

Tom Peters'

EXCELLENCE!

“THE WORKS”

A Half-Century's Reflections/1966-2016

Chapter FIVE:

The 34 BFOs

(Blinding Flashes of the Obvious)

01 January 2016

(10+ years of presentation slides at tompeters.com)

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This—circa January 2016—is my best shot. It took 50 years to write! (From 1966, Vietnam, U.S. Navy ensign, combat engineer/Navy Seabees—my 1st “management” job—to today, 2016.) It is ... **“THE WORKS.”** THE WORKS is presented in PowerPoint format—but it includes 50,000++ words of annotation, the equivalent of a 250-page book.

The times are nutty—and getting nuttier at an exponential pace. I have taken into account as best I can (there really are no “experts”) the current context. But I have given equal attention to more or less eternal (i.e., human) verities that will continue to drive organizational performance and a quest for EXCELLENCE for the next several years—and perhaps beyond. (Maybe this bifurcation results from my odd adult life circumstances: 30 years in Silicon Valley, 20 years in Vermont.)

Enjoy.

Steal.

P-L-E-A-S-E try something, better yet several somethings.* ** *** *****

* Make no mistake ... **THIS IS A 17-CHAPTER BOOK** ... which happens to be in PowerPoint format; I invite you to join me in this unfinished—half century to date—journey.

** My “Life Mantra #1”: WTTMSW/Whoever Tries The Most Stuff Wins.

*** I am quite taken by N.N. Taleb’s term “antifragile” (it’s the title of his most recent book). The point is not “resilience” in the face of change; that’s reactive. Instead the idea is proactive—literally “getting off” on the madness per se; perhaps I somewhat anticipated this with my 1987 book, *Thriving on Chaos*.

**** Re “new stuff,” this presentation has benefited immensely from Social Media—e.g., I have learned a great deal from my 125K+ twitter followers; that is, some fraction of this material is “crowdsourced.”

***** ***I am not interested in providing a “good presentation.” I am interested in spurring practical action. Otherwise, why waste your time—or mine?***

Note: There is considerable **DUPLICATION** in what follows. I do not imagine you will read this book straight through. Hence, to some extent, each chapter is a stand-alone story.

Epigraphs

“Business has to give people enriching, rewarding lives ... or it's simply not worth doing.” —Richard Branson

“Your customers will never be any happier than your employees.” —John DiJulius

“We have a strategic plan. It's called ‘doing things.’ ” —Herb Kelleher

“You miss 100% of the shots you never take.” —Wayne Gretzky

“Ready. Fire. Aim.” —Ross Perot

“Execution is strategy.” —Fred Malek

“Avoid moderation.” —Kevin Roberts

“I'm not comfortable unless I'm uncomfortable.” —Jay Chiat

“It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it.”
—John DiJulius on social media

“Courtesies of a small and trivial character are the ones which strike deepest in the grateful and appreciating heart.” —Henry Clay

“You know a design is cool when you want to lick it.” —Steve Jobs

“This will be the women's century.” —Dilma Rousseff

“Be the best. It's the only market that's not crowded.” —George Whalin

First Principles. Guiding Stars. Minimums.

*** EXECUTION! The “Last 99%.”**

GET IT (Whatever) DONE.

*** EXCELLENCE. Always. PERIOD.**

*** People REALLY First! Moral Obligation #1.**

*** EXPONENTIAL Tech Tsunami.**

GET OFF ON CONTINUOUS UPHEAVALS!

*** Innovate or DIE!**

WTTMSW/Whoever Tries The Most Stuff Wins!

*** Women Buy (EVERYTHING)!**

Women Are the Best Leaders! Women RULE!

*** Oldies Have (All of) the Market Power!**

*** DESIGN Matters! EVERYWHERE!**

*** Maximize TGRs!/Things Gone RIGHT!**

*** SMEs, Age of/“Be the Best,**

It’s the Only Market That’s Not Crowded”

*** Moderation KILLS!**

NEW WORLD ORDER ?!

