

**Getting Things
(THAT MATTER)
Done Against the Odds
and in the Inky-black
Shadow Cast by
the Guardians of
the Status Quo**

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This essay is *not* autobiographical—heaven forbid. On the other hand, it is autobiographical—heaven forbid.

The ideas that led to *In Search of Excellence* were welcomed by my employer, McKinsey & Co., like a cold sore in February; partners, almost to the man (and occasional woman), felt that I was betraying the canon that underpinned McKinsey’s success—that is, vaulting the usually glossed over “soft stuff,” like an abiding emphasis on people and relationships, over the “hard stuff,” like developing brilliant business analyses and paper strategies. Today, some say that the ideas from Bob Waterman’s and my book, altered and expanded, to be sure, underpin something like a whopping fifty percent of the firm’s business. After leaving McKinsey, “they” say I “invented” the “management guru industry”—for better or for worse. In both instances, overstated or not, I was at war with some pretty big folks, and managed to survive and make a bit of progress concerning the ideas about which I was so passionate and with which, I believed, firms of all sorts could increase their odds of sustainable success.

Here’s what I think I’ve learned from my many accumulated cuts and scratches—at least the bits that also seem to match up with the stories of successful people and organizations I’ve been collecting for the last three or so decades.

Key words:

Passion

Enthusiasm

Knowledge

Positive/NEVER Negative

Allies/Allies/Allies

Credit Sharing/Self Effacement

Presentation Excellence

Listening Skills

Network Obsession

Show up

Keep Showin' Up
Political Mastery
Execution Fanaticism
Indirection/Invisibility/"End runs"
Demos/Small Wins/Speed
Impatience
Patience
Civility
Excellence
Wow
Tenacity/Tireless

As usual, every bit of it is as obvious as the end of your nose. And, as usual, my retort to myself is that in "getting things done" it's overlooking the commonsensical in pursuit of the clever that gets us in trouble. Enough with the preview. On with the show:

1. "Gotta do it" vs. "Wanna do it." Warren Bennis says leaders don't "want to be a leader"; instead there is something they are determined to *do*, and becoming a leader is the only route to getting done that merciless aspiration that hovers over you "24/7/forever." Effective leadership in this context means leading a change or transformation agenda, and implementing such an agenda is invariably painful, if ultimately rewarding. One is rarely willing to endure such pain for an extended period (years, even decades!) unless the cause is perceived as a mighty one. In my case, the work that led to *In Search of Excellence* was incredibly painful ... and a labor of pure love. I had a contrarian view of the world in the eyes of the high and mighty (of which I was decidedly not one!), and I wanted desperately to have and hold onto the opportunity to inject that view into McKinsey's rarefied world, and indeed the world at large. "Working the content was my first love"—but I became painfully aware that to make a difference meant spending 80 percent of my time, for years on end, plunging headlong into corporate politics at the headquarters level; it also required painstakingly, and often sub rosa, building and nurturing a base of allies. I ended up spending a lot of time on things I found irritating and with people whose company I did not enjoy—and in fact got fired in the process and emotionally battered beyond the recognition of even my best friends. Only the "gotta do it" essence of the work saved my soul and skin—in the long run. In my study of large-scale organizational change, my story is as ordinary as ordinary can be.

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2. Um, know what you're talking about before you open your mouth! Don't "go public" until you "know your stuff" cold and have tested it a gazillion times, out of the public eye, with supportive colleagues. To be sure, you'll learn one helluva lot more as you go along, and alter your pitch more times than you can count. *But make damn sure the substance is good and wide and deep and the data are rock-solid reliable and that you refer to outside superstars (e.g. folks who've made similar things work and pay off, perhaps academics who can add solid-gold intellectual confirmation); and make sure you can respond effectively to most any challenge, legitimate or petty.* (Though respond gently, oh so gently and humbly, allowing as how there *are* other views that may be just as powerful—arrogance is so so easy to exude since you "love your stuff" and in your mind your argument is unassailable as any fool should be able to see.) (In my case, I was very comfortable that my basic premise was sound and that I had the evidence to "prove it" and the experts to support it, while at the same time acknowledging—with a smile, brother, always with a smile—other points of view.) (This point is so very obvious—yet your faith and belief in what you're doing may lead you to "go public" before you are ready to intellectually defend or masterfully deflect every sort of fair and unfair challenge.)

