

# The “You Like, I Like” Fifty-Two

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**H**is eminence, Peter Drucker, once said, “Strategy is a commodity, execution is an art.” As for me, my Ph.D. dissertation was labeled by my committee as the “first [Stanford business school] dissertation on the topic of implementation.” My subsequent research at McKinsey & Co., which led to *In Search of Excellence*, was an out-and-out exaltation of execution/implementation/people and culture first, and thence a frontal attack on McKinsey’s Holy Grail, developing scintillating strategies for clients—and letting the doing take care of itself, which, of course, rarely occurs. A number of the firm’s power players wanted me fired. They eventually got their way, but I got the last laugh: the rather significant sales of my book with Bob Waterman.

Given that history, you may understand why I started this brief “You like, I like” compendium with:

**“You like strategy. I like execution.”**

That one is followed by fifty-one additional—and mostly contrarian—pairings.

Enjoy. And I hope what follows provokes some thought. And, hey, it was fun to write. I will plug away on these issues—ever more important—until, more or less, my last breath.

You like **strategy**.

I like **execution**.

You like **big gestures**.

I like **small gestures**.

You worry about **disruption**.

I worry about **the next five minutes**.

You like **systems**.

I like **people**.

You think **the shortest distance between two points is a straight line**.

I think **the shortest distance between two points—when people are involved—is a twisting, turning path with hairpin turns and dead ends**.

You like to **“get to the point.”**

I like **kindness**.

You like **answers**.

I like **questions**.

You like **“sticking to the script.”**  
I like **unbridled curiosity**.

You think **“we pay our taxes.”**

I think **our responsibility to the community is enormous—taxes are but a first step**.

You think **“we need to work on the gender issue.”**

I think **we must make a “hard commitment” to 50–50 gender-balanced boards and executive teams within 36 months**.

You think **women can be good managers**.

I think **women on average are better managers than men—and better salespeople, negotiators, and investors**.

You think **sustainability and the war on climate change “is an issue.”**

I think **sustainability and the war on climate change is *the* issue**.

# You think "we gotta take more cost out." I think "we gotta put more value in."

You say **design is "prettification."**  
I say **design is nothing less than soul.**

You say **design is "the final touch."**  
I say **design is the starting premise and at the top of mind in every step  
in the product-and-service development process.**

You want to **"hammer the competition."**  
I want us all to **succeed by doing great work.**

You think **it's a STEM world.**  
I think in the main, **if true distinction is the goal, it's a liberal arts world.**

You like **"Do it because it's your job."**  
I like **"Thanks for the extra effort."**

You say, **"Thank you" is fine—but "don't overdo it."**  
I say **it is impossible to overdo it!**

You like to **"get down to business."**  
I like to **take the time to engage one and all in the issues at hand.**

You say, **"finish it up" and move on.**  
I say **the "last five percent" makes all the difference—and takes  
lots (and lots) of time.**

You like **your office.**  
I like **the shop floor.**

You like **people "who get to the point."**  
I like **people who think before they open their mouth.**

You like **the noisy ones.**  
I like **the quiet ones.**

You like **the people in the first row who constantly raise their hands.**

I like **the people in the last row taking copious notes.**

You like **speed.**

I like **excellence.**

You think **culture is "important."**

I think **culture is a flourishing garden which must be watered daily.**

You think **the development and maintenance of relationships is "not insignificant."**

I think **the development and maintenance of relationships must be a daily obsession.**

You want **a technical group to be  
peopled with folks who have sterling  
technical backgrounds.**

I want **a technical group peppered  
with poets and musicians  
and artists and theater majors.**

You like **a resume with no gaps.**

I like **a resume with false starts and fresh starts, dead ends and detours.**

You like **people who read *Forbes* and *Fortune*.**

I like **people who read Dickens and Ishiguro.**

You **"try to find time" to read.**

I follow **the dictum of fanatic studenthood and read and read—and read some more.**

You like **those who "get it done on time" no matter what must be sacrificed.**

I like **those who settle for no less than excellence, regardless of the task or the time frame.**

You think **excellence is "a hill to climb."**

I think **excellence is the next five minutes.**

You like **"Let's figure out who screwed this up."**

I like **"I'm sorry."**

You like **people who dream in spreadsheets and process maps.**  
I like **people who dream about helping others accomplish things they never imagined possible.**

## You like **org charts.** I **laugh hysterically whenever I see an org chart.**

You insist **on putting the customer first.**  
I insist **on putting the people who serve the customer first-er.**

You are determined **to fix what’s wrong, and therefore emphasize the negative.**  
I am determined **to build upon what’s right, and thence emphasize and emphasize—and then re-emphasize—the positive.**

You like **“but” (“yes, but . . .”).**  
I like **“and” (“great, and let’s keep going”).**

You think **training is an expense.**  
I think **training is our Investment #1.**

You have **a fit when a well-trained person leaves.**  
I throw **a party when someone good leaves to take an amazingly cool job.**

You see **the front-line boss as the keeper of law and order.**  
I see **the cadre of front-line managers as Corporate Asset #1—the premier developers of people, and thence responsible for productivity, quality, innovation, and excellence itself.**

You promote **the ones with the best technical skills.**  
I promote **the ones with the best people skills.**

You say, **“leave your personal issues at home.”**  
I say **we benefit from a caring environment that celebrates and is enhanced by 100 percent of who you are.**

You think **management is about getting the most out of people.**  
I think **management is helping people succeed beyond their wildest dreams.**

# You like **generals and admirals.** I like **privates and sailors.**

You say **follow the rules.**

I say **make new rules.**

You say, **“don’t waste time.”**

I say **most creativity and engagement and commitment comes from milling about and indirection.**

You sprint **through the day like a soldier on a forced march.**

I leave **gaps in my day (up to 50 percent according to one guru) to allow for reflection and chance occurrences.**

You see failure as, well, **failure.**

I see failure as **something to be celebrated—the signature and hallmark of rapid tries and thus all innovation.**

You think **the top priority of an enterprise is profitability.**

I think **enterprise profitability is a derivative—the top priorities of an effective business are moral behavior, developing people beyond their wildest dreams, being a sterling community member, and providing products and services that make our world a little bit better.** (FYI: These priorities in fact underpin the demonstrably highest long-term growth and profitability.)

*Over to you . . .*