Defy Mediocrity
Choose to be Uncommon
Think of the Alternative

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The Author of
In Pursuit Of Profits:
How To At Least Double Your Profits Without Increasing Your Sales

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Today we live in a suit happy society in which no one takes responsibility for anything. Between lawyers and the government, business has less and less control each year and more and more liability. Like it or not, and I don't, this is the world we live in. Therefore, I must add the following disclaimer:

This publication contains the opinions and ideas of its author and is designed to provide useful advice in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the author and publisher are not engaged in rendering legal, accounting or other professional services. The author and publisher specifically disclaim any responsibility for any liability, loss or risk, personal or otherwise, which is incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, of the use and the application of any of the contents of this book.

With that said, I will also point out that I will claim no credit for any success you enjoy as a result of reading and implementing my ideas. After all, fair is fair.

Dedication

To Elizabeth Ann..... I’ve been blessed
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

What others have said about Defy Mediocrity

"I think you have created another Masterpiece"

Pat Garufi

"Defy Mediocrity is a must read for every professional and for every young person coming out of college into the professional world. It clearly defines what sets the winners apart. I recommend all managers give this book to all incoming staff."

A review posted on Amazon.com

"I was given a copy of Defy Mediocrity by my division retail manager and asked to read it. It lit me on fire. I have read through it four times and referred to it many more times. I think about something in the book every day because not only do the things you write about pertain to the business world but also to the family and the values we can try to instill in our children. If anyone reads this book and can't see that Mediocrity is surrounding us and trying to get its hold on us they obviously can't be too concerned about improving themselves. Thank you for the opportunity to be enlightened by your book."

Cameron Ryan, Manager -- Econo Foods

"I think everyone in business should be required to read Defy Mediocrity. Mr. Welch, we at Southern Office Supply, Inc. believe your book points a finger at each employee here including myself. Anybody and everybody can get some excellent insights about themselves and their fellow employees by reading your book.

We are going to add Defy Mediocrity to our required reading list. Again, we think your book is an excellent tool to rebuild, rejuvenate, reiterate, what modern day business is all about. Thank you for your insight into the business world and how important continued and improved productivity can be even to a small business."

Anthony McKee, President, Southern Office Supply, Inc.
“This book changed my life. This book really serves as a wakeup call to anyone that works for a living. It focuses you on the fact that you and only you are responsible for your own success. You can’t help but read the book and constantly say “Wow, I can’t believe I used to think that way”. This is truly one of the reference books of my life. I refer to it whenever I’m feeling dissatisfied or unfulfilled at work. I highly recommend it."

A review posted on Amazon.com

"The invaluable advice in your book has changed my life during the last few months and gave me a vision to know how to plan and manage my life and my future. Thank you Derrick you are a mentor in my life."

Bryce Jeon   Seoul, Korea

"Your book was written for me. I have read many books in law school and business school. However I have never read a book like yours. I think this book should be mandatory in all business schools. It is a book for everyone that desires to improve their career as well as their life in general. I needed to read a book like yours and learn to apply it in my life. Thank you for that lesson."

George Hong,    President HJC America
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

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A message from the author

"The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor."

*Vince Lombardi*

This is a book about defying mediocrity. It is a book about overcoming the attitude of entitlement.

It is a book about conquering complacency, apathy, procrastination, and dozens of other self-defeating traits so many of us have that hold us back in our careers and our lives and prevents us from doing all we are capable of doing and of becoming.

**This is a book about the pursuit of individual excellence!**

It is a book about making the most of what you have. It is about producing results instead of creating excuses.

This book will show you how to rise above mediocrity.

Few things in life cannot be overcome with the right combination of attitude and commitment.

Mediocrity is one of the easiest things in life to defy.

Since the majority of your life revolves around your job my focus in this book will be defying mediocrity in the workplace.

Yes, your job provides you the income you need to live.

But think of how much time you spend on the job, going to the job, coming home from the job, talking about work, thinking about work, planning for work, and preparing for work.

More than half of your waking life somehow revolves around what you do for a living, where you do it, and how well you do it.

**Don't you think an attitude of complacency, apathy, doing just enough to get by, procrastination, and entitlement will carry over into other areas of your life?**

**Don't you think the way you function in a role that dominates your life will carry over to non-work areas as well? How could it not?**

You see mediocrity manifests itself in many ways. It cannot simply be turned on and off.
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It is a silent killer of careers and dreams.

On the other hand, the pursuit of improvement, the pursuit of excellence on the job, will also carry over to all other areas of your life.

It simply is not possible to dramatically improve your job related performance and not see major improvements in your overall life.

It simply is not that hard to rise above the rest. It is simply not that hard to dramatically improve your on-the-job performance.

It is simply not that hard to become far more valuable and capable.

In fact, I think it takes more effort, and drains you more emotionally, to embrace mediocrity than it does to pursue excellence.

The quest for excellence, the quest to be the best you can at what you do, is a thrilling and evolutionary quest that will produce astounding results in every area of your life.

It is not my intention to get "preachy" with you. I am not particularly fond of books that preach to me.

But I cannot overstate the direct relationship to how well you perform on-the-job to the quality of your life.

One cannot be separated from the other.

"Watch your thoughts; they become your words.
Watch your words; they become actions.
Watch your actions; they become habits.
Watch your habits; they become character.
Watch your character; it becomes your destiny."

Frank Outlaw

There are two types of income we get from our jobs. Monetary income which is the money we get paid for the work we do and psychic income which is the mental income we get from how well we do it.

"Self-esteem is the reputation we acquire with ourselves."

Nathaniel Brandon
If we do the best job we are capable of each and every day the positive psychic income we earn is the income that builds our self-confidence, builds our self-esteem and makes us feel good about ourselves.

It is the type of income that allows us to grow, build on our successes, and become better and better at what we do and how we do it on the job and in life.

However, just as it is with monetary income, the value of our psychic income is based on how well we do our job. If we merely get through each day with a goal of doing little more than we must to keep our jobs, of avoiding responsibility, of looking for reasons and excuses why we shouldn't or can't do a better job, our psychic income will reflect this.

It will create an attitude of entitlement, it will lower our self-esteem, it will convey to us we are not very capable, we can't do more, we won't rise higher, we have been unjustly treated, and many other self-defeating messages we will cover in more depth later.

The difference between those who excel at their job and in life and those who just get by lies in how they do their job.

The difference between those who are considered valuable employees, the employees who move up more rapidly than others within the company, and those who are simply part of the staff lies not in major things, but in many minor things.

Those who defy mediocrity do not always do extraordinary things. They often simply do ordinary things extraordinarily well.

**The difference lies not always in what you do, but in how you do it.**

*"When you do the common things in life in an uncommon way, you will command the attention of the world."

*George Washington Carver*

Very often the difference that will set you apart from others, from mediocrity, will come from many small things, not a few major things.

The difference between those who move up and up the corporate ladder and those that languish on the lower rungs lies within you.

It is not who you know. It is not your academic credentials. It is not your years of experience or your lack of experience. It is not any of the many things you may think it is.

The answer lies within you.
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If you are seeking ways to make your job more secure in this age of employment instability, this book will show you how.

If you want to improve your on-the-job performance this book will show you how. If you want to develop your skills and value to the company, this book will show you how.

If you want to become much better at what you do and how you do it, this book will show you how. If you want to begin to reach the levels of potential you have within you, this book will show you how.

If you want to move ahead in your career as rapidly as possible, this book will show you how.

Whether you are starting the first day of your first job or whether you have been in the work force for most of your life, this book will give you the tools you need to defy mediocrity and reach your true potential.

What you did or did not do yesterday does not matter. What matters is what you are going to do today and everyday thereafter.

Where you are and where you have been is not the issue. Where you want to go and who you want to become is.

Rising from mediocrity to excellence simply is not that difficult. The difference between an extraordinary person and an ordinary one really is that little "extra".

The little extra that spells the defeat of mediocrity.

Excellence can be its own reward. Knowing that you have done the best you are possibly capable of is a tremendously gratifying feeling.

Knowing that you don't need to second guess yourself and that any others who might second guess your efforts have no validity is a tremendous reward indeed.

Knowing you have earned your paycheck, that you are valuable to your company, that you are respected and appreciated by your peers, subordinates, and superiors is one of the best feelings in the world.

It gives you pride in yourself and your abilities. It gives you confidence in your abilities. It gives you self-respect.

It allows you to rise above mediocrity. It provides you a foundation of excellence to build a future on.

Of the two kinds of work-related rewards, monetary and psychic, it is my feeling psychic is far more important.
Money is short term. Once spent it is gone. You can never draw on it again. It comes and goes.

Positive psychic income helps you become the best you can in the long term. It allows you to build on your confidence and success and improve your performance and capabilities.

This will result in you having a far greater income in the long term and much greater job and personal satisfaction. This is the income that will directly affect the quality of your personal and professional life.

Furthermore, unless your psychic income is very good, your monetary income will never be.

How could it?

No matter how hard you try and justify its existence, how could a negative attitude and poor work ethic ever produce increasing monetary income?

Once you take the simple steps required to defeat mediocrity on-the-job, your attitude, commitment, and quest for constant improvement will carry over to every area of your life.

It really is this simple! This book will show you how.

Let me also point out what this book is not about. It is not about the power of positive thinking. It is not about loving yourself and loving others. It is not about "I'm O.K. You're O.K."

It is not about self-visualization. It is not about corporate politics and how to play the game to get ahead.

It is not about processes. It is not about reengineering your career. It is not about paradigms. It contains no theory or idealism.

I will leave this type of motivational writing to others.

**It is a blunt, hard-hitting, no nonsense guide written to show you how to dramatically improve what you do and how you do it.**

It is about reality. The reality of improving your job stability, of moving ahead in your career, of improving your life, and of reaching the potential you have within you.

I will be aggressive with you at times. I will tell you things that you might not like to hear. I would not be doing you any great favors by sugar-coating anything for you, so I won't.

It is about the things you can do to become far better at what you do and how you do it. It is about tapping into that tremendous potential you have.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

"Change your thoughts, and you change your world."

*Norman Vincent Peale*

It is about removing the road blocks that you have put in front of you.

The road blocks that are holding you back from obtaining the excellence you can so easily achieve.

"What we ponder and what we think about sets the course of our life. Any day we wish; we can discipline ourselves to change it all. Any day we wish, we can open the book that will open our mind to new knowledge. Any day we wish, we can start a new activity. Any day we wish, we can start the process of life change. We can do it immediately, or next week, or next month, or next year.

"We can also do nothing. We can pretend rather than perform. And if the idea of having to change ourselves makes us uncomfortable, we can remain as we are. We can choose rest over labor, entertainment over education, delusion over truth, and doubt over confidence. The choices are ours to make. But while we curse the effect, we continue to nourish the cause.

As Shakespeare uniquely observed, "The fault is not in the stars, but in ourselves." We created our circumstances by our past choices. We have both the ability and the responsibility to make better choices beginning today."

*Jim Rohn*

I ask that you read this book with an open mind. I know that you will not agree with, or even like, some of the things I say. Most of us don't like it when others tell us things we don't want to hear, when someone tells us that we can do better than we have been doing.

Most of us are inclined to ignore these types of words, to think they apply only to others, to resent them, or to get angry and defend our actions or inactions.

Quite honestly, I am often inclined to do the same thing at times. Self-assessment has shown me that even today I am still guilty of associating with some of mediocrity's friends from time to time.

Experience has proven to me that I have much to learn. That I have unlimited room for improvement, for personal and professional growth.

But please do me a favor, and do yourself a favor and read my words with an open mind. Think objectively.
Derrick W. Welch

Leave some room for the possibility that what I say may apply to you -- not just to others.

"One of man's greatest failings is that he looks almost always for an excuse, in the misfortune that befalls him through his own fault, before looking for a remedy -- which means he often finds the remedy too late."

Cardinal De Retz

It will always be far easier to hold onto your perceptions, your justifications for not doing a better job, for not reaching the level of job security you should have, for not getting the promotion you feel you deserve, for not having the position you thought you would, for not getting the job you wanted.

We will go into each of these areas in detail.

For now I merely ask that you consider, that you entertain the idea that the possibility exists that some of what I say may apply to you.

It is my hope that you will use these thoughts, ideas and strategies to make the most of your talents and capabilities so that you can accomplish what you are truly capable of in your life.

If I can play some small part in helping you achieve your goals, my efforts will be well rewarded.

My best,

Derrick W. Welch
Preface

Let me tell you a story. A story about the defiance of mediocrity. A story about someone who suffered setbacks, including many self-inflicted setbacks, and kept moving forward.

A story about someone who never kidded himself about being better, smarter, or more capable than anyone else, but who always tried to make the most of what he had. A story about someone who had to pull himself out of a pool of self-pity on many occasions.

A story about a little boy who found out he could not walk like the other little boys and girls due to a serious hip problem. A little boy who spent far more time in the hospital then he did at home.

A little boy who went to first grade wearing a full leg brace on his right leg and a shoe on his left foot with a six inch lift. A little boy who limped to school that first day, and every day for 3 years, with his brace, his Herman Munster shoe, and the aid of crutches or a wheelchair.

A little boy who could not play with his classmates at recess. A little boy who could only watch and could never join in. A little boy who had to ask others to get his lunch for him since he could not navigate the stairs to the lunch room to get his own lunch. A little boy who ate in the classroom alone each day.

A little boy who was so happy the day he was able to walk without his crutches and shoe and leg brace that he could never describe the feeling to others. A little boy who thought his ordeal was over the day they came off.

A little boy who grew into a young man. A young man who was repeatedly cut from the sports teams he so longed to play for because his leg strength was never strong enough.

A young man who once again had to watch from the sidelines. A young man who watched his brothers become fine athletes while he became the best booster he could.

A young man who began to walk with a limp again in Jr. High School. A young man who was told that the leg with the hip problem was growing much slower than his normal leg and that this was what was causing his limp. A limp that would only get much worse if something wasn't done.

A young man who missed the entire eighth grade as he underwent surgery to correct the problem. Surgery that slowed down the growth of one leg so the other could catch up.

A young man who spent six months in a toe-to-hip cast. A young man who stayed home with a tutor every day.
A young man who watched at the window each day as his friends romped in the front yard. A young man who tried hard not to complain or feel sorry for himself as he always understood so many others had much worse problems than he. A young man who wasn't always successful in pushing self-pity aside.

A young man who was never good enough to make the high school basketball, football, or baseball teams. A young man who was determined to somehow overcome these problems and earn his high school letter.

A young man who knew he would never have the leg strength he needed for these other sports but who did have the arm strength to throw a discus, javelin, and shot-put.

A young man who bought his own javelin with money he earned delivering newspapers. A young man who spent countless hours alone in a nearby field learning how to throw that spear.

A young man who refused to be left out and found a way to earn his letter by using what he had and accepting what he would never have.

A young man who was so stubborn, so pigheaded, that he moved out of his house as a teenager and went to live with a poor broken family in another part of town.

A young man who woke up his first night in that new house smelling smoke and saw a man plunging a needle into his arm. A young man whose new roommate turned out to be a heroin addict.

A young man who had average grades in school but went on to college anyway. A young man who did little better in college.

A man, who left college after two years, got married, and, at the age of 22, had a little girl. A man who was determined to finish what he had started and went back to college at night.

A man who once again stopped his studies a few years later as he had another little girl and was now working two jobs to support his family.

A man who was later given the opportunity to join a major Boston-based advertising agency despite his lack of experience and education.

A man who, at the age of 27, was promoted at the agency to the position of account executive assigned to the agency's largest account. A $4 billion dollar financial institution. A man who soon learned he was terrified of speaking formally in front of people.

A man who found that the job of account executive involved a great deal of public speaking, new business solicitation, and boardroom presentations.
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A man who, when he gave his first formal presentation in front of a room full of executives, broke out into such a cold sweat he began to see stars and nearly passed out. Needless to say, the agency did not get this account.

A man who dedicated himself to overcoming this fear and went on to win many new accounts, awards, and excellent reviews.

A man who was given the opportunity to take over all operations of a multi-million dollar company at the age of 31, still without that college degree and without the experience to handle the job.

A man who went back to school 18 years after he first dropped out and finished the degree he had started so many years ago.

In fact, he earned two degrees and had a straight A grade point average.

A man who overcame numerous minor obstacles, who pushed a never-ending source of excuses aside, who made the most of every opportunity he was given, and who always tried to remember his limitations and problems were nothing compared to so many others.

A man who was determined to defy mediocrity and learned how. A man who learned it simply isn't that hard to rise above the masses. To rise above mediocrity.

I know. I was that little boy. I will show you how.

Derrick W. Welch
Chapter 1. Mediocrity. What is it?

"Excellence is to do a common thing in an uncommon way."

Booker T. Washington

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines mediocrity as follows: "the quality or state of being mediocre, moderate ability or value, a mediocre person". Webster's defines mediocre as "moderate or low quality".

Do these definitions describe you? Low quality? Moderate ability? Do they describe the people you work with? Do they describe the effort put forth by you or those you interact with each day?

Is this how you feel about yourself? Your on-the-job performance? Is this how others in the company see you or would describe you?

Now I understand the good folks at Webster's are describing the term mediocrity in a very general sense, but I want to discuss it specifically.

Very specifically. I want to discuss it as it pertains to your efforts and the efforts of those you interact with.

Speaking as an employer, an employee, a co-worker, and a customer, I can say without hesitation that mediocrity surrounds us. It has become an epidemic. It is a disease that is destroying the ability of every company in this country to be competitive.

It is a condition that is preventing many from ever scratching the surface of who and what they can become and accomplish.

It can't be seen but the results of it can be. It can't be heard but it can be demonstrated in the words you use or hear. It knows no discrimination.

It can affect every one of us if we do not fight against it every day. It can hurt our careers, our life, and our company.