3. You need a straight-shooter who will tell you if you are off the mark, stylistically as well as substantively. Relative to the likes of arrogance (see immediately above), you've got to have a buddy who will give you private-unvarnished feedback on how you come across—you see yourself as a paragon of patience, but she says your body language exuded borderline contempt. *(You also need a longtime buddy who will hum lullabies in your ear when you've just had the shit beaten out of you—which will regularly occur if you're on to something big.)*

4. Stay positive even if (especially when) the pain is killing you. Never ever ever ever "go negative"—no matter how stupid you think the other guy's argument is and no matter how many shots you've taken. No, you need not resort to silly-grin-positive, but you must look comfortable and matter-of-fact playing the game and taking the heat. (Maybe "affable amidst shitstorms" is a more appropriate term than "positive"?)

Never ... EVER EVER ... “go negative.”

5. Never ever sell “up” the chain until you have your compelling demos in place and your “base” of “real people” rooting for you—i.e., you have the bastids surrounded. In general, “selling up” is a stupid idea for a project or program champion. At least not until you have so well paved the road forward with successful trials and allies and outside supporters that you are almost guaranteed to prevail. Even then, there are two more rules: First, sell up in private if you’ve got an ironclad case; this gives Madam Director the chance to jump aboard, co-opt you, and act around her colleagues as if it’d been her brilliant idea from the get-go. Second, get out of the spotlight and stay out of the spotlight and let field supporters who’ve done successful trials do the selling—and let them take 100.00% of the credit. (If due, the credit will bounce back on you anyway—and who cares about credit, the point is getting your “it” done—right?)

In general, “selling up” is a stupid idea for a project or program champion.

6. Always let others take the lion’s share of the credit—while you take *all* the heat! Want to turn an “interested” ally into a “frothing supporter”? Let her take the credit for successes while you take the bullet for foul-ups! Hey, see #1 above: You’re in this because you simply must get your “it” done—not to revel in personal glory. (If the latter, fudgetabout the whole deal.)

Want to turn an “interested” ally into a “frothing supporter”? Let her take the credit for successes while you take the bullet for foul-ups!

7. Encourage others to achieve real “ownership” by visibly influencing the core design. Allies, to be resilient allies (and your allies will take shots, too), must have ownership. Co-design supporting projects in which they take the lead. Make sure they get their 25-cents worth in on all key design issues—and get at least a little bit of what they want, so the design becomes their very own. Sometimes their additions may add little or nothing substantively, or even set things back a smidgeon—no matter, they must perceive that they own it and that they are the ones whose contributions took the project over the top and without whom things would have imploded.

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8. Always be open to alterations no matter how complete you may think this or that item is. Folks are put off by “finished products”—even if they are in a flat-out rush for that finished product. “Theys” always want to feel that you *welcome* another tweak or piece of advice from them. If your presentation, for example, is too smooth, you will de facto be exuding know-it-all-ism; that’s not bad—it’s *very* bad.

9. Am I being clear: Your goal is invisibility! This thing you want to do is a big deal. In private, you froth at the mouth about its obvious change-the-world character and decry the stupidity of the idiots who are blocking you. That is, you are in fact and by definition unstable. (True of 100% of folks in the history books!) Hence, you will win by keeping as far from the limelight as possible and making sure that as many “sane” people as possible get as much of the credit for any successes as possible. *You are a human lightning rod! You will be as successful as your invisibility cloak is impermeable.*

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10. It's all politics all the time—live with it! Any serious change project challenges the status quo—and the current hierarchs who are the official guardians of the status quo—even when, or, ironically, especially when their institution is under frontal assault from outside forces and they are fully aware of the extent to which they need significant change. This is the field on which you are playing the game—act accordingly. Learn to live with reversals, to live with conflicts that are years old between Ms. X (a VP) and Mr. Y (also a VP) relative to which you become collateral damage. Some sage said, “Politics is the art of getting things done”—hence, it is your bread and butter and steak and potatoes and nachos and burritos. Politics is *not* “a necessary evil.” Politics is life if you want to fight the status quo. FYI: There are no innocents among the winners. There is no such thing as a “successful change agent” with spotless hands.

Politics is not “a necessary evil.” Politics is life if you want to successfully upend the status quo. There is no such thing as a successful change agent with spotless hands.

