

EXCELLENCE

5. If Not Excellence, What? If Not Excellence Now, When?

"Strive for excellence. Ignore success."— Professional driver Bill Young

"Excellence can be obtained if you:

" ... care more *than others think is wise*;

" ... risk more *than others think is safe*;

" ... dream more *than others think is practical*;

" ... expect more *than others think is possible*."

—K. Sriram @ tompeters.com

"A minute. You 'achieve' Excellence by promising yourself right now that you'll never again knowingly do anything that's not Excellent—regardless of any pressure to do otherwise by any boss or situation." —Tom Watson, IBM, approximate words, on how long it takes to achieve Excellence

6. Whither Excellence? Or: Asleep at the Wheel. One of our best business analysts, James B. Stewart, offered this "simple" commentary on the staggering decline of General Motors (in the June 3, 2009, *Wall Street Journal*): "It has been long in coming, this slow death of what was once the greatest and biggest corporation in the world. The myriad causes of its demise have been thoroughly chronicled, but to my mind one stands out: The custodians of GM simply gave up trying to build the best cars in the world. *To accommodate a host of competing interests, from shareholders to bondholders to labor, they repeatedly compromised on excellence.* Once sacrificed, that reputation has proved impossible to recapture. ... Can anyone say GM builds the best cars in any category?"

And you?

Has the word "EXCELLENCE" per se been used as a basis for evaluating your actions? Could you personally call the outcome of each meeting or the nature of the milestone/s achieved "EXCELLENT"?

Key idea: The "Excellence Standard" is *not* about Grand Outcomes. In Zen-like terms, all we have is today. If the day's work cannot be assessed as Excellent, then the oceanic overall goal of Excellence has not been advanced. *Period.*

7. "Quality": You'll Know It When You See It. Six Sigma is "good stuff"—great stuff. No doubt whatsoever about it. From a more encompassing standpoint, the quality "movement" added billions upon billions of dollars to America's bottom line. Only ... Whoops! Better car quality—which we surely got from GM and Ford—was supposed to have saved the U.S. automotive industry from the Japanese automotive onslaught.

Am I suggesting you scrap quality programs? Hardly! But "quality," as it's commonly understood, is Six Sigma-ish and readily measured. But there's more to it. Much more. I believe that "quality," like "Excellence," is one of those ... "I'll know it when I see it" ... words. So quantify quality all you want (please do!) ... but don't forget that quality is equally—nay, primarily—determined by something that is elusive, mysterious, indefinable. *And ...* in the eye of the beholder.

Bottom line: Give the "soft side" of quality the respect it deserves!

8. Excellence Is ...

Excellence is the best defense.
Excellence is the best offense.
Excellence is the answer in good times.
Excellence is the answer in tough times.
(Excellence is *the* answer in tough times.)
Excellence is about the big things.
Excellence is about the little things.
Excellence is a relationship.
Excellence is a philosophy.
Excellence is an aspiration.
Excellence is immoderate.
Excellence is a pragmatic standard.
Excellence is execution.
Excellence is selfish.
Excellence is selfless.
Excellence is what keeps you awake.
Excellence is what lets you sleep well.
Excellence is a moving target.
Excellence is that which ... knows no bounds.

EXCELLENCE. Always.

If not EXCELLENCE, what?

If not EXCELLENCE now, when?

EXCELLENCE is not an "aspiration."

EXCELLENCE is the next five minutes.

This document is #2 in a series of 48 highlights from Tom Peters' *The Little BIG Things: 163 Ways to Pursue Excellence* (HarperStudio, 2010). For more information, visit tompeters.com.