It limits our potential. It holds us back. It thrives on excuses, on procrastination, on the attitude of entitlement, on self-serving justifications for our actions and inactions.

Mediocrity is one of the most powerful enemies we will ever face in our lives and yet, the only true allies mediocrity has are the men and women in the mirror. You and I.

Without each of us it cannot win. It cannot even survive.
We are also mediocrity's strongest enemy. In fact, we are the only enemy it will ever face and cannot hope to overcome unless we let it.

The defeat of mediocrity must come from within each of us.

It is keeping you down. It is holding you back. It is stopping you from even beginning to approach the potential you have within you.

Few things will hinder your professional growth and career advancement more than mediocrity. You do not need new processes. You do not need new equipment. You do not need more connections. You do not need a lucky break. To win the battle you merely need to defeat mediocrity.

The battle takes place within you! Here is where the battle against apathy, complacency, and indifference must be fought. Here is where you win or lose the battle against mediocrity. Here is where you must defy and defeat mediocrity.

Mediocrity manifests itself in the work place in thousands of ways. Perhaps you might recognize a few. Have you ever heard these words, thought them, or maybe even spoken them? Have you ever seen actions or inactions that clearly make these statements?

"I am not paid to do that."

"I know nothing about that."

"It is not my job."

"Someone else will handle that for you."

"That is good enough."

"What's your problem?"

"I can't help you."

"Who cares?"

"When he does I will."

"Maybe they won't notice the quality problem."

"We can correct that later."

"I'll get to you when I have time."

"Let someone else do that."
"Send it through. The next department will get it."

"That customer was a jerk anyway."

"Who do they think they are, anyway?"

"I am on my break."

"I will sell them the first thing they will buy even if something else might do the job more effectively for them."

"That repair will hold for now. Call us if it breaks again."

"It's not my problem. Someone else caused that problem. Call them."

"I do not like them anyway. The hell with them."

"I don't know and I'll do nothing to find out."

"Who cares what they want?"

"Just throw that box over there; someone else will check it later."

"Someone has a problem. I'm glad it is not me."

"That's not my department."

"I'm out to lunch."

"That is not my responsibility."

"Let them wait."

"The company owes me."

"I have no idea what to do so I'll just pretend not to notice and pass this problem along."

I am sure you have dealt with co-workers, clerks, customer service people, and hundreds of others who have spoken these words or very similar ones. Or at least made you feel they were thinking them.

Do others think of you and your efforts this way?

But mediocrity in the work place is not demonstrated with words alone. Mediocrity is both verbal and non-verbal. It is demonstrated by actions, inactions, words, and deeds.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

"The only time some people work like a horse is when the boss rides them."

Gabriel Heatter

When I was a young man there was a popular science fiction show called “Lost in Space”.

If you have ever seen this show you know it was a very low tech show about a family who was lost in space. They always floated around the galaxy landing on one hostile planet after another.

But they always had one high tech security feature. They had an invisible force field that kept all the monsters out. You couldn't see it but it was there working to keep all the bad things out.

I have worked with many people who seemed to put up invisible shields around them. The shield they put up also serves to keep out the bad things. However, in this case the bad things, as they see it, manifest themselves in the form of added work, responsibility, accountability and extra effort.

It is like they are surrounded by an impenetrable force field that activates whenever you request or even suggest they take the extra step, cross train, stay late, take on added work, be more careful, be more caring, make things easier for others, or do anything outside of what they think they should do.

I have known many employees like this.

Instead of searching for more responsibility they ran from it.

Instead of striving to improve quality they simply did all they could to push things onto the next person, the next department.

Instead of solving problems they became one by ignoring or passing on problems.

Instead of embracing the option of helping others when things were busy they put invisible force fields around themselves.

You couldn't see it. But boy could you sense it. You could almost feel the negative energy flow from them.

You could almost visualize them shoving the work back across the desk or counter to where it came from.

Their body language and mannerisms made it abundantly clear that they had no intention of doing anything more than was absolutely required to keep their job.

What they thought they should do, of course, was the bare minimum needed to keep their job.
Derrick W. Welch

You will notice I did not say to do the job right. I said to keep their job.

These people are the embodiment of mediocrity. Not embracing these things represents mediocrity.

Help someone else? Forget it.

Take on more responsibility? Fat chance.

Go the extra mile to make someone else's job down the line easier? No chance.

Yet, who do you think felt they deserved the biggest raise and the largest bonus? Who do you think felt slighted when they were passed over for promotions?

"The girl who can't dance says the band can't play."

Yiddish proverb

They wouldn't give but they were first in line for the getting and then wondered why they would come away with an empty plate.

Then, inevitably, instead of realizing they were the problem they would turn around and blame others, bad mouth the company and their boss and justify to themselves that their actions had been right all along.

They had been right in not helping others, in not taking on more work, in not doing a better job. Of course they were right. After all look what happened. They did not get the raise. They did not get the promotion. They did not get the support of others.

Boy it is sure a good thing that they didn't perform up to their capability since they clearly would not have benefited from it.

This is the way the thinking of mediocrity goes.

Do you know anyone like this? Have you ever wondered if others think of you in this way?

Omission of activity also represents mediocrity. Mediocrity manifests itself in a thousand and one ways.

Do you recognize any of these?

The sales clerk who doesn't greet you when you come into the store, or ask if she or he can help you, or thank you for your business?
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

How about those employees who refuse to pick up a ringing phone, as though they have a broken arm or are deaf?

Or the salesperson who turns orders in that are missing information and barely legible and assumes someone else will fill in the blanks?

How about the receptionist who greets you rudely and transfers you to the wrong department or disconnects you?

What about the person who promises to do something and then does not do it?

How about the waitress or waiter who brings your meal and never asks if you need anything else and never checks back with you to see if everything was satisfactory?

Or the waiter or waitress who turns you into a waiter by making you sit for 25 minutes waiting for a check?

How about the union worker who hides behind union rules to avoid the pursuit of excellence?

What about those that never return your calls?

How about the production worker who never checks the quality of what they are producing or packing?

How about the cleaning person who vacuums only every other week even though they are being paid to do it every week?

How about the person who accepts no responsibility for anything and seeks to claim credit while assessing blame?

How about people who hide behind voice mail?

What about the employee that stands around the time clock waiting for it to click to the next minute before punching out?

Or the workers who flee the building at 5:30 as though it was on fire no matter how many phones are ringing or how much work is left undone?

How about the employee who pours the last cup of coffee and leaves the empty pot for someone else to clean out and refill?

What about taking care of personal business on company time?

Have you ever waited for help while a clerk was talking on the phone engaged in an obviously personal call on company time?
How about those who assume instead of asking?

How about the salesperson that never follows up on a lead?

How about the person who never pays any attention to details?

What about the employee who is too busy playing politics to do the job?

How about the employee that always seems to be out sick on Mondays and Fridays?

How about the person who stretches a 15 minute break into 20 or 25 minutes?

I could list thousands of examples of mediocrity in action and I would not even be scratching the surface.

It surrounds you. You must deal with it every day in hundreds of small and large ways.

"We distinguish the excellent man from the common man by saying that the former is the one who makes great demands on himself, and the latter who makes no demands on himself."

Jose Ortega y Gasset

You must not become part of it. You must not allow it to drag you down. You must not swim in the sea of mediocrity that surrounds you. You must rise above it.

That is the objective of this book. I want to show you how to rise above mediocrity by defying it. We will cover these areas and many others in this powerful book about defying mediocrity.

Along the way I will shatter a few myths that can cause you to embrace an attitude of mediocrity and think it is justified.

Let me assure you mediocrity is a very easy enemy to defeat. In fact, few enemies in your life will be easier to claim victory over than mediocrity. But very few will ever even enter into battle against this truly weak opponent.

I hope to change this by showing you how easy it is to defy mediocrity.

Let's get started.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Chapter 2. The company owes me!

"Don't go around saying the world owes you a living; the world owes you nothing; it was here first."

Mark Twain

Ahh, the attitude of entitlement. A lifelong friend of mediocrity. Let's tackle this career killing attitude right now. Let me warn you once again, I will not sugar-coat anything I tell you. I have an obligation to tell you the truth. You deserve nothing less and will get nothing less from me.

With this said, let me confront this often uttered argument head on. **The company owes you nothing but a paycheck for the work you have done.** They have no obligation to take care of you for life. They do not owe you a lifetime job. You owe them an honest day's work and they owe you a paycheck for the wage you agreed to work for.

Few formulas are simpler than this.

Also remember that the company pays you when you are out sick. They pay you when you do a mediocre job. They pay you when you are on vacation. They pay you when you make mistakes. They also provide you numerous very costly benefits and a place to grow and advance. They do not owe these latter things. They provide them to you.

It is up to you to make the most of them.

Countless times I have heard employees state how they felt the company owed them more. How the company has an obligation to provide for them for life. How the company had a debt to them.

I have spoken with many who have been laid off after years of employment and felt the bitterness and the self-pity of their words.

I have interviewed dozens of men and women who found themselves out of a job after a plant or company closed down and listened to the anger and resentment that they harbored toward the company for the predicament they found themselves in.

But think about this. They blamed the company for closing the doors. As though they somehow expected the company to continue losing money solely to provide them a job.

They blamed the company for the fact that they had no job, as though somehow the company had an obligation to provide the employee a job for as long as the employee wanted one, regardless of the employee's value to the company or the company's ability to keep the employee on the payroll.

As though these were minor details.
These employees are often the same ones who would think nothing of moving to another company for more money in a heartbeat. Who would never consider the tremendous investment the company had in them. Who only see the employer/employee relationship as a one-way street. They only see their side. What they want. What they feel they are owed. What they feel they have given.

They never look at what they have gotten.

They complained about the fact that they had spent years working for the company and now feel they have a limited future as they gave so much and so many years to the company as though this meant the company now owed them.

Did the company not do its part by paying them every week? Was this not the sole obligation of the company?

Did the company agree to provide a job to these employees for life?

If they were laid off or let go because they did not have the skills needed to remain an effective and contributing employee in the current workplace they blamed the company.

Did the employee not have a responsibility to obtain the added education and training they needed to keep up with the changes?

Why did these people not take the initiative and learn the skills they needed to keep up or, better yet, to make themselves more valuable to the company?

"We've gone from a society of people who were self-reliant to a people who inherently refuse to accept responsibility. We're remarkably skillful at multiplying our excuses. It's never our fault, and everyone is a victim."

Charles Sykes

What happened to the self-responsibility of these people?

Are we not all responsible for our own actions and inactions? I know this is not a very popular position to take today.

I know that few take responsibility for anything today. I know that all problems are always caused by someone else in today's world. Is it any wonder we are surrounded by mediocrity?

This type of thinking is what holds so many down.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Let me ask you something. If you knew you were going to work for a company for 5, 10, 15, 20, or 25 years or more and then be out of a job would you not use this time to plan for the day you would be out of work? Would you not develop other skills and interests so you would be prepared for the day of unemployment? Would you not plan fiscally as well?

Of course you would. If you did not, you would have no one to blame but yourself.

Then why do so many employees think that when they take a job it is forever unless they decide to change positions? Why do they assume the company will take care of them forever unless they decide to leave?

Why do they assume the company will even survive 5, 10, 15, 20, or 25 years?

Why do they assume the company will need or be able to afford them in the future? Why do they assume that technology or changing markets or any one of a hundred other changes will not affect their job?

Why do they think the employee / employer relationship is a one-way street with the employee having the options and the employer having some type of obligation that extends infinitely beyond a weekly paycheck?

"The actions you take, or fail to take, today determine the results you will realize tomorrow."

Derrick W. Welch

Why do they not realize that changes happen and happen rapidly? Changes that are often forced, unanticipated, and unavoidable. That they, not the company, are responsible for their own future.

Think of someone being employed by the same company for 30 years and then one day being faced with unemployment. If the employee assumed that he would have a job with this company for life, if he assumed the company would need him until he chose to leave, if he assumed the company would be able to afford to keep him until he chose to leave, if he assumed he would never need to improve his skills and capabilities, he would be shocked and unprepared.

But if the employee understood that the future was his responsibility, that the only true obligation the company had was to pay him each week for his efforts, that change could occur anytime and was not always positive, that the company could downsize, be bought out, or even close down one day, that his skills may no longer be needed or affordable, then he could have taken the steps to be prepared.

If he realized his skills might not have kept up with the changes of the business he could have spent his time acquiring new skills.

Skills that would make him more valuable to the company instead of expendable.
He could have put all his efforts toward making the company as good as he could so it would survive. He could have fiscally prepared for the day that was coming.

**Don't let this happen to you. Take responsibility for your future. It is your responsibility, not the company's.**

"You will find many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view."

*Obi-Wan Kenobi to Luke Skywalker in Return of the Jedi*

Let me also ask those of you who feel the company owes you something to look on the other side of the ledger for a minute. To look at things from your employer's standpoint.

If you take the time to look at the overall picture with an open mind, if you put aside your anger, your bitterness, your attitude of being owed more, of deserving more, of feeling that the company owes you for all your past efforts, that the company does not appreciate you, you might just find that these feelings are most often unjustified.

If you realize that the company has paid you day in and day out for every day you worked -- and many you did not -- that they have lived up to their end of the employment bargain, most often you will see that your feelings are unjustified. That you do not have a basis for complaining and perhaps you should be more thankful.

How would you feel if the company felt you owed them more?

After all have they not kept you on the payroll all these years? Have they not paid you more and more despite the fact that in many cases you do not increase productivity each year?

Have they not paid you sick time, vacation time, insurance costs, and many other benefits? Have they not paid you 100% of your agreed upon wage each day even though you have not always given them your 100% effort?

Have they not invested in you by training and teaching you, by giving you advancement opportunities?

**Why are you any more justified to feel that the company owes you something more than your employer would be for feeling you owe them more?** Why would it be acceptable for you to leave the company for another position at anytime and not for the company to replace or terminate you?

If you look at things through the perspective of your employer perhaps you will begin to understand how they may be more justified feeling you owe them more than you are feeling they owe you more!
My point is not to suggest you owe the company but rather to suggest that they do not owe you.

**If I still have not convinced you consider this.**

If you have an attitude of entitlement you have established a certain set of expectations. You expect things you are not going to get.

You have forgotten you are paid based on your value to the company today. Not yesterday, not last year, not over the last 20 years.

**You were already paid for these efforts.**

To get paid more, promoted, recognized more, you must increase your impact and value with the company today and the company must be fiscally able to provide these things to you.

Sometimes employees will create expectations based on needs and wants as well. They need more money or want the promotion and they feel the company owes it to them. But let me ask you, are you going to give me something because I want it? Are you going to give me something because I need it?

That is nonsense! Why should you? I should get more money because I earn it. Because I do such a good job you must give it to me or someone else will. Because you can't afford to do without me.

Because I make the company more money and I therefore deserve more money. Because you want to give me more money or responsibility more than you want to lose me.

Because I improve myself and my skills so I am worth more money. Why else should you give me more money? Why else should you get more money?

Put yourself in the shoes of your boss or of management. Need or want has nothing to do with business.

Should you get a promotion because you want it? Of course not! You should get it if you have proven you can handle it. Proven you have the skills to do the job. Because you have the leadership needed to maximize the performance of the position.

**You get more by giving more. Anything else is highly unlikely and has no place in a profitable business.**

You get more because you've proven you're worth more. Not because you want it. Not because you need it. Not because you feel entitled to it. This is how your manager feels. This is how ownership feels.

**This is the way you would feel were it your company. This is the way business works.**
When you lose sight of these things you create expectations in your mind. Expectations that are not going to be met and quite frankly should not be met.

Now when your expectations are not met you become bitter, angry, and frustrated. Your attitude worsens, your morale drops, and your performance slips.

You become disgruntled and it is reflected in your performance and interaction with others.

Now instead of being a valuable employee you may be viewed as a selfish employee who is becoming, or has become, a problem employee.

All because you created expectations in your mind based on an attitude of entitlement, of being owed something more for your efforts than a paycheck. All because of an unrealistic want or need.

This is a self-defeating cycle. A cycle of mediocrity.

Where do you think this is going to get you?

I know in some cases, far fewer than most people with this attitude would have you believe, this may even be true. Perhaps the owners or managers aren't doing enough, aren't paying enough, don't appreciate your efforts, or whatever.

When this is true you may have no alternative other than to consider changing jobs or moving to another department (if the problem is with a manager and this option exists).

The company either can't or won't compensate you at the level your value deserves. Or they simply will not recognize your value or perhaps they do not feel your value to them is as great as you feel it is.

**But even when this is true do you think the attitude of entitlement is going to get you what you think you should have?**

Even if your complaints are justified do you think a negative attitude is going to turn into a positive result?

Do you think your moaning and complaining is going to get you what you want?
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

"Be warned. Constant complaining can cost you your job. "Entitleists" a polite word for whiners -- often express their outrage in passive-aggressive ways, including being chronically late or absent, stealing from the company, backstabbing co-workers or bosses, or simply withdrawing—not taking risks, not suggesting solutions, not going the extra mile, in effect just waiting around to be fired. Need we point out these are not great career building strategies? Care to lay odds on who, in the next round of cost cutting, will have a bulls-eye sketched squarely on his or her forehead (and who will be then heard to cry, Waaaaah)?"

Anne Fisher

Do you think your refusal to put forth your best effort each and every day until they treat you the way you feel you should be treated is going to turn the situation around to your favor?

Where is this going to get you?

What do you possibly hope to accomplish by undermining the company's efforts, displaying a poor attitude, working at a level below your capabilities or badmouthing the company?

Do you think this behavior is going to make your employer suddenly think "Hey, I have been underpaying him and under appreciating him? Let me call him in and give him a big raise and a promotion?".

Is this what you think the result of your negative attitude and actions will be?

If so, you must run downstairs on Christmas morning looking for the presents Santa left you.

I think you are in for another disappointment.