0810/2011:

Apple > Exxon*

0724/2015:

Amazon > Walmart**

***Market capitalization; Apple became #1 in the world.**

****Market capitalization; Walmart is a “Fortune 1” company—the biggest in the world by sales.**

Phew.

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Chapter FIVE

The ...

34 BFOs*

***Blinding Flash(es) of the Obvious**

**This Is the (OBVIOUS)
Stuff I Care About.**

**This Is the (OBVIOUS)
Stuff, the Absence of
Which Sends Me Into a ...
BLIND RAGE.**

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The 34 BFOs*

***Blinding Flash(es) of the Obvious**

NOTE: In 1985, I gave a 2-day seminar to YPO members in Manhattan. As we moved to close, I asked for feedback. Early on, a chap by the name of Manny Garcia got up to speak—Manny, who became a pal, was one of Burger King's top franchisees. He began, "I really didn't hear anything new in the two days"—you could have heard my sharp intake of breath in the back row. He continued, "I'd add that this was probably the best seminar I've attended in my many years in business." Huh? "I'd call it a **'BLINDING FLASH OF THE OBVIOUS.' We KNOW all these things—but time and again we fail to relentlessly practice them." In retrospect, I consider Manny's feedback to be the best I've ever gotten.**

There will be ... GUARANTEED ... nothing new in the slides in this section. We know putting people REALLY first translates into mid- to long-term growth and maximized profitability. SO WHY DON'T WE DO IT? We know ... GREAT TRAINING ... pays for itself 100 times over—in business just much as in sports and the arts. SO WHY DON'T WE DO IT? We know a simple "THANK YOU" is the greatest of all motivators. SO WHY DON'T WE DO IT? And on—and on—it goes.

Frankly, I am in a rotten mood. If I was preaching rocket science, and people didn't "get it," that'd be one thing. But each point in this section amounts to, beyond doubt, a, yes ... BLINDING FLASH OF THE OBVIOUS.

Damn it! Let's get a move on! It is indeed obvious, then ... **NO EXCUSES!**

BFO #1: If you (RELIGIOUSLY) help people—
EVERY SINGLE PERSON, JUNIOR OR SENIOR, LIFER OR TEMP—grow and reach/exceed their perceived potential, then they in turn will bust their individual and collective butts to create great experiences for Clients—and the “bottom line” will get fatter and fatter and fatter. (ANYBODY LISTENING?)

(PEOPLE FIRST = MAXIMIZED PROFITABILITY. PERIOD.)

(ANYBODY LISTENING?) (FYI: “*People FIRST*” message 10X more urgent than ever in the high-engagement “**AGE OF SOCIAL BUSINESS.**”)

**BFO 2: ENABLING “ALL
HANDS” GROWTH/
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
IS ... LEADER DUTY #1.**

(And ALL good things flow there from.)

BFO 3: The “CTO”/Chief Training Officer should
(**MUST!**) be on a par with the CFO/CMO.

**TRAINING =
INVESTMENT #1.**

(8 of 10 CEOs see training as an “expense,” not
an investment/prime asset booster.) (*“Our
training courses are so good they make
me want to giggle.” “Our trainers are on
the same pay scale as our engineers.”*)

(In a 45-minute “tour d’horizon” of the
enterprise: **GUARANTEE 9 of 10 CEOs* [*10 of
10?] wouldn’t once mention training.**

THAT = DISGRACE.)

BFO 4: OUT-READ 'EM.

AGE 17. AGE 77. 2014: READ &
GROW ... or wilt.

(One financial services superstar pegs CEO problem #1:
“They don’t read enough.”) **STUDENTHOOD**
(OBSESSION THEREWITH) (for ALL of us) **FOR LIFE!**

BFO 5: Organizations one & all exist for ONE reason ...

TO BE OF SERVICE. PERIOD.

(And effective leaders in turn are ...

SERVANT LEADERS. PERIOD.)

quality, service, you name it) ... is the typically under-attended ... **FIRST-LINE BOSS**. (Your FULL CADRE of 1st-line bosses is arguably ... **ASSET #1**.)

