

20 October 2015

TOM PETERS

“Tom Peters is the Red Bull of management thinkers.”
—Bo Burlingham, *Inc.* (2013)

“A human exclamation point who no longer needs his last name.”
—Nancy Austin on Tom Peters

In Search of Excellence/Wikipedia/WorldCat data: “most widely held library book in the United States from 1989 to 2006”

In Search of Excellence/National Public Radio/1999: one of “Top Three Business Books of the Century”

In Search of Excellence/UK’s Bloomsbury Publishing: **“greatest business book of all time”**

Tom is behind the Pope & Stephen Hawking, but ahead of Elon Musk, Eric Schmidt & George Soros: Thought Leaders 2014: GDI/Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute, a Swiss think tank, and MIT teamed up to create “Thought Leaders 2014: The Most Influential Thinkers,” “Whose ideas engage people most frequently? Who are the most influential thinkers? To find answers to these questions, we initiated a complex process of evaluation, using software-based calculations to produce a simple ‘influence rank’—a measure of the global importance of creative minds.” **Tom placed #32, behind Pope Francis (#1) & Stephen Hawking (#14)—and ahead of George Soros (#51), Michael Porter (the only other “management guru” on the list, #53), Elon Musk (#69), Thomas Friedman (#72) & Eric Schmidt (#82).**

Tom is McKinsey’s #1: From the definitive study of McKinsey (2014), *The Firm: The Story of McKinsey and Its Secret Influence on American Business*, by Duff McDonald: “Though his tenure was relatively short, *Peters is the most famous consultant McKinsey has ever produced*. His influence on the firm was enormous and helped raise its profile beyond Bower’s wildest dreams. ... *Peters helped rebrand McKinsey as a group of thinkers*. ... [In Search of Excellence] *wasn’t talking only about financial management. It was also talking about how you treated the people who worked for you. It was, in short, the first great manifesto of the idea of corporate culture.*”

The Bloomsbury Press book, *Movers and Shakers: The 100 Most Influential Figures in Modern Business*, reviewed the historical contributions of path-breaking management thinkers and practitioners, from Machiavelli and J.P. Morgan to Peters 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.”

Peters/Volcker/Soros are top anti-greed icons: *Age of Greed*, Jeff Madrick (2014): “Not all of those who are the principal focus of a chapter [in *Age of Greed*] were blatant practitioners of greed—some were not at all. Tom Peters, the famed management consultant, was much the opposite. Paul Volcker, the stringent chairman of the Federal Reserve, was mostly oblivious to financial gain. George Soros, the hedge fund manager, gave much of his fortune to causes that were detrimental to his personal financial interest.” (From page x, Introduction to *Age of Greed*, Jeff Madrick.) (Part Two is called “The New Guard,” and Chapter 12 therein is titled “Tom Peters and Jack Welch”—Welch does not emerge unscathed.)

“Book Changes World: 30 Years of Excellence”/Rich Karlgaard, publisher, *Forbes*: “The U.S. recovery was weak and fitful. Confidence had been in tatters for several years, following a big and ugly recession. Unemployment was so high as to be a moral crisis. And the world was looking to Asia for business-leadership ideas. ... *It’s often debated whether Ronald Reagan’s tax cuts or Paul Volcker’s monetary medicine got the U.S. off its back. The answer is both, but let’s add a third and fourth reason. Third was the personal computer, introduced by Apple and others in the 1970s. ... The PC was more than a machine. It was a garden of entrepreneurship that produced such daring men as Steve Jobs and Bill Gates. A fourth reason was a book that came out in 1982: In Search of Excellence, by Tom Peters and Bob Waterman (Harper-Collins). Yes, I am claiming that a single book belongs up there with tax cuts, a strong dollar, and the PC as a pillar of the American renaissance.”*

“In Tom’s world it’s always better to try a swan dive and deliver a colossal belly flop than to step timidly off the board while holding your nose.”—*Fast Company*

“In no small measure, American corporations have become what Peters encouraged them to be.”
—the *New Yorker*

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

“If they’re onto a good thing, management gurus generally milk the same business mantra for all it’s worth. However, one guru par excellence is going against the grain. The one-man brand that is Tom Peters is still reinventing himself.”—CNN.com

“Mr. Peters is an enthusiast, a storyteller, and a lover of capitalism. He says that effective management is management that delivers more value to customers and more opportunity for service, creativity, and growth to workers. He is saying that the decent thing to do is also the smart thing. It’s a wonderful message.”—Paul Weaver, the *Wall Street Journal*

“The single best management book I’ve ever read.”—Warren Bennis, on Tom’s most recent book, *The Little BIG Things*