If you think this way you had better think again.

All this attitude will do is reinforce in the minds of those in charge that their decision not to do whatever it is you think they should be doing was and is the right thing to do.

They will be able to justify not paying you more. After all you could do better couldn't you? They will be able to justify not providing you better benefits.

After all you have a negative attitude don't you?

"Work done with little effort is likely to yield little result."

B.C. Forbes
They will be able to justify not promoting you. After all with your negative attitude and your lack of 100% output and initiative why should you get a promotion and who would want to work for you anyway?

These are the things they will be thinking and saying.

**You can't win with the wrong attitude and lack of effort even if your reasons are justified.**

You are going to be stuck in the great sea of mediocrity that exists in this country.

You will be hurting yourself and limiting your professional advancement which limits your income.

You will be hindering your ability to reach the levels you could and should reach since you are putting road blocks up in front of yourself.

**Your anger and bitterness will put a hole in your soul.**

**You will be hurting your image, and your reputation --- with others and with yourself.**

You could also be placing your job at risk and believe me, if you lose your job, as you stand in the unemployment line reflecting, all those things you thought were so unfair would suddenly seem to have been a bit less significant and unjust.

If you are indeed justified in feeling the way you do, and again, in some cases you will be justified, and you are unable to adapt to these circumstances, you have an obligation to seek alternative employment either with another department or another company.

**To remain it will be unfair to your employer, unfair to your co-workers, and extremely damaging to yourself.**

You will become bitter and angry and this will be reflected in your efforts and growth.

This will also affect your life at home and off the job as your unhappiness will begin to show in all areas of your life.

You will be creating a self-perpetuating cycle that can only lead to negative results on and off the job.

We will cover this area more in future chapters as it is a critical issue in the battle to defeat mediocrity.
Chapter 3. A special message for those of you starting a new job.

"If Walt Whitman were alive today he'd have to rewrite his famous line from Leaves of Grass to read "I hear America whining."

If you can make out some of the words they sound like this: The company doesn't appreciate me. The company won't help me plan my career. Nobody tells me what's going on around here. The boss is a knucklehead. My evaluation wasn't fair. My last raise was too long ago and too small. Everything's changing too fast, and not for the better. Waaaaaaah."

Anne Fisher

There are not many guarantees in life, not many sure things, but one thing I can guarantee you is that when you start working, whether it is on a new job or your first job, you are going to run into people with the attitude of entitlement.

They whine and complain, bitch and moan about how the company owes them this or that. About how the company should give them this or that or do more for them.

In fact, you will run into many people like this.

People who blame the company or life or this or that for their lack of professional and personal advancement or success.

When, in fact, they should be looking in the mirror since in most cases the possession of this type of attitude is exactly why they have not advanced or earned more or been given more.

As we have covered the many problems with these types of attitudes in the last chapter I will not waste your time by repeating them again here. Instead I merely want to give you some good advice.

Stay away from these people. These people are poison. They will try to grab hold of you like quicksand and pull you into their ranks of mediocrity.

Mediocrity is a relentless recruiter. You must be on guard and rise above these people.

They will do all they can to convince you they are completely justified in feeling the way they do. After all, they need to convince others of these injustices so they can continue to convince themselves all their problems are the result of others or of circumstances beyond their control.

The possibility that they have not received what they feel is owed them could never be their own fault. It could never be the result of their attitude, actions, or inactions.
The more they tell others how some force outside of their control has caused their problems the more they believe it themselves.

They will desperately want you to join their ranks. Mediocrity never stops recruiting. In the mind of mediocrity the larger the majority the more they are proven right.

If others buy into the actions and attitude of mediocrity it merely proves how right those embracing it have been all along.

They will try to convince you that all they say is true. They will warn you that you too face these injustices.

**Thank goodness they have been available to tell you these things. They have saved you from trying your best. From trying to improve your value to the company. From making the largest impact you can. From improving yourself and your skills.**

Don't waste your time and efforts they will tell you. It will get you nowhere. They will never pay you what you are worth. They will never do enough for you. They will never appreciate your efforts.

These are just some of the many arguments they will throw at you. They will be convincing. The temptation to fall in line will be great.

**After all, it is always far easier to get along than stand out.**

It is far easier to embrace mediocrity than it is to pursue excellence.

If you fall into the quicksand of mediocrity you may never get out. You will be falling into the same trap I have outlined in the last chapter.

"Something important has been lost in the spirit of Americans when they settle easily, and cheer mediocrity as if it were excellence."

*John Cunniff*

It will be far easier to fall in with them than it will be to ignore them and rise above them.

**Mediocrity is always ready and willing to be embraced.**

**But excellence must often stand alone.**
Chapter 4. If you want me to do more, just pay me more.

"The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary."

Vidal Sassoon

"If you want me to do more pay me more. Pay me more and I will do a better job."

The battle cry of mediocrity.

I know that in many ways this chapter hits on a number of things I have addressed in other chapters. However, it is an area of such importance, and an attitude so often seen, I feel compelled to give this subject a chapter all its own.

A common problem today is that employees want to be paid more to perform better. The problem is that they have this backwards. What they are saying is that if they are paid more they will do a better job.

This, of course, means that they are not doing the job as well as they could or should be doing it now.

Mediocrity will be defeated only when this attitude changes.

Take a few minutes and think about this.

If you have this attitude what you are saying is that you can do a much better job but only if you are paid more. Perhaps this is why you are not paid more. Unless you are a professional athlete you are paid based on what you do and what you contribute, not on what you could do or might do.

If you want to earn more then you must increase your value to the company. You must help the company earn more. Look out for the company's interests if you want them to look out for yours.

To earn more you must first prove you are worth more.

You don't get paid what you need. You don't get paid what you want. You shouldn't. You get paid based on your value to your employer. The way it should be.

Start giving more and you will start getting more. In your career and in life.

If you want your company to help you obtain your career and income goals you have got to help them accomplish theirs. If you want commitment from the company you must be committed to the company.
A very simple formula.

Help them get what they are striving for and they will help you get what you are striving for. The basic formula for career success. It is also the basic formula for success in life.

This also holds true with your employees, co-workers, and superiors. If you want commitment, loyalty, respect from them, you must give it to them.

There is no magic here. Help others get or accomplish what they want and they will help you get what you want.

"You must pay the price if you wish to secure the blessings."

*Andrew Jackson*

You cannot expect to get what you want by first demanding and then performing. Perform first and then expect. Prove you are worth more and you will earn more and be given more responsibilities and more opportunities.

"Updating skills will be a lifetime endeavor for most employees. Those that don't keep learning and adjusting will limit their own career."

*Kiplinger's Magazine*

Let me also point out that if you want to earn more many times you must learn more. Many jobs have a preset value to the company. Many jobs, no matter how well done, can only command a specific level of pay.

Yes, there will be a range within the pay scale of most jobs and yes, you can often earn more by doing a better job. But to earn above the top of the scale for that job you will need to increase your knowledge and capabilities.

To advance to a higher level of earnings you must often move up to a higher level of responsibility. This will often mean learning more.

It is up to you to find out what qualifications are needed to move up to the next level of responsibility. It is up to you to undertake the needed training and education to qualify yourself. It is up to you to gain the qualifications you need to move to a higher level of responsibility and earnings.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

"They're only puttin' in a nickel, but they want a dollar song."

Song Title

Never forget that the ability, effort, and capability must come before the opportunity and earnings.

The individual in pursuit of excellence understands this. Those with the mind-set of mediocrity do not and by not understanding this they hold themselves back while blaming others for their lack of progress or advancement.

Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.
Chapter 5. Your obligation.

"Only by helping others get what they want can you get what you want."

Derrick W. Welch

What is the employee / employer relationship?

Let's look at this relationship at its most basic level, remembering we still to some degree live in a free market, capitalistic society.

Too many employees, and I consider everyone other than the owners an employee including management, have developed the mind-set that the company owes them something.

They are right of course. As I have indicated earlier, the company does owe you something. The company owes you a paycheck for the agreed upon wage. This is the wage that you have agreed to work for.

Yes, of course, the company also has an obligation to provide a safe workplace and to provide you with the resources you need to do your job in a manner that allows you to meet or exceed their expectations.

But you also have an obligation.

An obligation to your employer to do the very best job you possibly can.

Day in and day out this obligation exists.

Is this not what you promised to do when you accepted the job?

Was this not your intention when you accepted the job?

Is the company not paying you for your best effort?

I can assure you they expect nothing less. They deserve nothing less. Every week that you cash a paycheck from your employer you have this obligation.

Is this not a form of a contract? In exchange for your best effort every day the company is agreeing to pay you a preset wage.

Few things in life could be simpler than this.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

You expect to be paid and they expect you to be at the job and to do it in a manner that meets or exceeds their needs and expectations.

You will notice I said your best effort. They do not decrease or increase your wage each week based on how well you do the job each week. They pay you for your best effort each week.

If you feel you are paid too little for your efforts and accomplishments you can seek more money from your current employer and, if they agree, you will get it.

If they disagree with you over what you should be compensated or if they are unable to pay you more, you have the right to see if another firm is willing to pay you what you think your efforts are worth.

What could possibly be simpler than this?

**But never forget that as long as you accept a paycheck from your employer you have an obligation to them.**

An obligation to do the best job you can.

An obligation to look out for the company's interests.

"*It is easy to dodge our responsibilities, but we cannot dodge the consequences of dodging our responsibilities.*"

*Josiah Stamp*

You also have an obligation to yourself. An obligation to do the very best job you can.

To do otherwise would undermine your self-esteem and both your personal and professional growth.

To do otherwise would be to tell yourself that performing below your capabilities is acceptable.

To do otherwise is to reject the pursuit of individual excellence and embrace mediocrity.

**To do otherwise makes you common.**

"*Whether it be personal or business you always need to work as hard as possible to try and make yourself as irreplaceable as possible. Yet most do as little as possible thinking they are irreplaceable which of course makes them easy to replace or do without.*"

*Elizabeth Welch*
You know what?

It will also be the best thing you can do in life and for your career.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Chapter 6. There is more than one type of customer service.

"If you are not serving the customer you had better be serving someone who is."

Karl Albrecht

What does the often used, but rarely understood, term "customer service" mean to you?

Most people think of customer service as the service given to external customers, customers who buy the products and services of the company.

To many people it refers to the quality of service they give to the customer or they receive from the companies and people they conduct business with.

Most people talk about customer service and make wonderful promises and claims about how good the customer service they offer is.

But the reality of it is that excellence in the area of customer service is about as rare as free trade in North Korea.

Excellence in customer service means much more than just selling a product or delivering a service with a smile.

Excellence in customer service means consistently, day in and day out, customer after customer, delivering a quality product or service in a manner that, at least, meets, and hopefully exceeds, your customer's expectations each and every time.

This is really not a very complex process. However, it is one that is rarely seen in any business today. An attitude of apathy, inconsistency, and complacency is more the norm.

To most of you the term "customer service" means little as you think it only refers to those in the customer service department or those who deal directly with the external customer.

Simply put, you think it is not your responsibility. You are wrong.

Very wrong!

Yes, excellence in external customer service is important, vitally important. But there is another form of customer service that you must work at improving. I am speaking of internal customer service.
Each of your co-workers and employees is an internal customer. Each department is an internal customer to the other.

Unless you are able to provide top flight internal customer service, your company will never be able to provide the best external customer service possible. They will never be able to maximize productivity, improve quality, and increase profitability.

Excellence in both areas must be the goal. Any other goal will be very costly. Very costly indeed.

**Internal customer service deals with an attitude of assistance among all.** It deals with each employee, no matter how high up or how low down the corporate ladder, making sure they have not made an error or assumption that is being passed on to the next person or department.

It deals with asking and not assuming. It deals with you and each of your co-workers doing all that you can to facilitate the overall objectives of the company and not just your individual objectives.

Internal customer service deals with reducing errors in all departments. It deals with clear and effective communication. It means thinking about how you can make the job of others easier, not how to make your own job easier.

**It means going the extra step and striving for excellence in everything you do.**

It means functioning as a team and not just talking about it. It means treating others as you would like to be treated.

**It means always striving to exceed the expectations of your co-workers and of other departments.**

Internal customer service deals with a commitment, a commitment to doing the best job that can be done the first time. It deals with being careful and not careless. It must start with the initial customer contact and continue through to the delivery of your product or service.

The attitude of "it is not my job" or "let someone else worry about that" has no place in a company driven to provide outstanding customer service.

**It should have no place in your company or your life.**
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

To achieve excellence in the area of internal customer service your mind-set has got to be "How can I help you?", "How can I make your job easier?", "How can I make the job of the next person in the process easier?".

If everyone thinks like this each of you will be looking out for each other.

"Expect people to perform only as well as the example you set."

Byrd Baggett

Notice I said your mind-set and you. Not someone else but you. You must think this way. You can't wait for someone else to think this way and act this way towards you. You must start thinking and acting this way.

"To be the best you can you must always give the best you have. Nothing else should ever be acceptable to you."

Derrick W. Welch

You must think "How can I do my job so well and so far above what is expected that I can make your job easier?".

If you are thinking this way and acting this way while all other employees are doing the same thing how much better do you think your company will be?

How much more effective do you think you will be? How much do you think your product, process, performance, and service will improve? How much more enjoyable do you think your job will be? How much better do you think your company will be?

"When benefits are mutual, then cooperation will follow. Mutual cooperation results in benefits and thus leads to affection."

Tai Wong Gung

Think of the cycle of goodwill you will be creating. The cycle of helpfulness. The cycle of looking out for each other, of correcting each other's mistakes and oversights. The atmosphere of teamwork. The sense of comradery.

You will be amazed at the positive feelings you will generate and receive working in this manner, with this mind-set.
Derrick W. Welch

Your sense of job satisfaction will increase dramatically, as will the sense of job satisfaction of those around you.

Think of how much better your external service would be. Think of how much wasted time would be recovered and reallocated to more productive and profitable efforts.

Poor internal customer service costs your organization or company money in hundreds of different ways.

From quality problems to operational delays and redundancies, poor internal customer service costs money and lowers productivity. It will also cause serious morale problems and severely hinder your company's or organization's ability to provide exceptional external customer service.

"The real friend of his country is the person who believes in excellence, seeks it, fights for it, defends it, and tries to produce it."

Morley Callaghan

It limits the company's ability to be competitive. We will talk about this more later, but let me also point out that if it is bad for the company it is bad for you.

If it costs the company money it hinders the company's ability to pay you more, to provide better working conditions, to upgrade in numerous ways, and to provide better benefits.

Think of excellence in internal service as a critical piece of the puzzle. The puzzle that makes a mediocre employee great and turns a bad company into a good company and a good company into a great company.

It cannot be accomplished without you!
Chapter 7. If you want to work for a great company, start by becoming a great employee.

"It is not enough to see the possibility, you must become the possibility."

Dr. Robert Anthony

People create the perception of a company. Your customers view your company or organization a certain way as a result of their contact with the employees of the company.

Your co-workers perceive the company a certain way because of their contact with you. The corporation is a cold intangible organization. To a customer you deal with you are the company.

People create morale. Good people improve morale because others enjoy working with them and for them.

Negative people destroy morale because co-workers dislike working with them or for them.

How would you like it if your co-workers took bogus sick days, made inexcusable mistakes, passed half assed jobs onto you, and undertook any one of a hundred other unacceptable activities? Your negative feelings toward these people affect your feelings toward the company.

You wonder why they are allowed to do this. You question management behind their backs. You become dissatisfied with your job because you are doing things you should not need to do.

In a case like this you can work for the greatest company in the world and you will hate your job and hate the company.

"People don't work for companies; they work for people."

Philip Crosby

People enjoy their jobs because of the people they work with. If you did not enjoy working with the people at your company, you would not enjoy your job no matter how much you might enjoy the work. If you do not enjoy your job, what do you think your feelings about the company will be?

Do you think you would feel that the company was a great company if you did not enjoy your job? How could you?

If you have negative feelings towards the company or organization it will affect your job performance and attitude on and off the job. This negatively affects your entire life. A cycle is created.
A cycle I have outlined in an earlier chapter. A self-perpetuating cycle that feeds on itself.

"The best way to work with outstanding people is to become one."

Derrick W. Welch

But the problem is not the company, it is people. Don't be one of them. People are what make the difference in a company. Great employees are what create a great company.

Treat others with the respect and professionalism you want from them. Set the example. Set the standard.

It starts with you, not them. Perform the way you want others to. Do not take the attitude that you will when they do. They will have the same "the heck with them" attitude. This turns into a self-perpetuating, self-defeating cycle of mediocrity.

"Let him that would move the world, first move himself."

Socrates

You must rise above the attitude of mediocrity that often surrounds you.

Even if your co-workers do not.

Even if your boss does not or ownership does not you must.

Take pride in what you do and how well you do it.

Don't fall back on the excuse that others don't so why should I?

Don't let others establish your standards for you!

This holds you back, it damages your self-esteem.

It is not the mind-set of excellence it is the mind-set of mediocrity.

"It is not fair to ask of others what you are not willing to do yourself."

Eleanor Roosevelt
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

It must start with you. Lead the way.

Don't wait for others so you can follow.
Chapter 8. Your actions speak so loud I do not need to hear your words.

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

*Aristotle*

You can't buy a reputation, you must build one.

You can't command loyalty, you must earn it.

You can't be given respect, you must earn it.

Respect from your customers. Respect from your co-workers, respect from your employees, respect from your boss.

"The quality of an individual is reflected in the standards they set for themselves."

*Ray Kroc*

You must set the standard. People will follow your actions, far more than your words.

If you demand they do one thing while you do another, which do you think others will mirror?

If you preach cost control, increased productivity, honesty, and integrity and then take time off from work on false pretenses or use company labor and materials for personal projects, what do you think others will do?

If you demand others are more careful and you are not what do you think they will do? You will be laying a foundation of abuse, dishonesty, lack of integrity, and poor morale.

