

Excellence: Thoughts on Tom Watson

In 1982, I co-wrote with Bob Waterman a book called *In Search of Excellence*. We may have been among the first to pair the word “Excellence” with the word “business.” At any rate, I fell in love with the word because, to me, it is such an incredible aspiration to pursue Excellence. In fact, I really don’t understand the pursuit of anything else.

Somebody posted anonymously at my website a year or so ago, and they captured it pretty darn well. They said, “Excellence can be obtained if you care more than others think is wise, if you risk more than others think is safe, if you dream more than others think is practical, if you expect more than others think is possible.”

It’s said that somebody asked Tom Watson, the legendary IBM founder, at one point, “How long does it take to achieve Excellence?” Mr. Watson was, in fact, an Excellence fanatic. And Watson apparently replied—long before Ken Blanchard in *The One-Minute Manager*—Watson said, “One minute.” He said, “The secret to Excellence is a deep-seated personal commitment to the fact that you will never again knowingly do anything that is not Excellence.”

And so these days I conclude all of my presentations with, “Excellence always. If not Excellence, what? If not Excellence now, when?”