11. You need a “pulling guard.” I dislike using football analogies, but I’ll make a rare exception here. As you may have learned from Michael Lewis’ book *Blind Side* (there was also the movie with Sandra Bullock), the lineman who protects the star quarterback, labeled the “pulling guard,” is frequently the highest paid player on the team: That is, the protector is seen as more valuable in monetary terms than the principal he’s protecting. Translation here: While I advised you not to “sell up” prematurely, I do advise you to move heaven and earth to land a well-placed senior to protect you. Had the organization-effectiveness project initiator at McKinsey not assigned me a potent and positively disposed “pulling guard,” I would not be writing this paper. My pulling guard, Bob Waterman, who became my co-author and close friend and soul-mate, expended a ton of time and political capital over a four year stretch keeping me on life support. The good news, at least in somewhat sizeable organizations, is that you can likely find a semi-renegade supporter near the top of the hierarchy if you keep your eyes peeled and master the subtle come-on.

I strongly advise you to move heaven and earth to ferret out and land a well-placed senior to cover your back.

12. When people start stealing stuff from you, you are making enormous progress.

After all the whole point is to be stolen from—i.e. have “them” leading the way on implementation. And at its best, they don’t remember who they’ve stolen from—that is, they have internalized the program as a fact of daily life. Hooray!

13. Spend eighty (!!) percent of your time on allies—finding and developing and nurturing allies of every size and shape is the name of the winning game.

Taking allies for granted, assuming they are on board because of an initial show of support for example, is the kiss of death—and is as common as dirt. You are in a war zone, surrounded by bad guys—their delay tactics sap 101% of your physical and emotional energy. Hence, you have nothing left to give, and you end up assuming your allies are still with you and available as needed. **Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!** You *must* find the time and make the time all the time for those allies—with little touches as well as big ones. Allies must be constantly (**Constantly = Constantly**) reminded of how important they are and how critical their support is—even when they are not in positions of power. To some (large?) extent, collecting allies is at least as much a numbers game as a power game. Sure, I pulled the precise number eighty (80% of your time) out of thin air; but I think that’s about right. To mind your allies this intensively is to dramatically increase the odds of success; to fail to do it is the near guarantee of death. (You have got a ton of “substance stuff” to do; there’s no bloody time for a “social” lunch with Ms. X or Mr. Y, just to make sure they are up to speed and purring—and developing their own set of allies for the cause. Oh yes, there is time—believe it!) *(This item is perhaps the #1 reason I am writing—that is, this essay stems from a discussion with a harried big-change agent about the importance of fired-up allies, and the amount of effort that must necessarily go into keeping them fired up.)* *(Think about presidential elections in the U.S.A.—hard not to in 2012. An enormous share of the candidate’s time goes into “firing up the base” and “getting out the vote” to make sure allies come through in overwhelming numbers.)*

Taking allies for granted, assuming they are on board because of an initial show of support for example, is the kiss of death—and is as common as dirt.

14. Lunch! Relationship construction and maintenance is the key to success at, well, pretty much everything. And the best and most readily available setting for relationship building over the long haul, and regardless of the value of the new “social media,” is ...

LUNCH. Hence, it is axiomatic: Never (I’m almost serious) waste a lunch! I call it “the sacred 240 at bats,” injecting a little baseball into the conversation. That is, assuming about 240 work days a year, you have 240 lunch opportunities—a/k/a “at bats.” Each lunch not devoted to relationship building is lost, yes, and I don’t care how silly it sounds, forever. While I’m not in fact asking for quite this much single-mindedness (there are a few other things to do), I’m sure you get the point.

You will be as effective at damn near anything as your R.O.I.R.* is high. (*Return On Investment in Relationships.) Which means: Never waste a lunch!

15. Your power does not come primarily from the number of Big Dudes you’ve convinced—it comes from the demonstrated commitment of your growing Band of Sisters and Brothers. Someday, quite a ways away, you will doubtless need to assault the hierarchy—and at that point a few friends in high places don’t hurt in the least. But you don’t make the push for the summit, until, mixing a metaphor, the game has, in effect, already been won. Your success in fact will have come from recruiting an army of folks of all ranks and from hither and thither and especially yon. These are the ones who test your idea in the real world and help modify it 1,000 times to get it just right. These are the ones who like what they see and who subsequently infect their networks. It’s quite a bit like MLM—Multi Level Marketing. Networks beget networks beget inevitability begets success begets more success.