If you do not care or do not live by the rules you expect others to, neither will they.

Would you? Your actions cause a reaction.

"Be the change you want to see in the world."

*Gandhi*

You must lead by example.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

How can you expect others to adhere to the policies if you do not?

How can you ask for honesty if you do not demonstrate it?

How can you arrive late every day while demanding others come in on time?

How can you expect others to act ethically when you do not?

How can you expect others to go out of their way to help you when you do nothing to help them?

How can you ask others to improve quality when you do nothing to improve your own?

How can you expect the best effort every day from others when you do not give your best effort every day?

Treat your co-workers the way you would like to be treated even if they do not treat you that way.

Never expect someone else to live up to standards that you are unwilling or unable to live up to. You must set the example.

The attitude of "I will when they do" must be unacceptable.

This lowers yourself to a level below your capabilities.

This is the attitude of mediocrity.

You set the standard by your actions.

"Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing."

*Albert Schweitzer*

You must walk the talk. You cannot say one thing and do another.

Doing so will be the end of any efforts by anyone else. Showing me means something. Telling me means little.

If you do not demonstrate the commitment, your co-workers never will.

**It must start with you.** Not someone else, but you.
Derrick W. Welch

Think about how destructive and ineffective it is to others who dedicate themselves to a program of internal customer service or any other job improvement performance efforts while you embrace your own program of mediocrity.

**It will not work.** It will create resentment. It will earn you disrespect and distrust instead of respect and loyalty.

Others will follow your lead. The defeat of mediocrity can become infectious. It starts with you.

Others will mirror your example. Good or bad.

"*As I grow older I pay less attention to what they say. I just watch what they do.*"

*Andrew Carnegie*

You can't expect others to consider your needs if you do not consider theirs.

You can't expect your co-workers to give 100% to all they do while you put forth no more than the minimum effort.

You can't expect your boss to consider you for a promotion or increased responsibility if you are not a team player who does all he or she can do to help others and to help the department and company accomplish its goals.

You can't complain about others coming in late when you leave early. You can't demand others work extra hours when you don't. You can't expect co-workers to do all they can to make your job easier when you do nothing or very little to make theirs easier.

You can't take company supplies and question the honesty of others. You can't take long lunches and then wonder why others won't skip a break to help you out.

You can't put personal agendas and activities ahead of corporate objectives and then complain that you are not getting further up the corporate ladder.

You might think you can, but you are wrong!

**We are talking about show and tell.**

You cannot talk about and expect one thing and show them something else. You might like to think you can, but you are wrong.

Do not be naive. People judge you by what you do, not what you say.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

"It is commitment, not authority that produces results."

William L. Gore

Your co-workers or employees will not bust their butts to do a better job while you do not. Instead of developing a common goal and improving morale, you will have poor morale, resentment, and an attitude of "the hell with them".

You will create dissension and foster an "us against them" mentality. How can you expect commitment from anyone else if you do not demonstrate it?

How long would you shovel sand in the ocean?

"You must demonstrate commitment before you can demand it."

Derrick W. Welch

Excellence has a price. The price is commitment.

Without commitment you will never achieve excellence. Make no mistake about it.

You can't state what you want and do nothing about it. You can't claim to be committed to your company, to self-improvement, and to excellence in the area of internal customer service while you look out for your own interests only.

You cannot have it both ways.

You are either committed to excellence or you are not.

You either choose to be uncommon or you don't. There is nothing in-between.

Let me also point out something very important. When you knowingly perform below your capabilities, for whatever reason, you are reinforcing to yourself the acceptability of this.

This should never be acceptable to you. Never.

Once you allow yourself to justify performing below your capabilities you are creating new standards for yourself.

Standards far below what you are capable of doing at work and in life.

You are embracing mediocrity.
Derrick W. Welch

You cannot simply turn excellence on and off. It must be the standard you establish and pursue.

When you do anything else, no matter how hard you try and justify it to yourself or to others, you are lowering yourself to mediocrity.

"The lies most devastating to our self-esteem are not so much the lies we tell as the lies we live."

Nathaniel Branden

Don't kid yourself. You are sending yourself a message when you do this. A message that it is OK to perform below your capabilities.

That your sub-standard efforts are justified. A message that you don't need to do a better job.

A message of mediocrity.

You allow yourself to be common.
Chapter 9. Excuses. We all have them.

"We don't need more strength or more ability or greater opportunity. What we need is to use what we have."

_Basil S. Walsh_

Excuses are often the bane of the weak. They give us reasons for failing or not even trying. They are the food that feeds our fragile egos. They allow us to justify what we do or do not do. Excuses. We all have them.

"We seldom think of what we have but always of what we lack."

_Schopenhauer_


Excuses are very easy to come by. But make no mistake about it, most are nothing more than self-justification for failure or unaccomplished objectives.

In short, most are just bull!

Excuses. That is all they are. Excuses. They will never represent an acceptable reason for not doing the best job you can day in and day out.

"Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other thing."

_Abraham Lincoln_

Men and women with far less going for them than you and I, have accomplished far more than we might even dare to dream about. Think about this. The average person's IQ is around 100. An IQ of over 160 qualifies you as a genius.
"It is not the size of your IQ that counts most in life. What you do with what you have is infinitely more important."

Ted Nicholas

Imagine that. A genius is only 60% smarter, according to the experts, than the average person. In other words, if you can read this book, a genius could not possibly be even twice as smart as you are.

So how can so many accomplish so much more than others?

How can some men and women make millions of dollars a year while others make a few thousand? How, then, can one person be so much more successful than another?

Clearly it is not due to the difference in intelligence between them. How can this be?

Let me give you the answer. Your commitment and effort will always be more important than your IQ.

"Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent."

Calvin Coolidge

Stop looking for excuses and start figuring out how to improve your results. Stop thinking why you can't or won't and start justifying why you can and how you will. Start putting your best effort forth each day.

"If we did all the things we are capable of doing we would literally astound ourselves."

Thomas Edison

These words from a man with less than three months of "formal schooling". An exception? Hardly. Henry Ford had less than 6 years of "formal education". William Gates is a college dropout.

These men and countless others like them knew results are what count in life, not excuses.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Education and academic credentials will never be a substitute for common sense and an unwavering commitment to your job. It will never be a substitute for what is in your heart and your head.

How about Jim Abbott the major league baseball pitcher? What is so special about Jim Abbott? He was born with only one hand! He won an Olympic gold medal. He pitched a no hitter in the majors. He pitched in the major leagues for 10 years and won 18 games one year. He defied all the odds in his pursuit of individual excellence.

"A man who wants to do something will find a way; A man who doesn't will find an excuse."

Stephen Dolley

What about Arnold Schwarzenegger? A bodybuilder who couldn't speak English very well. He had a terrible accent. He couldn't act. His name was too long. Over and over he was told he would never make it in the movies never mind become a movie star. Expert after expert told him the same thing. Give it up they said.

He persisted. He made a few early movies under the name of Arnold Strong. His voice was dubbed over. They were, to be blunt, absolutely terrible. The kind of movie that would make any would-be actor think of rapidly changing his career. You know the rest of the story.

As I have told you in other chapters, most often we are our own worst enemy. We stop ourselves from maximizing our capability and moving further ahead in life. Sometimes others attempt to stop us as well. However, very often they know nothing.

The rare individual like Arnold not only overcomes his own insecurities, but overcomes all other external doubts and roadblocks as well. This is why Arnold Schwarzenegger was perhaps the greatest bodybuilder of all time and why he was one of the top box office draws of his time.

"The block of granite which is an obstacle in the path of the weak, becomes a steppingstone in the path of the strong."

Thomas Carlyle

Isolated examples? Think again.

Beethoven was told by his teacher he was hopeless as a composer.

Walt Disney was once fired for lacking ideas. He also went bankrupt many times before he built Disneyland.
W. Clement Stone, an extraordinarily successful insurance company executive and founder of Success Magazine, was a high school dropout.

Bob Dylan was booed off the stage by his high school classmates during a talent show.

Novelist John Creasey received over 750 rejection slips before his first of 564 books was published.

John Major, Prime Minister of Great Britain, did not finish high school.

What about Venus Lacy? Who? You've never heard of Venus Lacy? Venus Lacy was born with "mangled" legs. In her own words "my legs were turned around almost backwards, with my feet turned in". Venus was carried to school every day by her mother and home by her brother, her legs bound by braces.

What chance did Venus have of obtaining any type of success? Venus overcame this incredible handicap to grow up and become the starting center on the Olympic Gold Medal USA Woman's Basketball team in Atlanta in 1996.

Excuses? Ask Venus Lacy about excuses!

What about Dustin Carter? As a result of a rare blood disorder Dustin had his arms and legs amputated at the age of 5. Despite this he went on to become an outstanding wrestler in high school winning 40 of his 44 matches and then went on to wrestle in college.

Do you know who Carl Joseph is? Carl was born with only one leg. But through sheer will and determination he earned 13 letters in high school in football, basketball and track. Carl was elected Captain of his football team. He did not wear an artificial limb as they were not allowed in competition. He played on one leg!

He also high jumped 5’10. Carl went on to play college football. In 2009 Carl Joseph was elected into the Florida High School Athletic Hall of Fame.

Do you know the story of Nick Vujicic? Nick was born in 1982 in Australia with no arms or legs. His story is an amazing and incredibly inspirational story of a man who overcame tragedy and torment. Can you even begin to imagine what this young man endured and overcame throughout his life to become of all things a motivational speaker?

Take a few minutes and go on line and read this incredible story and watch some of his videos including one titled “No arms, No legs, No worries”.

These extraordinary people overcame not only their own self-doubt, their own insecurities, their own physical limitations and handicaps but also the doubts and criticisms of others and of the experts.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Stop looking for excuses. Start looking for answers. Both are plentiful. What you find will be determined by what you are looking for.

"The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will."

_Vince Lombardi_

Think about this man's life. He dropped out of grade school. He ran a country store and went broke at the age of 21. He took 15 years to pay off all his debts. He was defeated in a legislative race at the age of 22.

He failed in business again at the age of 24. His sweetheart died when he was 26.

He had a nervous breakdown at the age of 27. He lost a congressional race at the age of 34. He lost another congressional race at the age of 36. He ran for election to the Senate at the age of 45 and lost.

At the age of 47 he ran for Vice President and lost. At the age of 49 he once again ran a senatorial race and lost. He was in an unhappy marriage.

Finally, at the age of 52, he ran for President of the United States and won.

Who was this man who overcame setback after setback, who refused to be defeated by mediocrity? He was our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln.

Settling is always easy to do and simple to justify. Doing less than you could or should will always be an easy path to justify.

Excuses come to mind far quicker than reasons why you should do a better job with the project at hand.

The reasons why you can't, won't, or shouldn't are always easy to find and self-justify.

Excuses pave the path to mediocrity.

But the easy way out is often coping out. You are sending a message to yourself and those around you. A message of mediocrity. Just resign yourself to failure. Don't try. Why bother? You will only fail. What other choice do you have?

Well, the only other choice would seem to be to succeed. To improve. To perform your best day in and day out.
"Do what you can with what you have, right where you are."

_Theodore Roosevelt_

You have got to make the most of what you have. Bemoaning the fact that you don't have enough education, or that you are too short or too fat or too tall or are too young or too old or don't have the right background or connections will do nothing but feed the monster of low self-esteem that we all possess.

**By whose standards?** Who sets these standards we measure ourselves against?

Who is this perfect creature or these perfect people against whom we measure ourselves and declare we simply don't measure up, we don't have what it takes?

Who are these faceless people that we are allowing to dictate to us how good we can be and what we need to succeed? Who are these people that we are allowing to decide what is good or bad, right or wrong, possible or impossible?

Who are these people whose standards dictate to us how we should or should not be? Who are these people that we allow to convince us that we can't, that there is no use trying that seeking to improve ourselves would be a waste of time?

Who are these people that cause us to be afraid to speak up or to suggest a new idea or way of doing things for fear they may think less of us, may laugh at us, may think we are stupid?

"Who cares what other people think? Worrying about what other people think gives them power over you."

_ Derrick W. Welch_

Is this not the only reason we do not do many of the things we could, should, or might be able to do?

What makes these people so superior to you and you so inferior to them? Nothing.

**You make it this way because it is all in your mind. You create and foster this fear or you allow others to have this power over you.**

**Stop it. Stop it now.**

What you have to offer may be as important as or more important than anyone else. It may make a major difference. What you are capable of becoming and of doing would astound you!
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Who makes them the judge, jury and executioner? You do. We do. You and I. We let them. We appoint them by allowing them to influence us.

If you absolutely have to have a trait you can get then make the effort to get it and stop whining about the fact you don't have it. It took me 17 years to go back and finish my college degree.

If I had waited to move ahead in my career until I got my degree my career might have been over before it started.

If you need it, and I mean really need it, not just think you do and not just something you are using for an excuse for your lack of advancement, and if you can get it, do it and stop talking about it.

Shed those self-serving excuses we all seek from time to time. Many people have done far more than you and I ever will with far less.

"People who are unable to motivate themselves must be content with mediocrity, no matter how impressive their other talents."

Andrew Carnegie

Concentrate on what you have and what you can do with it to obtain what you seek in your career and your life.

You are most likely your own worst enemy.

You are holding yourself back with self-serving and self-justifying excuses because things are harder than you thought or take more effort and sacrifice to get them than you anticipated.

Make the most of what you do have and add to it as you need to and can. Become the best you can with what God gave you to work with.

Stop making excuses. Stop saying "if I only" had this or that. If only.

Forget it. Look within, don't look for approval from others.

Most wallow in mediocrity and are always looking for more to join them. Rise above them. Don't seek their approval. Don't wait for them to give you the green light.

"If you argue for your limitations you get to keep them."

Dr. Robert Anthony
Chapter 10. Questions are the key to the door of improvement.

"Why and how are words so important that they cannot be too often used."

Napoleon

It was Kipling who gave us what was perhaps the greatest advice for business success and, in fact, success in life, which has ever been given. He told us the key to success in all areas when he said "I had six honest serving men. They taught me all I knew. Their names were: where and what and when and why and how and who.".

The late great Earl Nightingale suggested we add two more friends to this group. They are, which and if. I suggest you add as many more as you can to this group.

"If we are to achieve results never before accomplished, then we must be prepared to employ methods never before attempted."

Sir Francis Bacon

Whatever type of improvement you are seeking, questions will provide the answers. Whether you are seeking to find ways to increase sales or control and reduce costs, questions are the key.

Whether you are striving to improve your customer service or the quality of your product, questions are the key.

Whether you are seeking to find ways to improve yourself or your job-related performance, questions will show you the way.

Asking the questions and developing the answers are the keys to any and all success you will have in business and, in fact, in life.

Questions like:

Which is better?

If we make that purchase what is the payback period?

If we do this what happens?

Why do we do it that way?

Why do we not do it that way?
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

What if we tried this?
Why do we need this?
Why do we buy that many?
Why do we buy that few?
Why do we need it?
Why can't we do without it?
Why do we not buy more to save on the unit cost?
What are we planning to do with them?
Why do we only get one bid?
Why are we paying that much?
Why do we not deal with another company?
Why do we do this at all?
What does this add?
Is this effort cost justified?
What can we do to reduce costs?
What can I do to improve productivity?
What can I do to improve quality?
What can I do to improve our service?
What can I do to improve myself?
What steps can we take to streamline?
When do we do that? Why?
How else can we do this function?
How else can that be done?
How can we do it better, faster, cheaper?
How can I do my job better?
How can we improve quality, service, and profits?
How can we reduce waste?
How can we sell more to that customer?
How can we cut costs?
How can I make things easier for the next department?
Is there a better way? There always is!
If we do not do that what happens?
If we do this will we improve quality?
If we do this will it improve service?
If we do this will it increase profits?
If we do this will it save time?
Which is better? Why?
Which provides us with better quality?
Which is best for our customer?
Will this process or step add value to our product or service or does it produce added profit?

"Insanity is doing the same thing in the same way and expecting a different outcome."

Leslie Calvin Brown

You see my point, I am sure. You must ask questions and seek out the answers. You must also justify the answers.

You must never stop asking. If you are not continuously asking the questions and reacting to the answers you are either assuming or stagnating.
Defy Mediocrity:  Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Either one can be deadly to your career and your life.

"I do not believe you can do today's job with yesterday's methods and still be in business tomorrow."

_Nelson Jackson_

Questions are also the key to improvements in every area of your job performance and your company.

Do you know how your products are produced and distributed? Do you know what goes into your product or service?

I don't mean a general idea, I mean specifics.

Is your product flow or order processing set up to maximize time, quality, and productivity and reduce costs?

If you don't know, how can you expect to control costs, improve or control quality, and improve productivity?

How can you expect to find a better way to do your job if you don't know how things are done now and how your efforts impact them? Why do you do these things this way?

How can you find a better way if you don't know how it is being done now and why?

"The one real objective of education is to have a man in the condition of continually asking questions."

_Bishop Mandell Creighton_

Examine every single area that you are involved in. Every single area.

There are very few areas in which you cannot improve. You must find ways to eliminate needless steps, improve productivity, reduce errors, increase sales, reduce expenses, improve service, and improve quality.

"There is a better way for everything. Find it."

_Thomas Edison_
Always strive for improvement in everything you do. Tom Peters once said "Do 1,000 things just 1% better and soon you'll be 1,000 % better.". He is right. Numerous small improvements will equate to major improvements.

The Japanese call this type of management thinking "Kaizen".

A more radical version of this type of thinking is popularly known in this country as "reengineering". Call it what you will, it does not matter, just adopt this type of thinking.

You must always be asking yourself if this is the best you can do.

The quest for improvement must be never-ending. But you will never become better unless you ask the questions.

Why do you do what you do the way you do it? Why do you not do it another way?

