

Tom Peters In Search of Excellence²⁵: 1982–2007

“In no small part, what American corporations have become is what Peters has encouraged them to be.”—The New Yorker

“Peters is ... the father of the post-modern corporation.”—Los Angeles Times

“We live in a Tom Peters world.”—Fortune

Fortune called Tom Peters the “Ur-guru” of management, and compares him to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and H.L. Mencken. The *Economist* tagged him the “Uber-guru”[™]—and *BusinessWeek*’s take on his “unconventional views” led them to label Peters “business’ best friend and worst nightmare.” In 2004, the Bloomsbury Press book ***Movers and Shakers: The 100 Most Influential Figures in Modern Business*** reviewed the historical contributions of pathbreaking management thinkers and practitioners, from Machiavelli and J.P. Morgan to Tom and Jack Welch. The summary entry on Tom’s impact:

“Tom Peters has probably done more than anyone else to shift the debate on management from the confines of boardrooms, academia, and consultancies to a broader, worldwide audience, where it has become the staple diet of the media and managers alike. Peter Drucker has written more and his ideas have withstood a longer test of time, but it is Peters—as consultant, writer, columnist, seminar lecturer, and stage performer—whose energy, style, influence, and ideas have shaped new management thinking.”

When Tom & Bob Waterman wrote *In Search of Excellence* 25 years ago, they introduced the world of business to the idea and value of Excellence per se as an inspiring and profitable aspiration—at a time when America’s competitiveness was under fullblown assault. The world and management practice have changed in the years following *Search*, and although the companies profiled have adapted remarkably well along the way, the challenges today are more daunting than ever. Excellence as a way of life and an unmatched competitive advantage has never been more important.

In 1999, *Search* was honored by NPR as one of the “Top Three Business Books of the Century”—and ranked as the “greatest business book of all time” in a 2002 poll by Britain’s Bloomsbury Publishing. Tom followed *Search* with over a dozen additional international bestsellers. Among them: ***A Passion for Excellence*** (1985, with Nancy Austin); ***Thriving on Chaos*** (1987); ***Liberation Management*** (1992: acclaimed as the “Management Book of the Decade” for the ‘90s); the millennium trioka in 1999 on Reinventing Work in the face of new global competition (***The Brand You50***, ***The Project50***, and ***The Professional Service Firm50***); and, in 2003, the provocative, colorful ***Re-imagine! Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age***. He is currently working on a book that renews and strengthens his clarion call for Excellence.

Two Tom Peters biographies have been published: ***Corporate Man to Corporate Skunk: The Tom Peters Phenomenon*** and ***Tom Peters: The Bestselling Prophet of the Management Revolution*** (part of a four-book series of business biographies on Peters, Bill Gates, Peter Drucker, and Warren Buffet). In a 2002 in-depth analytic study, Accenture’s Institute for Strategic Change scored Peters 2nd among the top 50 “Business Intellectuals.”

Tom, who is widely credited with almost single-handedly launching the “management guru industry,” now billions of dollars in size, writes, reflects, and then presents some 60 or so major seminars each year, more than half outside the U.S. He estimates that since 1978, when the work on *Search* began, he’s given about 2,500 speeches, flown 5,000,000+ miles, spoken before 2,000,000 to 3,000,000 people, and presented in 47 states and 63 countries. Since 2004, Tom also has devoted significant energy to his award-winning (a “Top 500” designation) blog—www.tompeters.com.

Leadership guru Warren Bennis, the only person close to both Tom and the late Peter Drucker, told a journalist, “If Peter Drucker invented modern management, Tom Peters vivified it.” In fact, as even Tom’s book titles indicate, his passion is passion: Destruction & Re-imaginings ... liberating talent for a hypercompetitive world ... the Herculean task of sustaining Entrepreneurial Excellence. Among Tom’s newer passions & provocations are: Women-as-Leaders particularly suited for these times; the supreme role of Design in differentiation; gaining advantage in the enormous, underserved market represented by Women (controllers of ¾ of the world’s wealth) and the burgeoning, financially potent Boomer-Geezer population. Now, Tom is once again pursuing, with characteristic determination ... Excellence, variety 2007. “There is no higher aim,” he says, “than the relentless pursuit of Excellence. On the 25th anniversary of our book, I am re-dedicating myself to the search that began in 1982. That is: The search continues ...”

Born in Baltimore in 1942 with lacrosse stick in his hands, and residing in Silicon Valley from 1970–2000, Tom now lives on a 1,600-acre working farm in Vermont with his wife, the artist and entrepreneur Susan Sargent. He is a civil engineering graduate of Cornell (B.C.E., M.C.E.) and earned an MBA and Ph.D. at Stanford; he holds honorary doctorates from several institutions, including the University of San Francisco and, oddly, the State University of Management in Moscow. In the U.S. Navy from 1966–1970, he made two deployments to Vietnam (as a Navy Seabee) and “survived a tour in the Pentagon.” He was a White House drug-abuse advisor in 1973–74, and then worked at McKinsey & Co. from 1974–1981, becoming a Partner and Organization Effectiveness practice leader in 1979.

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