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16. Ideas suck! Demos rule! A great idea is obviously essential but will only get you part of the way down the field. Perhaps 1.5 feet on a 100-yard field. It's increasingly compelling and sophisticated demos-prototypes- "*small wins*" that do the heavy lifting. And the lifters are the allies who invest their time and energy into launching and nurturing those demos. You must start the demo/partial-demo process immediately—long before you are "ready." To get this "it" right—effective and implementable and compelling—you need to get underway ASAP. This is, once more, a plea to recruit and nurture and hide and cuddle allies—the typically rather powerless (officially) ally who is turned on by the idea and willing and eager to give some version of it a try. Right now!

Ideas suck! Demos rule!

17. Demos are cool. Stories are cooler. The research is clear. Even when the idea is incredibly sophisticated, in pursuing funding or implementation ... **BEST STORY WINS**. That is, you must take the next step, and turn the successful demo in Podunk into a "compelling yarn" about the goal and the process and the impact and the people affected. No one, literally no one, including the most analytic guy in the room, is immune to a terrific tale. (NB: Storytelling is a true art form that must be mastered to be effective.)

18. WTTMSW. WTTMSTFW. WTTMSASTMSUTFW. I call it "the only thing I've learned for sure in 48 years." (I.e., since my first job as a junior Seabee officer—combat engineer—in Vietnam in 1966.) The inimitable H. Ross Perot calls it ... **"R.F. A."**

Namely:

WTTMSW/Whoever Tries The Most Stuff Wins.

WTTMSTFW/Whoever Tries The Most Stuff The Fastest Wins.

WTTMSASTMSUTFW/Whoever Tries The Most Stuff And Screws The Most Stuff Up The Fastest Wins.

R.F.A./Ready. Fire. Aim.

And Wayne Gretzky: **“You miss 100% of the shots you never take.”**

And Samuel Beckett: **“Fail. Fail again. Fail better.”**

Works for me!

(Yup, only thing I’ve learned “for sure” in 48 years.)

(FYAmusement: My 1977 Ph.D. dissertation was labeled the “small wins theory.”)

“We made mistakes, of course. Most of them were omissions we didn’t think of when we initially wrote the software. We fixed them by doing it over and over, again and again. We do the same today. While our competitors are still sucking their thumbs trying to make the design perfect, we’re already on prototype version #5. By the time our rivals are ready with wires and screws, we are on version #10. It gets back to planning versus acting: We act from day one; others plan how to plan—for months.”—Bloomberg by Bloomberg

19. Stay away from “headquarters”—even if you, personally, are domiciled there.

“Headquarters” is by definition the home of the defenders of the status quo—and the home of the dirtiest inside politics. You want to build your army of allies from the outside in—“Away” is the best place to do that. And “far away” beats “away”—at least in the earlier days. (Sometimes I call this the “4F strategy.” That is ... Find a Fellow Freak Faraway. We need to rack up those demos, and out of sight is the safest location—so find a soul mate in the Timbuktu distribution center, and get on with a prototype ... NOW.) (This *is* a Big Deal. In my case, McKinsey HQ—and indeed its politics—was New York. And Bob Waterman and I were in San Francisco. Out of sight by 3K miles, out of mind—and in sight mostly on our terms. That was no small part of our success.)

Early demos/4F “strategy”: ***Find a Fellow Freak Faraway.***

20. Outside In. My success at McKinsey was largely thanks to clients. I'd tag along with one of my friends on one of their assignments, and try to find a way to apply some piece of my stuff. In fact, those clients were often more interested than my McKinsey partners—on several occasions they invited me to speak rather formally to their exec teams, which upon occasion led to new work. Likewise, I found several outside publications (such as *BusinessWeek*) that wanted me to write up some aspect of our effort. While any number of the powers that be wanted me to be subject to a formal gag order, they were reluctant to push back against clients. I subsequently heard some of the details of my election to partner. Numerous reasons to oppose me surfaced, but the senior partner (not Bob Waterman) pleading my case won the day with, more or less, "I understand your reluctance and share many of your concerns, but we're stuck here. Clients, virtually without exception, sing his praises, so I think we'll have to bite our tongues and vote him in." (They bit said tongues and voted "Yes.") The obvious point: Establishing an outside power base can significantly increase your immunity to the determined attacks by powerful inside forces.