Ask the questions. They are the key to the door of improvement.

"If you are satisfied with the best you have done you will never do the best you can."

Martin VanBee

Never assume you can't do better. Always assume you can do better.

From the way you do things to the way you work with others, it is up to you to improve things. Improvement is always possible in everything we do in life. All we need to do is ask the questions and seek out the answers.

It is not up to someone else. It is up to you.

Forget the way it has always been done.

Forget the fancy names like "reengineering" and "Kaizen".

Use your God-given common sense.

You possess the greatest thinking machine ever created and it sits right between your two ears.

You own it, free and clear.

All you need to do is put it to work.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Chapter 11. Appearance does count.

"Don't complain about the snow on your neighbor's roof when your own doorstep is unclean."

Confucius

Appearance is important. Very important. Whether it be your personal appearance or the appearance of the area you work in for so many hours each day or the appearance of your home.

It is a link in the overall chain. The chain of change that you will use to defy mediocrity.

Make sure that all areas you work in are kept clean and professional. I am not just speaking to those of you who work in the showroom or lobby. Whether you work in the warehouse, loading dock, front office, or boardroom, I am speaking to you.

It doesn't matter if you do not have a single customer or outsider ever visit your facility or work area. The condition of the area you occupy in your company speaks volumes about you and the pride or lack of pride you take in your work and in your life.

A clean and polished work area makes a statement about your work habits, personal pride, and the quality of your product or service. It is a marketing tool. It provides for a safer workplace.

It forces you and your co-workers to take pride in what you do and where you do it. It will help you to keep your equipment well maintained and presentable and it sets a standard that will be carried over to all areas of the company.

You will feel better about coming to work each day. You will take pride when others see your work area. You will work safer, you will produce better quality, and you will be more productive. The details do make a difference. They always do!
Chapter 12. Real improvement must start with the person in the mirror.

"Don't measure yourself by what you have accomplished, but by what you should have accomplished with your ability."

John Wooden

Self-improvement and self-assessment are critical to your quest to defy mediocrity. You must constantly be asking yourself the questions. How can you become better at what you do? What do you need to do or learn to become better? Where can you find the knowledge, information, and education you need to improve? To increase your value to the company, to increase your impact.

"The greatest magnifying glasses in the world are a man's own eyes when they look upon his own person."

Alexander Pope

In what areas are you strong and in what areas are you weak? You must be honest with yourself.

No one is ever as good at their job as they can be and should be. We can all become better at what we do and how we do it.

To think otherwise results in complacency and stagnation. Two good friends of mediocrity.

We can all learn more. Education must be a never-ending process. If you are still getting by on what you learned in school, you are probably doing just that. Just getting by.

A high school or college degree from years ago may be of limited value to you today. Everything changes. You must constantly increase your knowledge if you are to not just keep up, but to excel.

What you learned from a textbook may have very little value to you on the job. What you learned years ago may be of limited use to you today. Twenty years ago, heck even five years ago, they could not have possibly taught you what you need to know today.

How could they have? They could never have known about the advances that have been made or the changes in the workplace.

They could never have known about what you are doing now and want to be doing tomorrow.

They could never have known about your employer's expectations.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Knowledge must be evolutionary. Today's knowledge and techniques may be outdated tomorrow. At the very best it is merely a foundation to be built upon.

"Knowledge is the pavement on the path to excellence."

Derrick W. Welch

The defeat of mediocrity is the pursuit of excellence. Learning and education should be a lifelong process. It should never end.

All too many think that graduation is the end of learning. They could not be more wrong.

They think that the commencement ceremony marks the end of learning. Look up this word sometime and you will see that commencement means the beginning not the end.

"An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."

Benjamin Franklin

Understand I am not talking just about the continuation of your education on a formal basis. Your continuing education can be in a formal setting or an informal one.

It doesn't matter as long as you continue the learning process. When we stop learning we stop growing. We stop stretching ourselves. We stop asking questions. If our quest for knowledge was not insatiable we might still be living in caves.

"There's only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving and that's your own self."

Aldous Huxley

Stop learning and you embrace mediocrity. Stop seeking to increase your knowledge and you stop thinking and become a robot. You simply go through the motions each day. Stop learning, asking, and questioning and you might as well stop living.

"I don't think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday."

Abraham Lincoln
How much better do you think you will be at your job if you are using the same techniques as you used last year, or 5 years ago? Not much better I assure you.

How much more valuable do you think you will be to your company if you are still performing your job today the way you were last year?

How much more do you think they can pay you each year when your productivity and value never increase?

You may want more or need more but your productivity will not justify paying you a great deal more.

**How much better are you making the company? How many new ideas have you developed over the last year?**

Unless you are learning and thinking you are not improving, you are not producing more, you are not increasing your value and impact, and you are not finding better ways to do things.

**If you are not learning and thinking you are stagnating.**

Learn from others. Learn from books. Learn from seminars. Learn from tapes. Learn from trying. Learn from your mistakes. Learn from trade magazines. Learn from trade shows.

When a good company sells a product or service, they sell it in the marketplace against competition. To get customers to purchase from them they try to differentiate themselves and position their product or service as not just different, but better. Better priced, better quality, better service, or any one of dozens of ways to demonstrate that somehow their product is superior to that of the competition and will do a better job of meeting the needs of the prospect.

The best companies constantly strive to improve their product. To stay a step ahead.

It is no different with you. You are your own product. You must constantly be improving your product. The more you can improve yourself, your methods, your performance, the more you increase your value and impact with the company.

It will be very difficult, if not impossible, to increase your value and impact with your company or in the marketplace if you never get better. If you continue to do things the way they have always been done.

**The same methods, the same knowledge, the same actions, the same abilities, can only produce the same results.**

**What is that you say? You don't have time?**

**Nonsense.** This is a classic excuse. And, like most excuses, it is self-serving baloney.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Think about this. If you dedicate even one hour a day to learning more about your industry, improving your skills, thinking of ways to do your job better, to help others do their job better, of how to improve the company, the products and services your company puts out, to improve customer service, or to developing new products, you will be dedicating 365 hours per year solely to improvement.

This is equal to over 9 full time weeks of work. Over two full months a year that can easily be dedicated to improving your knowledge and capability.

Think of how much better you can become and how much you can advance your career and help your company with this amount of time dedicated solely to your goal of improvement. All this from only one hour per day.

"I would I could stand on a busy corner, hat in hand, and beg people to throw me all their wasted hours."

Bernhard Berenson

If you tell me you can't spare even one hour a day to improve yourself and increase your knowledge and value, you are simply wrapping yourself in a cloak of mediocrity made of excuses.

Think of how much time you spend sitting in front of the television set each night. I can assure you for most people it is far more than one hour per night.

I have never known anyone that became much better at what they do by sitting in front of a TV 3 or 4 hours a night. Have you?

If you can't give up TV with today's technology you could even tape the TV shows instead of watching them and when you watch them zip past the commercials. Doing this would easily give you an added 30 to 60 minutes of free time each night.

I do not know of a single soul who could not pick up at least one hour a day simply with better time management or by making it a priority to find the time.

In fact, if you are really serious about wanting to improve yourself you will set aside that one hour per day and develop the rest of your free time around that hour. You will let nothing come before this self-improvement time.

"Acquire new knowledge whilst thinking over the old, and you may become a teacher of others."

Confucius
Derrick W. Welch

Everything changes. Change brings with it opportunity. You must change to be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities change creates and provides.

One hour per day dedicated to self-assessment, self-improvement and thinking will produce astonishing results. You will be engaging in a process that few others ever will.

Now think about spending 2 hours per day or over 4 months per year to this process. How long do you think it would take you to reach the level of capability you are seeking?

You will be amazed at how much better you can become at what you do simply by spending a little time each day asking yourself the questions and acting on the answers.
Chapter 13. The good of the company must always take precedence over the good of the individual.

"Things that are bad for business are bad for the people who work for business."

Thomas Dewey

Now, I know you might not like hearing this but it is true. As I have told you before, you will hear no idealistic or socialistic nonsense from me in anything I write.

The plain simple truth is that the company must come before the individual. If the company cannot survive and prosper they have no need for you.

"The basic need of every company is to make a profit. Only then can it provide jobs and earnings for employees."

I.W. Abel
Former President - United Steelworkers of America

Business doesn't exist to provide jobs. The organization you work for doesn't exist to provide jobs.

Jobs are the result of a profitable business. Jobs are the by-product of a successful organization.

Businesses are not started with the goal of providing jobs.

No one sits back and says "I'm going to start a business or create an organization so I can provide jobs to people."

When a business profits or a non profit organization provides a needed service it grows. When it grows it creates jobs.

With profits, with growth comes the opportunity for advancement and higher earnings. But unless the business is profitable or the organization is productive, none of these things will occur.

How could they?

If the company can't make a profit, how are they going to pay you, promote you or even keep you on staff?

Clearly there is a direct link in your ability to accomplish your career goals and the company's ability to reach theirs.
Decisions often must be made to protect the interest of the company. Decisions you may not always like. Decisions designed to ensure the fiscal stability of the company. If the company does not produce adequate profits what is the point of staying in business?

Things must often be done to protect the long and short term interest of the company. Things you may or may not see, understand, or agree with.

We do not live in a socialistic society although at times it may seem that way and it has been suggested that some government leaders of this country might like that. But the fact is we live in a free market economy. We function under a form of controlled capitalism.

For a business to survive and function in our society it must make an acceptable level of profit.

What is acceptable? That is up to the owners, including the stockholders, of that business. They are the ones taking the risk. They are the ones that stand to lose should the business venture fail. They face the losses. They face the lawsuits. They pay the bills. They stay up sleepless at night. They have the liability.

They have the right to decide what an acceptable level of profit is and what is not. They have the right to decide at what point the profit is so low that they should liquidate the company and invest their money in some other investment.

Some other investment without the incredible risk and headaches that go along with running a business today.

You can't decide this. I can't decide this. If we feel our pay is too low and profits are too high we have the option of finding another job more suitable to our perception of what is fair.

It is not the company's obligation to pay me what I think I deserve or what I may need.

This is the attitude of entitlement. The attitude of mediocrity.

They will, and should, only compensate me at a level they feel is required to keep me at that job.

If I want to earn more I must increase my value to the company.

If you want the company to take care of you, you had better start taking care of the company.

It really is this simple.

It goes back to the basic formula for success. You must give something before you get something. You give others something they want in exchange for something you want.

Please notice the "you give" comes before the "you get".

Derrick W. Welch
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

The company is the entity that has the potential to give you what you want and in order for it to give you what you want it must be taken care of and given what it needs to survive and prosper.

It must be given your best effort everyday and your commitment to doing the best you can to making the company the best it can be.
Chapter 14. Change. It is inescapable.

"Those who say the only certain things in life are death and taxes are wrong. They have forgotten about change."

Derrick W. Welch

Let's talk about change. Don't like the newest change at the company? Think the strategy is the wrong one? Don't like the new product line? Don't agree with the latest promotion or consolidation?

Well let me give you a hard-hitting news flash. It is your job to support it. To support the new change, the new direction, the new boss. It is your job to sell the new product line, meet the new quota, help implement the new strategy.

"The most effective way to cope with change is to help create it."

L.W. Lynett

Yes, of course, you should provide input whenever you can to improve things, to make the new change even better. Yes, you should have the courage to stand up and question or challenge management when you think things are wrong or could be done in a better manner. Yes, of course, you should speak out if you think management has overlooked something.

Yes, of course you should ask questions about things you do not understand or that make little sense to you. By asking perhaps you will find out things make far more sense than you thought. Perhaps you can contribute to a point of improvement and help them see things they did not see. We can all be guilty of tunnel vision.

If possible, try to have input into the process that determines the change. Your thoughts, ideas, input, and even objections can prove very valuable.

But at some point the decision is made. The time to object and provide input is past.

At some point you must let go if management has chosen to go in another direction. A point is reached where input and suggestions can become bickering and complaining. This can become dissension and insubordination if the line is crossed.

Once the change has been made and any and all modifications to it have been made, it is your job to support it, to help make it successful.

Do not go around badmouthing the company or your boss.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Do not side with the others in voicing and showing dissatisfaction and disapproval.

If you do, you can't be effective. You will hurt morale, your effectiveness will drop, you will dislike your job and this may grow into hate. Others will begin to avoid you and soon you may find you need to start looking for a new position.

You may not always be able to see the overall or big picture. You may only have to consider a small piece of the overall puzzle. You may not need to consider today and tomorrow. The owners and management of the company must think short and long term.

They must look at the big picture. You may just be a small, albeit very important, piece of the overall puzzle.

You may not be able to see how all the pieces fit together. Those in charge must tend to the health and prosperity of the whole and this may not always be pleasant to you. The reason for many of the strategies employed may not be sensible or logical to you or even apparent to you.

You may indeed be right.

However, once the decision is made it is still your job to support the plan, program, or boss. This is what your company is asking you to do and paying you to do.

They are not paying you to disagree, to undermine what the decision was or to badmouth the company or the company's plans. They are paying you to help them succeed. If you can't or won't, they do not need you.

Think of this as a sports team. Someone calls the play. You might not like the play. You might think it is the wrong call. You might be completely convinced it is a bad call.

But guess what? You have a responsibility to do all you can to make that play work. It is your job. It is what you are being paid for.

If you are not helping the team succeed, you are helping ensure they won't.

No company will ever pay you to help them fail.

While you are with your employer it is your responsibility, and, indeed your obligation to support, or at least not fight, the direction of the company. It can't succeed without your efforts and support.
Chapter 15. Deal with things the way they are, not the way you would like them to be or think they should be.

"One does not plan and then try to make circumstances fit those plans. One tries to make plans fit the circumstances."

_General George Patton_

You must strive to become the best you can within the framework of the organization you work for. If you can't or won't, you have a right, and indeed an obligation, to yourself and your employer, to find an organization offering you the framework you are seeking.

Never forget that you must deal with things the way they are. Not the way you want them to be. Not the way you think they should be. The way they are.

"Nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who dared believe that something inside of them was superior to circumstance."

_Bruce Barton_

Spending time moaning and complaining about things because you think circumstances should be different will get you nowhere and could severely hinder every area of your career.

It can destroy your enthusiasm and morale. It could give you a bad reputation. It could brand you as a troublemaker and a problem employee.

"Much outcry. Little outcome."

_Aesop_

It will cloud your judgment and make others not want to work with you, never mind help you.

You can't always control your circumstances or the situations that arise, but you can always control your reaction to them.

You control your emotions and your reactions. Who else could? You can control your anger, frustration, and acceptance.

I know from first hand experience how difficult it can be at times to deal with circumstances you find unacceptable and that appear inexcusable. I know how easy it is to become frustrated and discouraged.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

I will be the first to admit that this is an area I have a great deal of trouble with.

I can't understand why some things are done or not done, how some employees are allowed to do such a slip shod job, how some get away with so much, how management and ownership can't see what I think is the obvious course of action.

I don't understand how others can't see things the way I see them as things are so clear and obvious to me.

Of course, I am sure they wonder the same thing about me and the way I see things. After all our perception is our reality.

I get frustrated at times. I get angry at times. I get discouraged at times.

But if I can't function despite this, if I can't move forward and do the job I am paid to do, then I am of no value to the company.

I become the problem.

I am paid to be the solution.

I could easily fall into a pool of frustration. I will even admit at times I do. But I must be able to climb out of this and move on.

If I can't it will not serve me or the company. The same applies to you.

"Your employer may not be perfect, smart, or worthy of your service, but by your act of working at your particular company, you have entered into an unwritten contract of support.

I am a true believer, if you don't like the company you work for, quit your job. But if you choose to stay and draw a payroll check from that company, morally you don't have the freedom to sabotage the company's morale through your constant expressions of dissatisfaction.

You are duty-bound to present any constructive suggestions that occur to you. If it is rejected and you feel that you can no longer serve the company without certain changes being made, then you have the choice to exercise your courage to resign your job. If you wish to remain, then support the company and its management."

Chin-Ning Chu

Yes, of course do all you can to make your voice heard and to build a case for the change you feel needs to be made.
Point out the shortcomings you might see to those involved. But do these things in a professional and positive manner.

Not an angry, frustrated, confrontational manner. This will get you nowhere but to the front door.

If you are unsuccessful in your efforts to effect the change you seek you must deal with things they way they are if you are to be an effective employee.

I am paid to do a job and work within the framework they establish for the company. If I can't do this they do not need me.

Yes, I do all I can to effect the changes I feel are needed and when I am unsuccessful in getting them to do what I think needs to be done it is up to me to do things the way they want to to the best of my ability.

**What happens to us and around us is sometimes beyond our control, but never forget that how we react to the situation is always under our control.**

You must learn to deal with circumstances the way they are and not the way you think they should be or could be.

They are not paying you to do anything else.

Without question there are going to be times when you find that you become very frustrated with ownership or management. You do not agree with what they do or say. You become angry and disenchanted.

*"Faced with the choice between changing one's mind and proving that there is no need to do so, almost everybody gets busy on the proof."

*John Kenneth Galbraith*

But you must be able to rise above this.

You owe it to yourself and to your company.

You cannot be an effective manager or employee if you can't.

They are paying you to do the best job you can under the circumstances that surround you.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Chapter 16. Responsibility. It seems to be a forgotten word today, unless, of course, it is someone else's.

"99% responsibility doesn't work."

Dr. Robert Anthony

What do you do when you make a mistake? Do you try to cover it up and hope no one finds out? Do you try to shift the blame to someone else? Do you defend your actions instead of admitting your error?

"A man who commits a mistake and doesn't correct it is committing another mistake."

Confucius

When you make a mistake and do anything but admit it, correct it if possible, and learn from it, you are making another mistake.

If you have not done something you should have, admit it and do the thing you should have done.

People will respect you for admitting you are not perfect. Your co-workers and superiors will respect you for your willingness to step forward and admit you have made a mistake.