11 November 2013/Hall of Fame - Thinkers 50: “The business world is fickle and has a short memory. And this is especially true in the world of business ideas. Brilliant tools and techniques are put to work and then taken for granted, their creators speedily forgotten. ... *As part of our mission we salute the distinguished thinkers whose contributions to management thinking have made it what it is today. So, we welcome the first phalanx into the Thinkers50 Hall of Fame. They are distinguished thinkers who have all made a lasting and vital impact on how organizations are led and managed. They are the giants upon whose shoulders managers and leaders stand: Warren Bennis; Howard Gardner; Charles Handy; Robert Kaplan and David Norton; Philip Kotler; Henry Mintzberg, Kenichi Ohmae; Tom Peters. ... Charismatic, passionate and insightful, Tom Peters virtually invented the modern thought leadership industry. ... Peters’ most recent book is *The Little BIG Things: 163 Ways to Pursue EXCELLENCE* . Even now, Peters’ speeches are a restless tour de force. His views have moved with reality. He is a keen tweeter, voracious reader, and endlessly enthusiastic. And, smart.”*

Warren Bennis, University of Southern California, the leading scholar on the topic of leadership:
“I suppose the most significant contribution Tom has made to ‘management thought’ is his capacity to articulate in graphic and persuasive terms what it is that organizations and managers must do if they want to create successful human communities (and also make a profit). He put into words what a lot of people had been talking about but never took all that seriously. And he writes with unbridled lucidity. If Peter Drucker ‘invented’ management, Tom Peters vivified it. He goosed us all, managers and academics alike. ... One last thought: Tom is a dreamer, and, thank God, a dreamer who can put his thoughts into clear and radiant terms. ‘For a dreamer,’ said Oscar Wilde, ‘is one who can find his way by moonlight and see the dawn before the rest of the world.’ That’s Tom’s gift—the creation of a waking dream—he has inspired us all.”

Facebook comment on *The Little Big Things* (October 2015):

“I listened to *The Little BIG Things* on my iPod last month and loved it. I immediately ordered two hard copies, one each for my business partner and me.”

“I am a religious boy, so when I say that this has become my business ‘Bible,’ I can’t offer better praise.

“Tom, if you don't like the honour, then I will refer to you ... as one of the major prophets then, Isaiah maybe! ... or the New Testament of Business! (where it all comes together).

“Thanks for the book! Love it! Love it. I am going to keep it on me at all times and spend my life trying to achieve the best of it.”

Books: *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best-Run Companies* (1982, with Robert Waterman); *A Passion for Excellence: The Leadership Difference* (1985, with Nancy Austin); *Thriving on Chaos: Handbook for a Management Revolution* (1987); *Liberation Management: Necessary Disorganization for the Nanosecond Nineties* (1992); *The Tom Peters Seminar: Crazy Times Call for Crazy Organizations* (1993); *The Pursuit of WOW! Every Person’s Guide to Topsy-Turvy Times* (1994); *The Circle of Innovation: You Can’t Shrink Your Way to Greatness* (1997); *The Brand You 50: Fifty Ways to Transform Yourself From an “Employee” into a Brand That Shouts Distinction, Commitment, and Passion*; *The Project50: Fifty Ways to Transform Every “Task” into a Project That Matters!* (1999); *The Professional Service Firm50: Fifty Ways to Transform Your “Department” into a Professional Service Firm Whose Trademarks are Passion and Innovation!* (1999); *Sixty: This I Believe* (2002); *Re-imagine! Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age* (2003); *Essentials: Leadership: Inspire, Liberate, Achieve* (2005); *Essentials: Design: Innovate, Differentiate, Communicate* (2005); *Essentials: Trends: Recognize, Analyze, Capitalize* (2005, with Martha Barletta); *Essentials: Talent: Develop It, Sell It, Be It* (2005); *The Little BIG Things: 163 Ways to Achieve Excellence* (2010); **2010-2015 Twelve eBooks.**

Travels: 38 years/2,500 speeches/50 states/67 countries/5,000,000 people/7,500 flights/5,000,000 miles/17 books plus numerous ebooks/10,000,000+ copies sold/600 syndicated columns/250 miscellaneous articles/3,000 blogposts/50,000 Tweets/130,000 Twitter followers/55,400,000 Google hits.

Back story: Born in Baltimore in 1942 “with a lacrosse stick in one hand and oars over my shoulder,” Peters resided in California, mainly Silicon Valley (where he was on a list of “100 most powerful people in Silicon Valley”), from 1965–2000. Tom is a civil engineering graduate of Cornell (B.C.E., M.C.E.), where he was included in the book *The 100 Most Notable Cornellians*, and he earned an MBA and a Ph.D. in business at Stanford; he holds honorary doctorates from institutions that range from the University of San Francisco to the State University of Management in Moscow, and he has been honored by dozens of associations (and dozens of Web polls) in content areas such as management, leadership, quality, human resources, customer service, innovation, marketing, and design. In the U.S. Navy from 1966–1970, he made two deployments to Vietnam (as a combat engineer in the fabled Navy Seabees) and “survived a tour in the Pentagon.” He was a White House drug-abuse advisor in 1973–1974, and then he worked at McKinsey & Co. from 1974–1981, becoming a partner in 1979; he also co-founded McKinsey's now gargantuan Organization Effectiveness practice. In 1981, Tom founded Skunkworks Inc. and The Tom Peters Company.

(Effectively, all of Tom’s written and speech material covering the last 15 year is available—free to download—at tompeters.com and excellencenow.com.)