BFO 7: WTTMSW. (Whoever Tries The Most Stuff Wins.) **WTTMSASTMSUTFW**. (Whoever Tries The Most Stuff And Screws The Most Stuff Up The Fastest Wins.) Practical translation #1: Winning through the Discipline of **QUICK PROTOTYPES**.

READY. FIRE. AIM.

Winners:

**“RELENTLESS
EXPERIMENTATION.”**

“A Bias For Action”: **#1** Success Requisite in 1982.

“A Bias For Action”: **#1** Success Requisite in 2016.

▪
BFO 8: “Fail faster. Succeed sooner.”

“FAIL. FORWARD. FAST.”

“Fail. Fail again. Fail better.”

“REWARD excellent failures. PUNISH mediocre successes.”

Book/Farson: “Whoever Makes The Most Mistakes Wins.”

We do NOT “accept”/ “tolerate” failures.

WE CELEBRATE FAILURES.

BFO 9:

Excellence is NOT an “aspiration.”

Excellence IS the next 5 minutes.

(Or not.)

BFO 10: Enabling change Rule #1: It's NOT NOT NOT about “vanquishing (‘ignorant’) foes.” It's ALL ALL ALL about RELENTLESSLY seeking & recruiting & nurturing ... **ALLIES.**

BFO 11: The Gospel of “**SMALL WINS.**” You and your Allies cobble together a skein of successful trials (“small wins”); momentum around this portfolio of demos more important than any high-investment Big Victory.

**(ALLIES + SMALL WINS +
MOMENTUM = UNSTOPPABLE.)**

BFO 12: Year = 220 LUNCHES.

WASTE NOT ONE. Cross-functional SNAFUs #1 problem for most orgs. Software ... **WILL NOT** ... fix it. **ONLY** ... “Social Stuff” works—e.g., makin’ pals in other functions; **LUNDH = Strategy #1.**

Goal: **XFX/Cross-Functional**

Excellence ... or die trying. Requisite: **DAILY/RELENTLESS ATTENTION & ALL-HANDS-ALL-THE-TIME ENGAGEMENT.**

BFO 13: *In Search of Excellence* in 6 words:

“Hard is soft. Soft is Hard.”

(E.g., Numbers are the “soft stuff”—witness the crash.
Solid relationships/ integrity/trust/teamwork = True “hard stuff.”)

Strategy is important.

Systems are important.

CULTURE is ... MORE IMPORTANT.

(Serious change = Tackling the culture. PERIOD.)

(In his autobiography, even “Mr. Analysis,” Lou Gerstner, IBM turnaround CEO, reluctantly acknowledged culture’s unequivocal primacy in the big-change-game.)

BFO 14: We Are What We Eat = WE ARE WHO WE HANG OUT WITH. (“Hang out with ‘cool’ and thou shalt become more cool. Hang out with ‘dull’ and thou shalt become more dull.”)

RELIGIOUSLY-CONSCIOUSLY MANAGE

“HANG OUT.” EVERY “hang out decision” (employees/customers/ vendors/consultants/ lunch mates/board composition/ locale/etc.) is a ... **STRATEGIC INNOVATION**

DECISION.

(Diversity [ON ANY DIMENSION YOU CAN NAME] an imperative in confusing times.)

(Hire for ... **CURIOSITY**. EXPLICITLY.)

BFO 15: Apple market cap surpasses Exxon Mobil.

Why? **D-E-S-I-G-N**. Are YOU obsessed by ...

DESIGN? (In **EVERY** nook and cranny of **EVERY** tiny or humongous enterprise—and in your own professional affairs.) (DESIGN is an instinctive STATE OF MIND as well as a set of practices.) (Less than EXCELLENCE in functionality = Unacceptable.) (Less than SUPER-COOL aesthetics = Unacceptable.)

BFO 16: **LBT/TGR MULTIPLIER POWER.**

Ceaselessly seek the LBTs/ **Little BIG Things**.

“Small stuff” ... BIG Impact: Walmart increases (mere) shopping basket size, small appliance sales up 50%.

Reducing TGWs/Things Gone Wrong invaluable. BUT ... put at least as much effort into remorselessly accumulating

TGRs/THINGS GONE RIGHT.