"He who has never made a mistake is one who never does anything."

Theodore Roosevelt

If you defend your actions, deny your mistake, or try to shift responsibility for something that was clearly your mistake, you will earn nothing but distrust and disdain.

"The man who makes no mistakes does not usually make anything."

Edward Phelps

No one is perfect. There is no one who has never made a mistake. If anyone tells me this they are either lying or not doing much of anything.
I would not want to work with either.

You have many responsibilities in your job. Sometimes you will succeed at each and sometimes you will screw up. That is life.

The goal is to correct your mistake if possible, learn from it, and move on without repeating it again.

"The price of greatness is responsibility."

Winston Churchill

When you start accepting responsibility for your actions and inactions that is when you are defying mediocrity. If you do anything else you are embracing mediocrity.

One of the most important tools you can have is a mirror. When you want to find out why you have not improved to the level you want to, this is when you will want to look in the mirror.

Stop blaming circumstances or others. Start taking responsibility.

"There is a direct relationship between how much responsibility you are willing to accept for results and how high you rise in any organization of value. There is a direct relationship between your income, your status, your position, your level of prestige and the recognition you receive, on one hand, and the amount of responsibility you are willing to accept, without excuses, for achieving the goals and objectives of the organization, on the other."

Brian Tracy

What do you do when you see something that needs to be done but you don't want to do it?

Do you pretend not to know about it or notice it?

"Conscience is the inner voice that warns us somebody may be looking."

H.L. Mencken

If so, let me ask you who you think you are kidding? Most often others know you had the opportunity to do what needed to be done and you did not do it. They know you pretended not to see or know about what needed to be done. They know you defied not mediocrity, but excellence. They know you left the task for someone else to do.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

What do you think they will think about you? How much do you think they will want to help you? Even if no one else knows, you know. You know what you did was wrong. You know you embraced mediocrity.

"If you'll not settle for anything less than your best, you will be amazed at what you can accomplish in your lives."

Vince Lombardi

If it is not my responsibility and it is not your responsibility, whose responsibility is it?

Don't run from responsibility. This is one battle against mediocrity that you can win very easily.

Could you have done a better job?

Could you have done something differently so that outcome was improved? Could you have done something that you should have and didn't?

These are the questions on the path to both excellence and mediocrity.

How you answer these questions and react to the answers determines whether you are traveling down the road of excellence or mediocrity.

Choose to be uncommon and hold yourself accountable.
Chapter 17. Who is watching anyway?

"Whenever you are to do a thing, though it can never be known but to yourself, ask yourself how you would act were all the world looking at you, and act accordingly."

*Thomas Jefferson*

Do you ever wonder if your efforts are appreciated or even noticed? In my opinion one of the greatest failings of today's managers is that they do not provide adequate feedback, positive or negative, to the people that work for them.

This is a very unfortunate and foolish situation and will be one of the subjects of a future book that will be titled "*A Manager's Book Of Wisdom".*

But, for now, I want to focus on you and how you can pursue excellence and not the shortcomings of many in management -- unless of course you are a manager and if you are I hope you will start providing the feedback your people need.

Because you may not receive consistent feedback regarding your efforts you may often wonder whether management or even co-workers even notice what you do. You may wonder how important your efforts are and you might think that little impact will be made even if you dramatically improve your performance.

"*You have to perform at a consistently higher level than others. That's the mark of a true professional.*"

*Joe Paterno*

Ask yourself this. Could you do a better job and are not simply because you think your efforts are not being noticed?

If so, perhaps this is the reason you are not getting ahead faster. Perhaps your efforts are being noticed and you may be in position for a promotion or raise and you do not even know it.

Can you afford to take a chance? You never know who is watching.

For those of you who work harder when you think someone is watching or paying attention, and shift back into lower gear when you think no one is watching, let me give you a tip.

You are kidding yourself. It is foolish to think you can know when you are being observed or that others do not know what you are or are not doing. You never know. You may think they do not notice subpar efforts but you are wrong.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Someone will always notice your efforts, excellent or poor. Never forget that many others will see the results of your efforts or the lack of results you produce. From the people in the next department to the customer who uses your products.

"True bravery is shown by performing without witness what one might be capable of doing before all the world."

La Rochefoucauld

Furthermore, think about this. **Is your goal not to be noticed? If so, you are the embodiment of mediocrity. This book was written for you. Not someone else, you.**

You should always be doing the best you can. To do otherwise is inexcusable and should always be unacceptable. Take pride in what you do.

Live up to your contract with your employer. What contract? The contract that you enter into every time you cash that paycheck they are paying you for your best effort.

Not just when you think they are watching. How would you like to get paid only when you think someone notices your efforts? You want to get a day's pay and your employer deserves nothing less than a day's work.

"You have to set your own expectations and live up to them."

Michael Jordan

Let me also remind you there is one person who is always watching. One who always sees what you do and do not do and how well you do it. One person who uses the standard you set on the job as an example for all other areas of their life.

**Who is this all-seeing person? The person in the mirror. You can never hide from yourself.**

"Character is the total of thousands of small daily strivings to live up to the best that is in us."

Arthur G. Trudeau

When you do less than you should, or could, you are engaging in a behavior that is self-defeating and will doom you to an existence of mediocrity. You are forming habits that will guarantee that you always perform at a level of mediocrity or lower.
You are telling yourself it is acceptable to perform below your capability. It is OK to loaf, to just get by. You are establishing standards for yourself.

Standards that will determine how far you get in life.

"Some say knowledge is power, but that is not true. Character is power."

_Sathya Sai Baba_

You can fool your co-workers sometimes. You can fool your superiors sometimes. You can fool your employees sometimes.

_After all, they are not watching you that closely because they are putting their faith and trust in you to do the job you are being paid to do._

It is probably easy to create the illusion or perception that you are doing much when at times you are doing little.

Yes you can fool most people some of the time and others most of the time.

**But you can never fool yourself.**

"Let everything you do be done as if it makes a difference."

_William James_

It is up to you to decide whether you are going to embrace mediocrity or pursue excellence.
Chapter 18. If you want to be recognized and appreciated, make sure you are recognizing others and showing your appreciation.

"The deepest desire in human nature is the desire to feel important."

*Doctor John Dewey*

One way to foster positive feelings from others is to do what you can to help them and to thank them. Just as it is critical to thank your customers, it is equally important to thank your co-workers. They are your internal customers.

"The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated."

*William James*

Let them know how much you appreciate their efforts. They will want to work hard to gain this type of honest sincere appreciation. Wouldn't you?

If they think you don't care, how much do you think they will care? How hard do you think they will work to help you? They will work much harder for someone that they like and who appreciates what they do than they will for someone who threatens, complains, ignores, or shows no appreciation. Wouldn't you?

This goes for both management and employees to other employees. Build relationships. Make the jobs of others easier so they will help make your job easier.

Build support among your people and co-workers by recognizing their efforts and by expressing your appreciation. This will make your job more secure, enjoyable, and, most likely, be very valuable to you in your career path.

After all, who would you rather promote, someone who has the respect and appreciation of those who work for him, or with him, or someone who does not?

"Fail to honor people they fail to honor you."

*Lao Tzu*

Who would you rather work for, someone who helps you in every way they can or someone who worries only about themselves?
Who would you rather work with, someone who shares credit and shows appreciation to you or someone who hogs the credit and blames others for anything and everything that goes wrong? Who do you think your co-workers would rather work for or with?

You succeed by helping others get what they want. When you put everything else aside, people are what matters. People help people. People promote people. People reward people. People and chemistry are what will often make the difference.

Help people and they will help you. You will never succeed without the help of others. Become known as someone who will go the extra mile. Stay late.

Take on added responsibility, solve the difficult problems. Be known for these things and you will get ahead.

"There are two things people want more than sex and money— that's praise and recognition."

Mary Kay Ash

People tend to do more for people they like. They will go out of their way to help people they like. They will work harder for people that appreciate their efforts.

They will go the extra mile for people they respect and appreciate. They will promote people they like over others if all else is even close to being equal.

This is not good, bad, or indifferent. It is the reality of the way things are. Look at your own actions toward others if you have any doubt of what I am telling you. It is simply human nature.

People will work much harder for and demonstrate much greater loyalty to, people they like and respect. This is simple human nature. You and I do the same thing.

This is a very simple formula. Being liked and respected most often results in an increased level of performance and loyalty from your co-workers and employees. Being disliked or disrespected results in disloyal co-workers and employees who may do little more than they must to keep their job.

Which type of employees would you rather have as a manager?

Which type of co-workers would you prefer to work with?

It is up to you. Which type of person would you rather work for?

Who would you keep on or promote first, the person that enjoys the loyal support from his group of highly performing people or the person who does not?
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Also remember the commitment or lack of commitment you have from your co-workers or employees will show up in your superior's eyes in numerous ways. From improved unit profitability to grapevine feedback regarding morale. They see the results.

Never forget that when people are considered for promotions, increased responsibility or even who will be kept during a layoff, a key factor upper management must consider is the relationship the person being considered enjoys with the people they work with, work for, or manage.

"By appreciating, we make excellence in others our own property."

Voltaire

But don't just show appreciation because it benefits you to do so. Do it because it is the right thing to do. Excellence should always be recognized and appreciated. It is not just the job of management, although it certainly is their job, it is the job of everyone.

Never overlook the fact that most things of any significance that you accomplish on the job will only be accomplished with the help of others. In some cases this help will be minor and in other cases it will be very significant. It may come from many or only a few.

But whatever the case, make sure you thank those who helped you publicly if possible and appropriate considering the situation, or at the very least thank them privately.

You must share credit and acknowledge the help of others. Not only is this the right thing to do but if you ever want help from these people again, or from others who see how you share or hog the credit, you had better spread it around.

If you don't, not only are you not going to see help in the future, but your reputation will be hurt, and people may actually work against you and sabotage your efforts.

Let me ask you have you ever gotten a thank you note from someone in your organization? From a boss? From a co-worker, from an employee?

I'm not surprised.

How would you feel if you did? I imagine like a million dollars. How hard would you work to live up to the expectations of that person? How much would you support the efforts of someone who took the time to not only recognize your efforts but to thank you for them in writing?

If I were you I would be on my way down to the card store right now.
Chapter 19. Are you making your employer sick?

"All successful employers are stalking men who will do the unusual, men who think, men who attract attention by performing more than is expected of them."

*Charles M. Schwab*

If you are abusing the sick days your company gives you, you are a problem. A big problem.

Your unjustified absenteeism reduces productivity. It hinders the company's ability to service their customers. It forces your co-workers to do your job and make up for your absence. It hurts quality control.

It hurts your company in dozens of different ways. It costs a great deal of money. It hurts morale. It drives up overtime costs. It forces the company to carry more employees than they can justify.

This decreases profits or forces prices to increase which could result in lost sales. Either way, absenteeism lowers the company's profitability and productivity and this affects their ability to pay you better and provide greater benefits.

"If you don't give much expect even less."

*Derrick W. Welch*

But if you are abusing the company's sick days you shouldn't be thinking of lost profits or lower wages.

*Maybe you should be thinking of how sick you will feel if you find yourself in the unemployment line. If you are abusing sick days this is where you belong.*

Do you know that statistics have shown that on average every employee will take 9 sick days per year? I know that many so-called sick days are bogus. So does your boss and so do your co-workers!

Sick days are one of the biggest areas of abuse among employees.

It has been projected that every week over 4.5 million American workers are absent from their jobs at least one day.

*That's right, 4.5 million lost days per week.* This translates into over 1.8 billion lost hours per year to American companies.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Think about this. These are stunning totals.

If your company has 50 employees and each takes nine sick days, take a few minutes and figure out how much this lost 450 days of labor is costing the company.

This is nearly two full years of work time lost!

If your company has 50,000 employees and each averages 9 sick days per year, the company has lost the equivalent of 450,000 work days.

The two primary things I have always looked for when I hire anyone at any level is attitude and attendance. If an employee has the right attitude, they can usually learn the job and do it well. No matter how well they do the job, they won't do me much good if they have poor attendance.

What is that you say? If you could save up sick days or get paid for those you did not use you would take fewer?

I have heard this often. It is a battle cry of mediocrity.

Think about that. Think about it some more.

This is a prime example of why this country is being driven to mediocrity.

Is this not saying very clearly that you are staying out sick when you could be coming to work, that you are calling in sick when you are not and simply that you are abusing the benefit your company has provided you?

Is this the mind-set of excellence? Is this choosing to be uncommon?

My response to this often stated argument of mediocrity is very simple. Why should I pay you not to be out sick when I am already paying you to be at work? Isn't this paying for the same thing twice?

Remember, every relationship is a two-way street. If you are taking more than you are giving, you don't deserve to stay in the relationship.

I once read a story about a man who has not missed a day of work in over 59 years. No, that is not a misprint. That gentleman did not miss a day of work in over 59 years. He defied mediocrity each and every day. Do you?

Sick days are provided to help you during the times you are sick or injured. They are something you should be thankful you have.

They are not a benefit to be used whenever you feel you want a "free day". They are not provided so you can use them as added free vacation time.
Sick days are a very expensive benefit provided to you by your employer. They have a purpose. The purpose is to make sure you are paid when you are unable to come to work.

If you use them for any other purpose, you are cheating your company and abusing a benefit provided to you.

You are also making things much harder on your co-workers and hurting your company in hundreds of ways.

You are paid to be at work. Some seem to think that they are entitled to sick days. That if they don't use them somehow they are being cheated out of free days. To avoid this they make sure they use as many as they can or they demand payment for the ones they did not use.

"*We first make our habits, and then our habits make us.*"

*John Dryden*

Does this seem like the mind-set of someone driven to excel? Driven to defy mediocrity?

The mind-set of the person that thinks this way is the mind-set of mediocrity.
Chapter 20. You could be stealing from the company and not even know it.

"Rather fail with honor than succeed with fraud."

*Sophocles*

The United States Chamber of Commerce has conducted studies that indicate 75% of all employees have stolen at least once from their employer. Excluding the theft of time, they estimated that employee theft costs U.S. businesses over $200 billion dollars a year or over $500 million dollars per day! One insurance company has even stated that 1 out of 3 small businesses fail as a direct result of employee theft.

From taking home a few pens and pencils to "borrowing" materials from the company, these innocent and seemingly insignificant acts are theft. It might seem insignificant to you, but it is still wrong.

It is no different than reaching into the petty cash box and taking money. The company paid for these materials, not you. It is company property. If you take it are you not taking someone else's property? Is this not theft?

"To see what is right and not do it, is want of courage, or of principle."

*Confucius*

Stealing time also makes you a thief. You are being paid to work a specific number of hours per day. When you steal time you are stealing money. You are being unfair to your co-workers. You are setting a bad example. You are hindering your company's ability to provide excellent customer service. You are hindering internal customer service. You are lowering productivity and you are lowering profitability.

**Stealing time is a big problem. It is not a minor issue. It is a silent theft. It is a massive invisible drain on productivity and profits.**

You are hindering your company's ability to get the job done, product out, or service rendered, in the most productive and profitable manner possible. Your co-workers must work harder to make up for the time you are not working. Productivity is lowered so profits suffer or prices might go up. This could hurt sales which, in turn, could hurt profits.

A cycle is created. A cycle of mediocrity.

Never forget if it is bad for the company it is bad for you!
In fact, one of the biggest thefts an employee can make from an employer is the theft of time.

Long breaks, extended lunches, personal phone calls on company time, standing around the time clock waiting for it to click to the punch out time, faking sick time, arriving late, and socializing during work time are just some of the many ways time is stolen from a company.

If you think I am overstating the problem and that a few minutes each day won't add up to much, let me give you an example in dollars and cents to make my point more vivid. An employee making $12 per hour is being paid 20 cents per minute, not including payroll indexed costs. At 20 cents per minute even 15 minutes a day of wasted time is costing $3 per day. This is $15 per week or $780 per year.

Big deal you say? Well, then think about this.

If 5 employees waste 15 minutes a day, this is costing your company $3,900 per year. If 50 employees waste even 15 minutes a day, it is costing your company $39,000 per year.

If 500 employees waste 15 minutes a day, it is costing your company $390,000 per year.

If 5,000 employees waste 15 minutes a day, this mere 15 minutes a day of wasted time will cost your company $3,900,000 per year. And if 50,000 employees waste just these few minutes each day, your company is effectively losing $39,000,000 per year.

I assure you most of you waste a great deal more than 15 minutes per day. As you can see, it does not take long for small amounts of time to add up to serious money.

Let me also point out something else that will help drive home the tremendous impact of wasted time. If you look at my example above with the company who has 50 employees each wasting 15 minutes of time a day you see that this effectively amounts to a loss of $39,000 per year.

Now if this company has a pretax profit ratio of 2.5% this $39,000 represents the total profit earned on $1,560,000 worth of sales!

That is correct. This mere 15 minutes of wasted time a day translates into a loss equal to over one and a half million dollars in sales at a 2.5% profit rate.

For those of you who work in the government, military, or non-profit sectors please understand this problem applies equally to you as well.

Admittedly lost profits are not the issue for you but think of what this loss of time is doing to your productivity.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Think of what it is doing to your co-workers who need to compensate for the time you are not doing your job. Think of what it is doing to the budget of your department or organization. Think of what it is doing to your internal and external customer service efforts.

The damage is just as bad as it is for those private sector for-profit companies. It merely manifests itself in different ways.

Don't be part of the problem. Defy mediocrity and become part of the solution.
Chapter 21. Take your job seriously, but remember it is not life or death.

"If you treat every situation as a life-and-death matter, you'll die a lot of times."

Dean Smith

In the worst case stress can kill you. It can make you sick. It can disrupt your ability to properly perform your job.

Stress will do you no good and a stressed out manager or employee cannot be effective and, as a result, will do your employer very little good.

