

Excellence Always

Why am I allowed out in public? I don't know. Twenty-six years ago I co-wrote with Bob Waterman a book called *In Search of Excellence*. And, I want to give you my two-minute excellence schpiel. The book sold a million, *millions* maybe, even. Bob Waterman and I were shocked. Well, you know what our secret was? Luck. There were a thousand stars aligned. And I really mean that. It's not false humility; it's real humility for exactly the right reasons.

On the other side of the coin, and I was thinking about this, and I'm delighted to say that my ego is not so big that I don't think about it often. And I thought, you know, I think oddly enough, it's purely hypothesis, no hard data, that maybe a lot of that book's success was the use of the word "excellence" *per se*. Talk about excellence, and what do you think? You think about the Olympics, you think about ballet, you think about theater. And what Bob and I said was there's no reason that this word "excellence" can't apply to business. Business in the restaurant, business in the accounting department, wherever it is. And think about it. I mean, just play with it. Play with it with your friends. Play with it over lunch. Play with it with your spouse. What is excellence? It's just this extraordinary aspiration.

Look, I'm an old guy. I've got another view these days. And the view is, if not excellence, what? What makes you get up in the morning? I mean, yeah, you've got to earn a living, but you still—the simple reality is that you may love your family to an extraordinary degree. And most of the people who are watching this undoubtedly do. But, love your family, or don't love your family ... unless you were born with a huge trust fund, the truth of the matter is, you will spend more of your waking hours at work than you will doing any other single thing from the age of about, for many of us, 12 to 112. So, what are those hours going to mean? What are they going to be all about? What those

hours mean is what *you* are going to mean to a significant degree. And why *not* an aspiration of excellence? I'm not saying you're going to get there; I don't think I've gotten there. I don't think I've gotten anywhere near there.

On the other side of the coin, it's what I want to *do*, it's what I want to *be*. It's the way I want to work with my fellow human beings. Yes, it's a nasty world; yes, they're bureaucrats. But, this aspiration to do something that is so special. Now, I'll close this little short thing by giving you a practical piece of advice that you might not think is practical, but I really do.

Somebody asked Thomas Watson, Sr., the senior member of the Watson family that effectively founded IBM. They said, "Mr. Watson, how long does it take to become excellent?" And Mr. Watson purportedly said, "A minute." This was years before *The One Minute Manager*. Somebody said, "A minute?" And he said, "Yes. It is a personal commitment to yourself that you will never again do *anything* that is not excellent." And that's what it's about, one minute at a time. The motto of Alcoholics Anonymous, which they say has saved lives by the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, is "How long does it take to stop drinking?" "A second. And then it's life, one minute at a time."

Excellence is not some measured aspiration. It is about how we live and exist in the world. If not excellence, what?

[This is a transcript of a video recorded by Skillsoft and posted at [tompeters.com](http://www.tompeters.com), at this link: <http://www.tompeters.com/entries.php?note=010383.php>]