21. You must not let your enemies absorb your time—or, especially, your emotional energy! Smile at 'em. Sidestep 'em. Never ever confront 'em. Remember, our strategy is 100% positive: to build and cultivate a mostly invisible, army of allies who are busily collecting data (those demos-prototypes-"small wins") and in turn recruiting their own allies. You must keep this in mind all the time. Your passion is your best friend—and worst enemy. It keeps you going "25/8"—but it also fosters an instinctively confrontational attitude, especially after months or even years of "25/8." Don't give in to anger, internal or external. Your ability to control your enemies is ... **ZERO** ... on a scale of zero to infinity. Act accordingly. (Plus, enemies wear you out. And turn you sour, where "sour" is the ultimate de-motivating no-no.)

22. ONLY positive sells. Don't sell against. Demo for. No: "I am here to tell you how f%^&* our purchasing procedures are ..." Yes: "You wouldn't believe the new type of information services purchasing agreement we tried in the Albuquerque field office—results buggered our mind. Here's the deal ..."

Don't sell against. Demo for.

23. It's not about "beating" "the other guys;" it's about your vision supplanting (occupying more space than) their vision. In your mind "all this" is or becomes a competitive struggle with the forces of right confronting the forces of might. Well, leave that "model" in the cupboard. We win when our project is up and purring and has become

the new (**EXCELLENT**) way of doing things. Your victory is the success of your implemented “it,” and the degree to which your successful allies have forgotten it was you who started the ball rolling—it is not the amount of blood spilled or enemies vanquished. Moreover, it’s never over until never—you want those “enemies” to find a gazillion ways to win in their own minds: E.g. as you proceed, invite them to make changes to “your baby”; they are smart cookies—and doubtless have a great deal to contribute, and, experience suggests, if the project pans out big time, they’ll pretend they were among the earliest adopters.

24. Be civil at all times! I cannot concoct powerful enough phrases to explain how important this is! *When you are civil and mannerly and thoughtful—you are, effectively, invincible.* Your fire inside keeps you burning bright; it is imperative. And your passion in public, within some limits, is priceless. But do not ever ever ever allow your passion to be translated into rudeness. Civil is good—for a host of life-asserting reasons. But civil is also “practical” and a “tool” which provides bedrock for the long haul struggle for your “baby” to prevail. “You know, he is pushy, and I’m not sure I buy his act, But you see it—in a passel of little gestures—he’s a very decent and thoughtful chap.” Oh my God, those words spoken by someone two levels above you in the hierarchy are worth so much more than their mere weight in gold. Discipline yourself on this! Make sure that your straightshooter-truth teller (see #3 above) is ordered to raise unmitigated hell with you when you veer off the course of civility by even a single degree.

When you are civil and mannerly and thoughtful—you are, effectively, invincible.

25. Send “Thank you” notes! Send ’em by the truckload! Make that trainload!

Send ’em every day. Make this an ironclad ... ***daily*** ... ritual: *Thank anybody and everybody who gives you a big hand or a small hand or any hand at all. Especially thank those in the “bowels of the organization”—that is, the unsung heroes who, if turned on, will move heaven and earth for you. In Denial of Death, Ernest Becker wrote, “Society is a vehicle for earthly heroism. Man transcends death by finding meaning for his life. It is the burning desire for the creature to count. What man really fears is not extinction, but extinction with insignificance.”* I believe a candidate for most powerful word in the English language is ... Acknowledgement. People, per Dr. Becker,

crave acknowledgement. If you become Acknowledger-in-Chief/Thanker-in-Chief, you will have taken a giant step toward implementation of your baby. (I once wrote a paper on implementation that subsequently appeared in *The Pursuit of Wow*—on a list of 30 items, I put “Send ‘Thank you’ notes” ... FIRST!)

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

26. Read/Ingest/Apply Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. • Then re-read it every six months. It is, in short, the implementer’s bible.

27. Work harder than the next guy. You may be the “radical” trying to upset the applecart, but it will help—a lot—if you are seen as a ... Very Serious Person. That is, I (imagine me as one of the bad guys) may disagree with what you’re doing, but I can’t fault you for not being an outrageously committed, outrageously hardworking player. (Oh yeah, and hard work pays off in and of itself.) (TP axiom: “Work hard” > “Work smart.”)