Stress can cause you to make mistakes. Stress can cause you to lose focus. Stress can cause you to make the wrong decisions. It can cause you to make irrational and illogical decisions and take regrettable actions.

Stress can cause you to be reactive and defensive. It can make you lose your temper and react to people who do not deserve your wrath. It can cause irreparable harm in your work relationships and cause you to get a label you may never shake.

"If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and thus you have the power to revoke it at any minute."

Marcus Aurelius

In short, nothing good will come from stress. But let me tell you something. Most stress is self-inflicted.

Remember, most often it is not the event or the situation that causes stress, it is your reaction to it.

You are putting the stress on yourself or letting others place too much stress on you.

"The mind is its own place, and in itself can make heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n."

Milton

When you are under stress, try to put things in perspective and think clearly before you act or react. Most often you will find the level of stress you perceive to exist to really be far less.
If you really want to put things in perspective take the time to take a walk through any local cemetery and look at the headstones. I recently found myself doing just this when I went to visit the graves of my father, grandparents and other relatives.

I was drawn to a headstone shaped like a lighthouse. It was the headstone of a 12 year old boy who had died very recently. He loved the ocean and this headstone gave him a view of the ocean for all eternity. I saw the headstone of a 1 year old child. And of a 31 year old mother of three.

**Never forget that every day above ground is a pretty good day.**

The moment we are born we start down the pathway to death. I don't mean to be morbid. The point I am trying to make is that you should keep things in perspective.

Your job is important. Very important.

But if you let things get to you to the point you are making yourself sick, or hindering your ability to perform your job at your maximum capability you are hurting yourself, the company, and your co-workers.

Take your job seriously, very seriously, you owe this to the company and to yourself, but don't take the things that sometimes happen on the job so seriously that you detract from your ability to perform your job.

"**Nothing gives one person so much advantage over another as to remain cool and unruffled under all circumstances.**"

*Thomas Jefferson*

The more stress you put yourself under the less effective your performance will be.

I once watched a fight between a superbly conditioned young fighter with tremendous skills and an older veteran.

Clearly the younger fighter was in better condition and had far greater skills. But by the 6th round he was so tired he could barely stand up. The pressure and stress had gotten to him and he lost.
Unless he can learn to deal with it, he will never be the quality fighter he could and should be. Unless he learns to deal with stress, he will never reach the level of excellence he is clearly capable of. Instead, he will wallow in mediocrity.

Stress will make your enthusiasm drain away. Your disposition will be terrible. These factors will be reflected directly in your job performance and interaction with your co-workers, employees, or customers.

"Be still my heart; thou hast known worse than this."

*Homer*

When you find yourself in a stressful situation step back. Take a deep breath. Wait a day or two if possible or even an hour or two to think things through clearly. Try not to get caught up in the moment. Try to look at the situation as an impartial observer.

Don't get caught up in the situation emotionally.

"Emotions are always more powerful than logic."

*Derrick W. Welch*

Try to remain calm and objective. Reacting based on emotion will rarely produce the best results and, in fact, could cause irreparable harm. You can't think clearly. Your judgment is affected. You may make the wrong decision for the wrong reason. You may do something you regret later. You may alienate your employees and co-workers and develop a reputation you will have a hard time shaking.

Let me give you a first hand example I witnessed to show you what can happen.

One time a woman who worked for me was going through a stressful period in her life both at home and on the job. Work was backing up and she felt she was under a great deal of pressure. She never stopped to think others were under an equal or greater amount of pressure and everyone was doing all they could to get things done.

In this particular case the woman in question had the job of checking the work of others to prevent errors from slipping through. Her job was to catch the errors of others. If others never made any errors this woman would not have a job.

One day I heard her screaming in the lunch room at another employee. Actually at a supervisor of another employee. She was out of control. She ranted and raved to the supervisor about how poor the quality of work was from the employee in question.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

About how many errors this other employee made and about how no one understood how difficult her own job was.

Needless to say this scene drew a crowd and word of the confrontation quickly spread throughout the company. Her behavior was not only unprofessional but it was unacceptable. Unacceptable to me and to those she worked with.

While I won't go into details of my conversations with her let me ask you a few questions.

What do you think this incident did to her image? Do you think others were anxious to work with her or help her out? What do you think this did for her job stability? Her potential for advancement? How do you think others saw her now?

Forget whether or not the woman even had a legitimate argument. Forget whether what she said was right or wrong regarding the errors of the person in question.

As soon as this outburst took place the validity of her comments ceased to be an issue. She became the issue. She became the problem.

The damage that was done in that brief few minutes can never be undone. It would never be forgotten by others, both peers and superiors.

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms -- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances -- to choose one's own way."

Dr. Viktor E. Frankl

Learn to put stress in its place. Prioritize the jobs, problems, or tasks at hand and do each to the best of your ability based on the level of priority each requires.

What more can you do? What more can you expect of yourself? What more can others expect of you?

"Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least."

Goethe

One way to minimize stress is to do the most important things first. The things that must take priority. The things that will have the most impact.

The things that will make the most bottom line impact. The things that are most pressing and will relieve the most pressure and, therefore, stress.
Derrick W. Welch

Let me give you a suggestion that I use to prioritize jobs and as a very simple and highly effective time management tool.

I have never found a simpler or more effective way to prioritize work.

I keep a "to do" list using 3 x 5 index cards. I find these to be extremely effective. I can shift the most pressing or top priority task to the top of the list by simply shuffling the pile and once a task is done I can dispose of the card to reduce my pile.

The use of these cards in itself is a time saver since I am not constantly redoing a "to do" list.

I simply toss out each card when the task is completed and add a new one as needed. I do not need to waste time every day creating a new list.

"There are two ways of meeting difficulties; you alter the difficulties or you alter yourself to meet them."

Phyliss Bottome

Remember, you create much of your stress by how you react to the circumstances that surround you, and as such most stress, like mediocrity, is self-inflicted.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Chapter 22. Defying mediocrity is a lot easier than you might think.

"The average person puts only 25% of his energy and ability into his work. The world takes off its hat to those who put in more than 50% of their capacity, and stands on its head for those few and far between souls who devote 100%."  

Andrew Carnegie

A study by the Public Agenda Foundation, a private research organization, found that 44% of all employees surveyed admitted that they "exert no effort over the minimum".

With this in mind, let me ask you, how hard can it be to be a standout employee?

According to a report in Today's Office, a study of United States Personnel Directors from both large and medium companies indicated that "the average on-the-job performance of American workers is only fifty three percent of their total capacity".

Yes, you read that right, 53%. This means that 47% of the time the average American worker is engaged in underproductive, nonproductive or non-job related activity.

A nonproductive or non-job related activity means a non-income producing activity. It means a production draining activity.

It means they are embracing mediocrity and not pursuing excellence. It means they are choosing to be common.

In another study, a private research company in New York conducted a survey among employees to find out if they felt they gave their maximum effort at work each day. The results of this survey indicated that 77% of the employees surveyed, by their own admission, did not.

Furthermore, nearly 50% indicated that they put forth no more than the minimum effort each day.

"It is more than probable that the average man could, with no injury to his health, increase his efficiency fifty percent."

Walter Dill Scott

Finally, Business Week reported that while factory productivity has gone up 51% individual employee productivity has gone down 7%. This, despite the tremendous technological advances that have been made during this time. So, if you think you can't easily rise above mediocrity, think again.
Just by working a bit harder each day you will be far ahead of most others. Far ahead of mediocrity.

Let me give you a few examples as to how easy it is to rise above the rest. Here I will use sales statistics merely as an example.

According to studies 87% of all inquiries are never followed up by a sales contact. 23% of all requests for product or service literature are never responded to. 81% of all sales calls are not closed until after the 5th call yet most give up after the first or second call.

Is it any wonder 81% of all sales are made after the 5th call? There is no competition left!

As I have told you many times, it simply is not very difficult to defy mediocrity. It simply is not very difficult to become much better at what you do.

It simply is not very difficult to exceed the expectations of others. It simply is not very difficult to dramatically increase your value to the company.

"I am only an average man but I work harder at it than the average man."

Theodore Roosevelt

If you increase your value to the company, you will increase your earnings and be presented with more opportunities.

Also remember the age of employment instability we live in. Which employee do you think will be kept when layoffs occur, or will be considered for a promotion when an opening comes up, the employee who puts in no more than the minimum effort each day, the employee who puts in only 50% of the effort they could be putting in, or the employee who puts forth 100% effort every day?

Which will you be?
Chapter 23. The fear of failure.

"Timidity causes mistakes."

*Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric*

Perhaps the biggest mistake you can make is being afraid to make a mistake. What is the worst that can happen? In most cases it will be minor. Don't be afraid to say "I screwed up". "I was wrong". You might dent your ego and feel a bit embarrassed, but people will respect your candor and honesty and willingness to admit you are not infallible and that you can and do make mistakes. They will appreciate your willingness to accept responsibility. An unusual trait.

"Our doubts are our traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt."

*William Shakespeare*

Who doesn't make mistakes? What is the worst that can happen in most cases? Your idea did not work? Your added efforts did not pay off as you had hoped?

So what? You may have gained invaluable lessons along the way. Failure can be the best teacher of all.

Have you ever had the pleasure of watching a child try to walk for the first time?

He strains to stand and he falls. He again strains to stand and falls. He does this over and over. He grabs onto something to help stabilize himself and takes a step. He falls. He falls over and over. Sometimes these falls are painful. How can he ever succeed?

It is physically impossible to walk. How could this little baby stand on two tiny feet and walk erect?

"Failure is perhaps the only foundation for success."

*Derrick W. Welch*

How can two little feet balance a body? How does he do it? He does it by refusing to fail. **Refusing to stay down.** By trying and trying until a glimmer of success shows itself. Then one day he takes two steps and falls. Then three steps and again he falls. Fall after fall. Failure after failure.
"Experience is the name everyone gives their mistakes."

Oscar Wilde

But each failure is merely one more step on the path that leads to success. Each fall teaches him what does not work. He finally takes one step and then one day two steps and then finally three steps. If he gave up he would spend the rest of his life crawling around on his belly.

Never forget that failing to succeed is not failure. The only failure is not trying at all or giving up.

"One who fears failure limits his activities. Failure is only the opportunity to begin again more intelligently."

Henry Ford

Every effort will not lead to success. In fact, most will not. Major league baseball players who fail 70% of the time become multi millionaires because they hit the ball safely a mere 30% of the time.

Thomas Edison failed to invent the light bulb over 11,000 times. Each time was merely one more step in his path to success. Each failure taught him what would not work. Each mistake gave him knowledge to build on.

"Do not be too timid or squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Never be afraid to try, to stretch yourself, to suggest new ways of doing things or new ideas.

Too many people are so concerned with the possible consequences of making a mistake that they will pass an opportunity by rather than take a risk.

"The better a man is, the more mistakes he will make, for the more new things he will try. I would not promote into a top level job a man who was not making mistakes ... otherwise he is sure to be mediocre."

Peter Drucker
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

They will stagnate rather than seek improvement. They will keep silent rather than speak up with an idea for improvement. If your ancestors were afraid of change, of challenge, of failure, we might still be starting fires by banging two rocks together.

Most of us anticipate failure instead of success.

We avoid trying because we fear humiliation or pain. We fear and worry about what others might think if we even try never mind if we fail.

"How much trouble he avoids who does not look to see what his neighbor says or does or thinks."

Marcus Aurelius

The fear of what others think is often a key factor in holding yourself back.

The sad truth is that most people don't think about you or I any where near as much as we think. In fact, many do not think about us at all.

In fact, they are most likely spending far more time thinking about what you are thinking about them than they are thinking about you.

Most are far too busy worrying about themselves and what they want or don't have. They have too many of their own goals, problems, and issues to worry about to spend much of any time thinking of you.

So I ask you, what do you care what most others think or what their opinions of you are?

"People are always ready to recognize a man's ability .... after he gets there."

Bob Edwards

The fear of failure, of others, of ridicule, only exists in your mind at this point. By fearing these things before you even try you are creating the negativity you anticipate. You are laying a foundation of fear. You are building a reservoir of rationale to draw upon as you convince yourself not to try.

By allowing your actions to be controlled in any way by your fear of what others may think of you, you are directly allowing those people to control your actions.
You are holding yourself back. Your career is being influenced by these people. Your life is being influenced by what you think these people will think of you.

**It is this serious.**

You may be prohibiting yourself from growing, from moving into the next level of personal capability.

Your fear of what others think can be one of the single largest reasons why you never reach the level you are capable of. Think about this.

But think about the source of most of these fears. You. Your mind. In many cases you are the problem.

Yes, in some cases people will scorn you publicly. They will question you and ask out loud who you think you are to think you can do a better job, suggest improvement, become management material or any one of 100 other things. They want to hold you back.

**Don't you dare let them.** Defy mediocrity by defying these people. True leaders, those who pursue excellence, those whose opinions you should care about, do not think this way.

"*The only people who never fail are those who never try.*"

*Ilka Chase*

Also think about the fact that many of these people you are so worried about, whether you will admit it or not, are people that have achieved nothing or very little in their lives. Their accomplishments are mediocre at best.

Let me also give you a tip. Most will not want to see you get ahead. They will not appreciate your drive.

They will not support you efforts to improve. Most will be jealous. They will see you trying to better yourself and will feel worse about themselves as a result. It makes little sense but it is true.

"*Success is simply a matter of luck. Ask any failure. "*

*Earl Wilson*

Be careful of listening to these people. They will often tell you why you can't do things and whether they are well meaning or self serving, the result may be the same. They will feed your fears and provide you with more self-justifications for not trying or for giving up or settling.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Also be very careful as to who you ask advice or input from. People often ask advice and seek approval from others but in all too many cases they are asking for advice and input from people who most often have never accomplished anything that qualifies them to offer this advice or input.

Would you ask a poor man how to get rich? Then why would you ask a co-worker, relative or neighbor about something they have never done and know nothing or little about?

"Success or failure is caused more by mental attitude than by mental capacity."

Sir Walter Scott

Whether it is your fear of what others might think or your fear of failure, by thinking of all the possible negative outcomes you are providing yourself an inexhaustible pool of reasons, excuses to draw upon to convince yourself how wise you are not to try, not to risk, not to take a chance.

You will now be able to tell yourself “wow it is a good thing I did not do that or this could have happened", "boy was I smart in not taking that risk, in suggesting that idea, in undertaking that project".

You are feeding yourself the self-serving justifications you need to justify your inaction.

You are your own worst enemy. You have met the enemy within.

But look at what you are doing. You are spending all your time establishing why you can't or shouldn't instead of why you can, could, or should.

Why is this?

We have been conditioned to accept and even strive for mediocrity. To not extend ourselves. To follow and not lead. To risk avoidance. To conform. To be the same. To fear mistakes.

We have been conditioned to this level by many.

Some who are well meaning. Some who want to hold us back.

"Fear is the most destructive of emotions. Fear is to a man's soul as a drop of poison is to a well of spring water. Fear wears so many different masks and comes in so many different forms. Wherever we turn, we are face to face with different aspects of fear. It is the biggest barrier for us to overcome in order to experience and fulfill our true potential."

Chin-Ning Chu
Your fears can be defeated. They can be overcome.

Action defeats fear.

Preparedness defeats fear.

Faith in yourself defeats fear.

High self-esteem defeats fear.

A willingness to risk making a mistake defeats fear.

Since fear is one more ally of mediocrity, each of these things also defeats mediocrity.

If you can't embrace belief in yourself, in your ability, at least suspend disbelief. At least give yourself the chance to improve, to make a larger impact.

Don't sabotage yourself simply because you can't envision the things you fear working out right. Don't hold yourself back by the fears that exist in your mind.

"The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one."

Elbert Hubbard

Don't get caught up in the trap of analysis paralysis. Don't analyze something so much that you never do anything. You never make a decision or take action. Inaction will very often be worse than the wrong action.

Most decisions or actions are not irreversible. You can make mistakes and correct most if needed.

"He who has never failed somewhere, that man cannot be great."

Herman Melville

Being known as someone not afraid to make a decision and take action and who is big enough to admit making mistakes and will take action to correct them is a reputation you should be proud to have.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

"The majority of men meet with failure because of their lack of persistence in creating new plans to take the place of those which fail."

Napoleon Hill

Without some risk of failure or error nothing will ever get accomplished. Playing it safe will not get you or your company anywhere. This is like running on a treadmill.

You go through a lot of motions but you never get anywhere.

Remember, you can never get to second base if you never take your foot off first base. Few results, large or small, can be achieved without some risk, some price being paid.

One of the most common reasons for failure is that people give up when they suffer a defeat.

"Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."

Confucius

Some of you might remember Amy Chow. During the 1996 Olympic gymnastic trials Amy Chow slipped and fell during her routine on the balance beam. Her face crashed into the beam knocking her off the beam and almost knocking her out.

Imagine her pain. Imagine her embarrassment. Her family and friends were in the crowd. The event was nationally televised.

Imagine her disappointment. She had spent years in the gym just for this moment. She had spent 6 to 7 hours a day 7 days a week getting ready for this.

One slip and her dream was slipping away. One slip and her hopes were dashed. Imagine what she must have felt and been thinking.

At this level of competition a slip like this is usually all it takes to knock you out of the top spots.

The Summer Olympics would not come around again for 4 years. In a sport that is dominated by youth, 4 years is a lifetime.

She could have stayed down. She could have sought medical attention. She could have given up. Why not?

After all what chance did she have now anyway? She could have felt sorry for herself or justified her quitting for any number of reasons. Who would not have understood?
Derrick W. Welch

She didn't. She got up and finished her routine. She made the team. She went to the Olympics. She helped the United States win the first team gymnastics gold medal in history and she went on to win an individual silver medal herself.

If she had stayed down, if she had given in to her pain, her embarrassment, her humiliation, if she had allowed that fall, that failure, that setback, to stop her from getting up and doing the best she was capable of she would have never reached the heights she did.

