra hour every

day, never looking at the clock and always focusing on what needed to be done!

When she was asked to make photocopies, she would make them with such precision that many people in the office thought they had been sent out to a printing company. When she made copies of the training manuals, Bidy made an extra one that she could read at night so she could create a list of suggested improvements to share with her supervisor. Bidy would always say: "If these make sense to you, please feel free to use them. If not, just throw them in the trash." Even though she enjoyed her job, she often talked about going back to college and finishing her degree as soon as she and her husband could get their finances straightened out.

Bidy quickly moved from an entry-level position (GS-2) to that of an administrator (GS-7) before she became pregnant with her first child. When she returned from maternity leave, she showed the same spirit of excellence. She still answered the phones with enthusiasm, even after hours. She still made photocopies with a precision that astounded the staff, continuing to make one for herself and jotting down ideas that she thought might be helpful for the team. She moved from a GS-7 up to a GS-9, and then she became pregnant again.

This time, however, the cost of placing two children in childcare was more than Bidy brought in! Dexter told her it would be more cost-effective if she stayed home. She did, for a few years, but once the kids were school-age, Bidy started looking into going back to work. A federal government job freeze proved a challenge, and the only job that was available was at an entry level (GS-2), answering phones and making

photocopies of the policy manuals, where she had begun years earlier! Needless to say, Biddy took the job and went back to work with the same enthusiasm and the same work ethic as before.

One day when she answered the phone, the person on the other end was someone she had not heard from in many years. It was her very first supervisor, and he had been trying to find her! He spoke of how he had never forgotten the impact of her positive attitude. He had raved to others over the years about her Attitude of Excellence and that her positive attitude had become a model he shared with new employees. He explained he was now the director of a new agency and he was looking for a special assistant. He wondered if she would be willing to leave her present job to come work with him. Of course, that would entail a raise that was outside the dimensions of the freeze. Plus, she would have a staff of people she would supervise! She giggled and said, “Excuse me, sir, . . . when do I start?”

She took the job and was excellent in the position, continuing to go the extra mile. When others didn’t quickly answer the phone, she would with her characteristic: “It’s a great day! How can I serve you?”

Today, Biddy continues to show that excellence truly is the best job security and job advancement strategy. She is now the director of policy and programs for the Department of Energy and continues to pursue excellence with a passion! And, she literally gets job offers every week. Recently, I spoke at a government agency where she used to work. When I mentioned I knew her, the staff raved about how she had been such a bright

light and how her enthusiasm for excellence had been contagious throughout their organization. They all talked about her Attitude of Excellence!

And by the way, when her first child graduated from college, so did Bidy—on the same day. Bidy had found a way to go back to college while working and raising her children. When I asked Bidy the secret to her success, she told me, “I learned that excellence offers no excuses but rather focuses on getting the job done, even in the midst of challenging situations. There is no substitute for excellence,” she went on. “It is the best job security!”