28. Show up on time for every meeting. I suppose this is a variation on civility. When I started my McKinsey adventure, one of my senior mentors sat me down and said, “Show up for meetings early. Dress conservatively. Modulate your voice. Don’t give those who oppose you on substance any chance whatsoever to discount you based on ‘the little things.’” It was as good a piece of advice as I’ve ever been given. Inside you’re fire-engine red. Outside you’re an affable guy wearing a black suit with a sedate tie. (Men, that is; I’d never even consider advising women on attire!)

29. Show up! *The too-oft-repeated Woody Allen line about showing up being 80% of success will here be re-repeated because it turns out to be true.* (1) Showing up is the best way to offer support. (2) Showing up is the best way to schmooze. (3) Showing up is the best way to become a presence. (4) Showing up means volunteering for a “trivial” assignment that gives you an opportunity to demo/showcase some part of your “it.” (5) Showing up fosters serendipity—which is always the #1 cause of success (no kidding).

Showing up fosters serendipity—which is invariably the #1 cause of success.

30. Show up anywhere and everywhere! There is no such thing as a “minor opportunity.” Any opportunity to talk about your stuff or demo your stuff is a golden opportunity. Political mastermind Patrick Caddell coined the term “the permanent campaign.” Well, that’s you. Anyone of any rank anywhere who offers you the chance to declaim on your project is a friend in need and a friend indeed. Many of the great entertainers spent years in nightclubs the size of a thimble trotting out their stuff. *No, there’s no such thing as an opportunity with the label “too small.”*

31. Keep showing up! When the consummate diplomat Richard Holbrooke died, the consummate diplomat Henry Kissinger said, *“If Richard calls and asks you for something, just say ‘Yes.’ If you say ‘No,’ you’ll eventually get to yes, but the journey will be very painful.”* In my own brief White House stint I was able to get a few things done. Busy people had far higher priorities than me and my little program. Hence the fact that I kept comin’ back at ’em often carried the day—I was not asking for the moon, and if they’d just say yes, I’d vanish from their harried life.

“One of my superstitions had always been when I started to go anywhere or to do anything, not to turn back, or stop, until the thing intended was accomplished.”—U.S. Grant

“Whenever anything is being accomplished, I have learned, it is being done by a monomaniac with a mission.”—Peter Drucker

“The reasonable man adapts himself to the world. The unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends upon the unreasonable man.”—G.B. Shaw

32. All sales all the time! We’ve all heard the famous Gandhi line: “You are the change you wish to see in the world.” Or another I like, “It’s always showtime.” You = Your (pet) project. Everything you do, wee or grand, should be congruent with the project. Translation: Championing a project is signing-up-for-sales 60/60/24/7. Follow the advice of one extremely successful Hollywood producer: Become a “Ph.D.” student of the sales process! This fellow had hit a wall; his creative work was not making it through the door; he then spent a year reading sales texts, attending sales seminars, etc. He became via brute force a master salesperson—the rest, as ’tis said, is history.

***You are “in sales.” PERIOD.
Sales is what you “do.” PERIOD.***

33. Suck down for success! Your goal is selfish—get the whole damn organization working for you! Garner an “unfair share” of attention, even though you may be a relatively junior person. Well, it can be done! *If you ... suck down.* In the saga reported in *Charlie Wilson’s War*, CIA mid-level staffer Gust Avrakotos made miracles happen—far above his pay grade. Author George Crile put it this way, “*He had become something of a legend with these people who manned the underbelly of the Agency.*” Avrakotos knew every “top floor” CIA executive secretary by name—and had helped many of them sort out personal or professional problems. The folks in the mailroom and in the bowels of computer operations were also the subject of Gust’s intense and affectionate attentions. In effect, you could say that Gust was Commander-in-Chief of the “Invisible 95%” of the Agency—which allowed him to make extraordinary things happen despite furious resistance from his bosses and bosses’ bosses sitting atop a very rigid organization. There’s a lesson to be learned from Mr. Avrakotos, and a big one. Take heed! Work the “underbelly” as if your life/success depended on it; to a large extent, it does—or could.

Suck down for success!

34. Sweat the details. And sweat and sweat and sweat ... Asked, at a gala honoring his career, to reveal the secrets to his monumental successes, Conrad Hilton replied, in full: ***“Remember to tuck the shower curtain into the bathtub.”*** “Location, location, location” is important to the hotelier—but it’s the tucked-in shower curtains that keep the guests coming back—which is the source of all profit. In your case, your idea is scintillating beyond measure. (Of course it is!) But it will rise or fall on the details of execution—that all-important “last 99%” as one of my McKinsey bosses put it. (This was the Steve Jobs secret, eh? The “points of perfection” are what most set Apple apart.) Your allies must be much more than simply beholden to your great idea—they must be “execution fanatics” in a way that makes each demo, even if half formed, a paragon of Excellence.