(E.g. Disney's OBSESSION with a memorable Start & Finish courtesy ... PARKING LOT EXCELLENCE.)

BFO 17:

WOMEN BUY EVERYTHING.

WOMEN ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE LEADERS.

**WOMEN ARE THE MOST SUCCESSFUL
INVESTORS.**

(Does your organization ... UNMISTAKABLY ... reflect these immutable truths from stem to stern?) (***“This will be the women’s century.”***—Dilma Rousseff, president of Brazil, opening address U.N. General Assembly)

BFO 18: KEEP ADDING VALUE.

IBM To IBM: Machine dominance to Business

Services dominance. **UPS** to **UPS**: delivering

Parcels to Managing Logistics Systems.

(**EVERYONE’s** game: “Customer **SATISFACTION**” to “Systemic customer **SOLUTIONS**”)

BFO 19: Forget B-I-G. (100% of biggies UNDER-perform long-term.) Instead build national wealth around ...

“MITTELSTAND” companies—

MIDSIZE SUPERSTAR

NICHE-/MICRO-NICHE

DOMINATORS —in ANY category you can

name. (C.f., Germany’s Mittelstand worldbeaters—#1

global exporter for years.) (Battle cry: **“BE THE**

BEST. IT’S THE ONLY MARKET THAT’S

NOT CROWDED.” WHY ELSE BOTHER?)

(FYI: **ANYTHING/EVERYTHING** subject to

MIND-BOGGING ADDED-VALUE/

DIFFERENTIATION.

[BANISH the word ... “commodity.”])

BFO 20: The problem is **RARELY** the problem. The lackluster **RESPONSE** to the problem is invariably the real problem. Answer? Slavishly adhere to these two response commandments: **LIGHTENING-FAST RESPONSE OVERKILL. UNEQUIVOCAL QUICK-TIME APOLOGY.**

BFO 21: What do people (MOST) desire—including thee and me? **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.** So: Show your appreciation ... **BIG TIME/ALL THE TIME.** (Track it ... **RELIGIOUSLY!**) (“Acknowledgement” is ... **THE MOST POWERFUL WORD IN THE LEADER’S VOCABULARY.**)

BFO 22: The two most powerful words in the English language are?

No contest: **“THANK YOU.”**
(**ACT ACCORDINGLY—e.g., OBSESSIVELY.**)

BFO 23: Have you done your **MBWA**/ Managing By Wandering Around ... TODAY? If not, why not? (Hint: There are ... ZERO ACCEPTABLE EXCUSES.)

BFO 24: Your CALENDAR knows your TRUE priorities. Do YOU?

You ... ARE ... your calendar.

Your calendar ... NEVER LIES.

(Drucker: Best bosses do ONE thing at a Time)

BFO 25: What is the individual's/organization's #1 enduring strategic asset? Easy: **ASSET #1** = INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE EXCELLENCE AT ...

L-I-S-T-E-N-I-N-G. (Listening can be ...

TAUGHT. Listening PER SE is a ... PROFESSION. Are YOU a “stellar professional listener”? THINK ABOUT IT. PLEASE.)

BFO 26:

LEADERSHIP is not about ABSTRACTIONS.

LEADERSHIP is about ... MASTERING DISCREET SKILLS.

E.g.:

“Aggressive ‘professional’ listener.”

Meetings as leadership opportunity #1.

Creating a “civil society.”

Expert at “helping.” (Helping “*professional*.”)

Expert at holding productive conversations.

Fanatic about clear communications.

Fanatic about training.

Master of appreciation/acknowledgement.

Effective at apology.

Creating a culture of automatic helpfulness by all to all.

Presentation excellence.

Conscious master of body language.

Master of hiring. (Hiring “*professional*”)

Master of evaluating people.

Avid practitioner of MBWA/Managing By Wandering Around.

Avid student of the process of influencing others per se.

Student of decision-making/devastating impact of irrational aspects thereof.

Creating a no-nonsense execution culture.

Meticulous about employee development/100% of staff.

Student of the power of “d”iversity (all flavors of difference).

Aggressive in pursuing gender balance.

Making team-building excellence everyone’s daily priority.

Understanding value of matchless 1st-line management.

BFO 27: Aim to make EVERY internal and external experience (PRODUCT/ SERVICE/SYSTEM/EMPLOYEE INTERACTION/CUSTOMER INTERACTION/

COMMUNITY INTERACTION) a ... **WOW!**

(WOW = WOW. USE THE “W-WORD” PER SE!

E.g., Do 4 out of your Top 5 projects score 8 or above on a 10-point “WOW Scale”?

If not, get on it:

NOW.

TODAY.

WITHIN THE HOUR.

WOW-ify!

WOW Now.)

BFO 28: While on the topic of ... **WOW:**

White collar work is by and large ticketed to fall prey to artificial intelligence/eye-popping algorithms as well as globalization. Stand there and take it on the chin?

NO.

My answer/1999 book/*The Professional Service Firm 50:*

CONVERT EVERY “DEPARTMENT”/ “UNIT” [AND YOURSELF] INTO A FULL-FLEDGED ...

“PSF”/PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FIRM ...

WHOLLY DEDICATED TO ... EXCELLENCE

& WOW & ADDING SKYSCRAPING

VALUE TO THEIR/ YOUR CUSTOMERS’

[USUALLY INTERNAL CUSTOMERS]

ACTIVITIES.

Why not?

There is no good reason not to proceed in this direction within the fortnight!

**BFO 29: EVERY DAY PROVIDES A DOZEN
(LITERALLY) LEADERSHIP
OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERY ONE OF US.**
(Every = EVERY. From the most junior—and
even the 3-day temp—to the Big Dudes.)
GRAB AT LEAST ONE.

**BFO 30: Circa 2016+: You (me/all of
us) totally misunderstand overall
econ context if you choose not to
start today on ... **RPD/Radical
Personal Development.****

BFO 31: CIVILITY WORKS. CIVILITY PAYS.

E.g.: **K = R = P.**

Kindness =

Repeat business =

Profit.

(ONE MORE TIME: “Kindness” is N-O-T “Soft.”)

BFO 32: Most of us/most organizations discount ... INTROVERTS. THAT IS A ... 1ST ORDER STRATEGIC BLUNDER. (Please read Susan Cain's book *QUIET. It was a no-bull lifechanger for me.*)

BFO 33: Listen (HARD) to my old D.C. boss, Fred Malek:

“EXECUTION IS STRATEGY.”

(Kelleher/Southwest: “We have a ‘strategic plan.’ **DOING THINGS.**”) (Welch/GE: “In real life, strategy is actually very straightforward. Pick a general direction ... **AND IMPLEMENT LIKE HELL.**”) (Charles Munger, Berkshire Hathaway: “Costco figured out the big, simple things and executed with total fanaticism.”) (Execution: That all-important ... **“LAST 99 PERCENT.”**)

BFO 34: The Works ...

SEGEW 2016: SERVICE!-ENGAGEMENT!-GROWTH!-EXCELLENCE!-WOW!

Employees as 1st customers

Acknowledgement & Respect

Commitment to Personal Growth & Training-to-Die-For

Engagement

Work Worth Doing

Peerless 1st-line Leadership Cadre Committed to Employee Growth

MBWA Obsession

Seamless Cross-functional Excellence

360-degree “Social” Engagement Inside & Outside the Firm

Co-creation of Everything

A Moral Service Ethos

(Each other/Vendors/Customers/Customers’ Customers/Communities)

An Ethos of Helping (“On the Bus” or “Off the Bus”)

Scintillating Design—Aesthetics & Functionality—Pervades Every

Aspect of the Business (Inside & Outside)

Provision of Extraordinary Customer (& Employee) Experiences

Obsession With TGRs/Things Gone Right

Matchless Quality

“Services Added”/Extended-Integrated-Partnered Solutions

to Broad Customer Needs

Relentless Experimentation (“Bias for Action”/Instant Prototyping/

Celebration of “Excellent Failures”/Transparency/

Pursuit of “Multipliers”)

JOY! (In All We Do)

GROWTH! (In All We Do)

WOW! (In All We Do)

EXCELLENCE! (In All We Do)