“Execution is strategy.” —Fred Malek

35. “We.” “We.” “We.” “We.” It may be pap, but it’s the whole truth—and all too often honored in the breach: Execution is a team sport. One small manifestation of that:

Always and without fail use the word ***“We”*** per se—and hold the “I.” Mayo Clinic’s greatest point of differentiation is not medical genius, but, in fact, team medicine—a clinic staple since its founding over 100 years ago. One high-powered doc said that Mayo’s approach made her ... *100 times* ... more effective than she had been in her prior professional positions. Mayo starts at the start: When interviewing candidates, the interviewer actually counts the number of times the applicant uses the word “We” vs. the number of times she or he uses the word “I.”

36. Party time! Celebrate the “small wins.” Celebrate the tiniest milestones achieved. Celebrate our newest friend signing up. Celebrate the fact of the journey per se. Our “it” is, after all ... A Full-fledged Adventure in Wow! And we should enjoy the pirates’ voyage upon which we’re embarked. In the best sense, make those who haven’t joined up jealous of the quest we’re engaged in. Induce them to join the parade. This ... right here, right now ... is where the coolest of the cool roost.

Celebrate the fact of the journey per se. Our “it” is, after all ... A Full-fledged Adventure in Wow! This ... right here, right now ... is where the coolest of the cool roost.

37. Sweat the details II: Maximize TGRs. The magic of Apple products are the scads and scads and more scads of little touches—we Apple users are the beneficiaries of Mr. Jobs’ advanced case of OCD. Likewise, I began my last book, *The Little BIG Things* (the title gives away the strategy contained therein), with a story about squeaky clean restrooms with voluptuous fresh flowers at a roadside restaurant which has won my enduring custom. I also call this idea “TGWs vs. TGRs.” That is, as we should we worry ceaselessly about quality—minimizing TGWs, or Things Gone Wrong. (The term originated in the auto industry.) The other side of the coin, of equal importance, are

TGRs, or ... **Things Gone Right.** It’s those sparkling, flower-festooned restrooms; or the bank that measures (true!) the number of dog biscuits it gives away each year—it wants customers in the branches rather than using the ATMs; inside is better for selling new products. Bottom line: In developing your project (an internal system, not just a customer-facing product or process), focus—like Apple—obsessively and explicitly on maximizing those TGRs!

38. Take breaks. You’ll doubtless give little or no heed to this. And you will pay a terrible price—personally and probably professionally. It’s elementary—you must recharge your batteries, and in a full-assed, not half-assed, fashion. You are fighting city hall, and it is grueling even though it is a labor of love. Problem: We are rarely aware of our degree of burnout. That is, until we take a break or break down—upon return we are astonished, as are our colleagues, at how refreshed we are, and how obvious it is in retrospect that the tank had been 90% empty. Bottom line: **Fresh matters!** (In addition to thinking straighter, your attitude is by definition better, your cynicism is tuned down a notch and you are, thence, a better representative of and salesman for your idea.)

39. Form an Advisory Board in pretty short order. I urged you not to “sell up”—at least not until you’ve recruited a sizeable base of allies and done a significant set of demos. This suggestion doesn’t contradict that idea, because we’re talking here about

proven “friendlies.” Call upon some of your prior supporters (e.g., past bosses) and a couple of rather well-credentialed outsiders and cobble together an official or semi-official Advisory Board of a half dozen—which may subsequently grow to twice that size. There is, to be sure, “PR value” here. But the long-term key is to take the Board very seriously—de facto appoint them as your coaches. Along the way, you are also trying to convert them into vigorous semi-public salespeople for the project—moreover, each of them doubtless has an invaluable network which could be of direct or indirect use to your venture.

40. Talk! *You will rise or fall on your presentation skills.* Meaning presentations of every flavor—from the 90-second elevator spiel to the formal 2-hour presentation, presentations to your team and to the Board. How do you become a notably good presenter? By presenting! Then studying the output. Then presenting some more and analyzing some more. To pursue your dream effectively is to pursue sales fulltime is to work your way toward presentation excellence. The key word: Work! (There are very few if any “naturals.”) When asked, as I frequently am, what my presentations “secrets” are, I unfailingly respond: “Giving 3,000 presentations.”

“In classical times when Cicero had finished speaking, the people said, ‘How well he spoke,’ but when Demosthenes had finished speaking, they said, ‘Let us march.’”—Adlai Stevenson

When asked, as I frequently am, what my presentation “secrets” are, I unfailingly respond: “Giving 3,000 presentations.”

41. Listen! I have argued elsewhere that listening is anyone’s or any organization’s potential “#1 strategic differentiator.” I mean it! The good news, a la presenting as just discussed: One can literally become what I call a “professional listener.” That is, one can study and practice and improve. This is particularly important to project champions. You are dying to tell everyone you meet about your fantastic project that’s going to turn the world upside down. Hence you collar them and ... TALK.

No!
No!
No!

Resist. Give them a flavor, a tease about what you're up to and get *them* talking. ASAP. You are, after all, trying to get them to own the idea—we only do that when we have an exchange rather than be on the receiving end of a harangue!

(An *obsession* with) Listening is ... the ultimate mark of *Respect*.

Listening is ... the heart and soul of *Engagement*.

Listening is ... the heart and soul of *Kindness*.

Listening is ... the heart and soul of *Thoughtfulness*.

Listening is ... the basis for true *Collaboration*.

Listening is ... the basis for true *Partnership*.

Listening is ... a *Team Sport*.

Listening is ... a *Developable Individual Skill*.

Listening is ... the basis for *Community*.

Listening is ... the bedrock of *Joint Ventures that work*.

Listening is ... the bedrock of *Joint Ventures that grow*.

Listening is ... the core of *effective Cross-functional Communication*.*

(*Which is in turn Attribute #1 of organization effectiveness.)

Listening is ... the engine of *superior EXECUTION*.

Listening is ... the key to *making the Sale*.

Listening is ... the key to *Keeping the Customer's Business*.

Listening is ... *Service*.

Listening is ... the engine of *Network development*.

Listening is ... the engine of *Network maintenance*.

Listening is ... the engine of *Network expansion*.

Listening is ... *Social Networking's "secret weapon."*

Listening is ... *Learning*.

Listening is ... the *sine qua non* of *Renewal*.

Listening is ... the *sine qua non* of *Creativity*.

Listening is ... the *sine qua non* of *Innovation*.

Listening is ... the core of *taking diverse opinions aboard*.

Listening is ... *Strategy*.

Listening is ... *Source #1* of "*Value-added*."

Listening is ... *Differentiator #1*.

Listening is ... *Profitable*.* (*The "R.O.I." from listening is higher than from any other single activity.)

Listening is ... the bedrock which underpins a *Commitment to EXCELLENCE!*

***One can literally become a full-fledged
"professional listener."***

42. **EXCELLENCE.** If not,
what the hell is the point of all the agro that comes your way?

43. **WOW!** Redux: If not, why bother?

“Be the best. It’s the only market that’s not crowded.” —George Whalin, *Retail Superstars: Inside the 25 Best Independent Stores in America** (*Regardless of your business or functional specialty—read this!)

44. **PERSIST!** If it’s important and contrarian, there will be reversal after reversal after reversal. (If it’s not important things will go smoothly—hence if things are going smoothly, then what you are doing is unimportant. No kidding.) You must hang in. (Some wag said, “Success comes to those who are best at ‘Plan B.’” Indeed.) The stupidest statement I know is “Know when to hold ’em, know when to fold ’em.” There’s some truth in it regarding tactics. But as to the main event, let me put it succinctly: No one makes it into a history book who “knows when to fold ’em.”
PERIOD.

Success = 72.1.5.909: On 13 July 1848, six women met in Seneca Falls, NY, and de facto launched the suffrage movement in the United States. Seventy-two years, one month and five days later, the suffrage amendment to the U.S. Constitution became law. Along the way, there were, among other things, at least 909 elections of one sort or another concerning this issue.

72 years, 1 month, 5 days and 909 elections is my operating definition of persistence.

And yours?

So: Keep on keepin' on!

Bon chance!

In no sense do I consider this list complete or sacrosanct. Rather, it comes under the heading of “some stuff that might spur a thought or two”—maybe even three! One can dream, eh?

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