What would you have done?

Do you think the road to a successful job is defeat free? Does every NFL team score on every play? On every series of downs? Of course not. They all suffer setbacks and defeats. In fact, far more defeats than successes. How those defeats are handled and what is learned from them is the key to success.

Embrace defeat and failure for it is the surest path to the accomplishment of your objectives.

"If you never experience any fear, it is probably because you are living your life too safely, beneath your capacity and avoiding challenges. Such a life can be summed up in one word --- nothing."

Chin-Ning Chu

Fear holds most people back. Fear of failure. Fear of ridicule. Fear of risk. Fear of rejection. Most fears are only in your mind.

Stand up and stand out.

Fear is one shore that borders the sea of mediocrity. Defy it.
Chapter 24. Talk to me.

"The decathlon takes place in your mind first. If I didn't wake up thinking I was going to win the Olympic gold medal or set a world record -- I wouldn't. I control my own destiny."

Dan O'Brien, 2 days before he won the gold medal in the 10 event decathlon in Atlanta, 1996

As I have indicated earlier, one of the great failings of management today at all levels is the lack of positive reinforcement given to co-workers and employees. Most do not give, or do not have a clue as to how to give, positive reinforcement.

If you are among this group do something about it. Start giving the people you work with and who work for you the verbal and visible recognition and appreciation they not only deserve, but need.

Talk to your people. Tell them when things are done well. Tell them how they can get better. Tell them your expectations and help them meet them.

People need feedback, direction, guidance, and appreciation. They will look for others to provide the reinforcement they need to validate their efforts and value.

Whether we admit it or not we all seek external validation.

If you work with or for someone who does not give you the appreciation, motivation, and feedback you need then don't wait to get it. Give it to yourself. Self-talk can be a great confidence builder. It can remind you of all the things you have done and can do.

It is mental conditioning just like exercise is physical conditioning. Both will make you more confident. Both will increase your self-esteem and self-confidence.

"Men are born to succeed, not to fail."

Henry David Thoreau

Think of the many good things you have done. The difficult tasks you have faced and accomplished. The success you have had. The setbacks you have overcome.

Remind yourself that no one else in the world is just like you. No one thinks like you. No one looks just like you. No one that has come before you, or will come after you, is just like you. You are unique. Never forget this.
Derrick W. Welch

Build your mind up. Build your confidence and self-esteem up. Give your mind something to draw from. Positive active thoughts to reach for when you become nervous, unsure, scared.

Tell yourself things like "I am unique. I am capable. No one is that much better than me. I can do better. I will do better. I can improve. I am improving each and every day."

"I allow no room for self-doubt. I will not tolerate doubt and low self-esteem. Mediocrity is my enemy. It will be wiped out. I will not accept anything other than the pursuit of excellence. I will not associate with those who embrace anything else."

Talk to yourself. I, I, I. Not others. I. Put these thoughts and reminders down on paper and read them each day. Record them and listen to them each day.

Self-esteem and self-confidence are powerful tools. We need to feed our mind with positive reinforcement to build our self-confidence and self-esteem.

"How I feel about and behave toward myself is the basic determinant of most of my behavior. If I improve my self-regard, I will find that dozens of behaviors change automatically.

If, for example, I increase my feelings of self-competence, I will probably be less defensive, less angered by criticism, less devastated if I do not get a raise, less anxious when I come to work, better able to make decisions, less afraid of making decisions, and more able to appreciate and praise other people."

Will Schutz

If we wait for others to provide the positive reinforcement we need, we may never get it.

We are all creatures of many frailties but most of us have much greater capabilities than our level of self-confidence and self-esteem lets us think. Use these self-talk recordings or written messages to boost your self-confidence and self-esteem.

You might feel strange doing it, but let me tell you it works and it works well. None of us hear enough good things about our performance and our ability. If others don't tell us, we will never hear it unless we tell ourselves.

Music can also be a great motivator. It can lift your spirits and improve your attitude and outlook. It soothes the soul. It can give you confidence and enthusiasm. It can free you from the shackles of your mind.

It will help you think clearer. It will help you think beyond the boundaries of your normal thought process by removing your problems and tedious thoughts from your conscious mind so thoughts and ideas can filter up from your subconscious mind.
Chapter 25. Promises, promises.

"You can't build a reputation on what you're going to do."

Henry Ford

Always do what you say you are going to do. Your word should be your bond. In life and at work. Whether you give it to a family member, friend, fellow employee, boss, or customer, never make a promise or commitment you know you may not, cannot, or will not keep.

You must always do what you say you are going to do. You must become known as an individual who follows through on what they say and on commitments they make.

**Others must know they can count on you.** Others will make commitments based on your commitment.

They must know you are going to do what you promise. They must know you are going to do the job that is expected of you.

If you let them down they will be letting others down. It is a domino effect. As I pointed out in another chapter, everything you do or do not do, good or bad, has an effect, an impact, on someone or something else. Your actions and inactions determine whether that impact is positive or negative.

"He who permits himself to tell a lie once finds it much easier to do it a second time."

Thomas Jefferson

Treat your word as a contract not to be broken. Contracts are the creation of lawyers, your word should be your bond.

If, for some 100% unavoidable reason, you are unable to live up to a promise or commitment you made, make sure you tell all parties affected as soon as possible.

They are counting on you and others are most likely counting on them. Your inability to live up to your commitment will affect the ability of others to live up to their commitment.

Think of it as the first domino in a line of dominos standing on end one after the other. When one falls it knocks all the others over. Give them some warning so they can compensate if possible and if needed.
People must know they can count on you. **Become a "can do" and "does it" person, not a "can't do", "can't be counted on", or "doesn't do it" person.**

Which would you rather have working for you? Which type of person would you rather work with? Which type of person would you rather work for? Which type of person would you rather have in your life?

Which do you think your employer would rather have working for them? Which type of person do you feel they will look to advance fastest?

Which type of person do you think will be noticed most? Counted on most? Compensated most? Respected most? Appreciated most?

**In a world filled with mediocrity, people often say whatever they think you want to hear or whatever it takes to get rid of you.**

**Don't you become one of them. Be the exception. Defy mediocrity.**
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Chapter 26. Free yourself from the shackles of your mind.

"Discovery (of a solution) consists of looking at the same thing as everyone else and thinking something different."

Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

Learn to think beyond the norm. Learn to think outside of the boundaries and the traditional reference points. We all have reference points. Reference points are merely the known options we have at our disposal to use in accomplishing something. When faced with a problem most of us consider those known options only. Options that reflect the way things have been done in the past.

"If everyone is thinking alike then someone isn't thinking."

George S. Patton

You must expand beyond these and develop new ways to accomplish the objectives of your job. This is how all progress is made.

By not being satisfied with the known way of doing something you are forced to think beyond the boundaries and consider new ways to do the same thing.

"Watch your step when you immediately know the one way to do anything. Nine times out of ten, there are several better ways."

Wm. B. Given Jr.

From ways to save money to efforts for self-improvement, allow your mind to look beyond the boundaries.

From a way to improve quality to improving productivity, look beyond the obvious, the tried and true, the traditional. Considering only the known options will never result in the improvements that are possible.

Good examples of this are overnight delivery services. Who ever thought we needed them? Fred Smith, the founder of Federal Express, did. Now we can't live without them. How about the fax machine? With phones, mail, and overnight delivery who ever thought we needed instant delivery?
Before these innovations came along and before email if you needed to send something fast your only reference (known option) would have been to use the post office.

But you do not need to create an industry or invent a new technology. Your small idea for doing things a new way may be equally important to your company. One idea can save tremendous amounts of money for your company and advance your career.

Your one thought on how to improve productivity could make major improvements to the bottom line of your employer.

Your one idea on how to improve your product could dramatically improve quality or increase sales. Your one idea for sales to a new market could make an important impact. Your idea to reduce shipping costs matters. Your idea to speed up processing is important. Your idea for improved customer service counts. Your idea, no matter how small or large, can make a difference.

For example, one of the 1,000 cost control, expense reduction, and income producing ideas I give in my book "In Pursuit of Profits: How To At Least Double Your Profits Without Increasing Your Sales", is to re-use incoming boxes, cartons, and packaging material for outgoing shipments. I suggest that you use these boxes with a stamp or sticker indicating that as a responsible corporate citizen you are doing your part to help conserve the earth's resources by recycling boxes.

This way you are not perceived as a penny-pinching company, but as an environmentally-sensitive company.

One small distributor I know used this one idea to save over $100,000 per year in packaging costs. At a 2.5% net profit ratio, this one small idea was equal to the net profits realized on gross sales of $4,000,000. For this particular company this was the equivalent of a 25% increase in sales.

That's right. In the case of this company they would have needed to increase sales by 25% to realize the same bottom line impact as the one they realized from this one simple strategy.

Little ideas, little changes, can have a major impact on the bottom line.

The same holds true with increased productivity. Small improvements can make a major difference.

In fact, I used the ideas and strategies in that book to increase the profits of one company over 800% in just 2 years without any increase in sales!
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

"Towering genius disdains a beaten path. It seeks regions hitherto unexplored. It scorns to tread in the footsteps of any predecessor, however illustrious. It thirsts and burns for distinction."

Abraham Lincoln

All progress, no matter how small or how large, starts with someone thinking of a better way to do something.

You are that someone.

You can't be afraid to try new things, to test a new approach, to try a new idea, to take a risk. All gains are accomplished this way. If we only followed what we knew we would all still be living in caves.

All progress starts with someone thinking of an idea and trying it. How else is progress made? Yes, failures will result.

But failure is a teacher. A teacher of what will or will not work. Failure is indeed the very foundation that success is built upon.

If you follow the same path everyone else has taken, if you walk in the same footsteps that have been established you are going to get to the same place they got to. You are going to get the same results.

Of course, you may get results that are a bit better or a bit worse as you may do a better or worse job. But basically you will end up with the same results.

How could you not? How could you possibly do the same thing or things the same way and not end up with very similar, if not exact, results?

"Behold the turtle. He makes progress only when he sticks his neck out."

James B. Conant

Duplication and repetition are never going to result in significant change, improvements or progress. You may get better at what you do and how you do it, but it will only be incremental improvement.

You may go from walking to running but it will never lead to flying.

Where do you think improvements within your company or organization came from? Those directions or procedures you are now following?
Well, at one point they did not exist. Someone took a risk, came up with a new idea, a new method, a way to change and improve.

The old known way was replaced with a new way. Someone stepped off of the known path, the proven way to go and created a new and better way.

This is how progress is made.

Why should that someone not be you?

"When you have an answer for everything you know you have stopped learning."

Philip Crosby

All you need to do is to think. To ask the questions.

If you always have the answer, if you always know what to do, you are basing your knowledge solely on how it is done now which is based on how it has been done in the past.

You know the answer because you know how it is done now. You know the process used now. You know the markets you sell to now. You know the procedures employed now.

"It is better to ask some of the questions than to know all the answers."

James Thurber

But how it is "now" does not produce improvement. Yes, it enables you to know the answers but knowing the way it is now by itself will never generate the improvements that are possible.

"The business desert is layered with the bones of those who felt they understood completely, and stopped learning."

Philip Crosby

In fact, the acceptance alone of how it is done now creates the very boundaries that must be broken through to realize improvements.

You must ask the questions.

Why is it done this way?
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Why not another way?
Why can we?
How can you?
What if?

Questions, as pointed out in another chapter, are the key to the door of improvement.

You have the key! All you need to do is use it.
Chapter 27. Don't let your ego get in the way of the objective.

"I not only used the brains I had, but all that I could borrow."

Woodrow Wilson

You don't know everything. Don't act like you do. Someone else will always know something you don't. Listen and learn.

"Personally, I'm always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught."

Winston Churchill

Listen. As good as you may be at something and as knowledgeable or experienced as you might be, never forget that others can provide you valuable information.

They may see something you do not.

They may have a unique angle on a new way to do something, to improve quality, to increase production, for a new product, or a new market.

"Whenever I walk among two other people, it does not matter their social status and accomplishments; at least one of them will be able to teach me the knowledge that I do not possess."

Confucius

Furthermore, an idea from someone else may cause us to modify a thought or idea and think in an entirely new way. There is always a better way.

Sometimes being very good at what we do causes us to put on blinders. We think no one knows it better than us and, therefore, we do not even consider thoughts from others. We may not even know we are blocking these thoughts out by closing our minds. But you do not know everything and never will. Neither do I nor will I.

"What difference does it make who teaches us as long as we learn?"

Derrick W. Welch
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

If we open our mind, our ears, and our eyes, we can learn something from almost anyone.

From those we work with, from those who work for us, from those we work for.

From those outside our industry.

From those who may know little about our job and because of this can see the obvious that we have blinded ourselves to.

We can, and should, listen. Listen and learn.
Chapter 28. Criticism. It can hurt, but it can also help.

"You can't let praise or criticism get to you. It is a weakness to get caught up in either one. Some criticism will be honest and some won't. Some praise you will deserve and some you won't. You have to take both in the same light."

John Wooden

Always listen to suggestions for improvement and what you might perceive as criticism.

What do you do when you are criticized? Do you react like a cat does when it sees a dog? Do you get defensive? Do you get mad? Do you think "the hell with them"? Do you blindly try to defend or justify your actions or inactions?

"Any fool can defend mistakes and most do."

Derrick W. Welch

Those that can admit their mistakes, correct them if possible, not make them again, learn from them, teach others not to make the same ones, and move on are the ones who will be the leaders. The ones who secure their jobs and open up the doors of advancement.

You will never be able to avoid criticism. In fact, I suggest you don't even try.

Instead, when you are criticized, when you are second guessed, the first thing you should do is look within. Is the criticism or concern justified?

Ask yourself if the point is valid. Ask yourself the questions.

"When an archer misses the mark, he turns and looks for the fault within himself. Failure to hit the bulls-eye is never the fault of the target. To improve your aim -- improve yourself."

Gilbert Arland

Did you make a mistake? Were you wrong? Could you have done better? Was there another option you overlooked? Could you have handled the situation differently to get better results? Have you been guilty of whatever the person criticizing you claims?

Don't just dig your heels in and take a pig-headed stance. This gains you nothing but perhaps an enemy or a poor reputation.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

"I realized the problem was me and nobody could change me except myself."

John Petworth

Self-assessment is a very difficult thing to do. It is very hard to admit you made a mistake or that you could have done something better or differently with better results.

But if you could have, admit it, learn from it, correct or adjust things if possible, and move on.

Learn any lesson there is to learn and move on. You can't be moving forward if you are still in the past.

Few things are more unproductive and damaging to your self-esteem than dwelling on past mistakes, failures, missed opportunities, or resentment for criticism, justified or not.

"Whenever we are willing to listen to the criticism of others, there is no shortage of volunteers."

Chin-Ning Chu

If the criticism is not justified forget it. Don't get caught up in it. Don't waste time fuming over it. Don't go around mouthing off to others about how unfair it was or how the person criticizing you was wrong. It is nonproductive and can seriously damage your attitude.

"My life is one long obstacle course -- with me being the main obstacle."

Jack Paar

The individual in pursuit of excellence will learn any lesson to be learned and move forward. The mediocre person will dwell on the situation and, by doing so, will put even more roadblocks in front of himself.

Self-inflicted roadblocks.

Which will you be?

I ask you to put aside any defensive nature you might have. I ask you to try and ignore what is often a natural tendency for each of us to deflect blame, side step responsibility and defend our actions or inactions.
I ask you to do these things only long enough to look in the mirror, to look within and see if indeed you could have done a better job, if you could have taken another step, if you could have handled things differently. If, whatever the situation is in question, you could have altered your activity or role in the issue to affect a more positive outcome.

Not what someone else could have done or should have done. But what you could have done differently or better even in spite of others dropping the ball and not doing what they could have or should have.

Excellence must stand alone many times. You can't control the actions or inactions of others. You can control your own inactions or actions.

Mediocrity cries "why should I if they won't or don't".

"Excellence steps up and ignores the mediocrity demonstrated by others and does the very best that can be done in any given set of circumstances, at any point in time - - every time."

Derrick W. Welch

Mediocrity looks for others to produce the effort or results. Excellence leads the way despite the inferior or unacceptable efforts of others.

Excellence sets the example for others to follow. Mediocrity may not even follow. Mediocrity may merely stand aside and let excellence carry the load. So what? This is terrible but so what.

What are you going to do about it. Bitch and moan all day? Question how this is allowed to happen? Lower yourself to the sub par standards of others?

The choice is yours. It always is.
Chapter 29. Don't let the number of pieces get in the way of finishing the puzzle.

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one."

Mark Twain

Many tasks you are faced with on the job each day can seem overwhelming. They may seem so large and complex that you don't even know how to begin. They may seem so all encompassing you may immediately start to look for excuses not to begin them or why you should not do them.

You may begin building a justification for failure without even realizing it. You may waste valuable time by going around informing everyone of the tremendous task you are faced with.

These and similar actions will serve only to ensure that the project or task will never be completed. You have already begun to mentally give up.

Mediocrity has won the battle before you even enter the war.

"Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs."

Henry Ford

The key to dealing with complexity is to break it down into simple steps. Break a big job down into a series of small jobs.

If you had a choice between simple or complex which would you choose?

"Life is frittered away by details. Simplify. Simplify."

Henry David Thoreau

Always proceed with the goal of simplicity.

Most things are simply not as complex or daunting as they may appear at first. Don't make them out to be more complex than they are. Do not allow them to become more complex than they must be.

The completion of a series of small tasks or steps results in the completion of the overall task.

It really is that simple. Don't complicate the issue.

"If your company did not have any problems they might not need you. They hired you to fill a need. To solve a problem. This is why you have a job. If it was easy, or if they had fewer problems, someone with less ability than you might have your job."

Derrick W. Welch

Problems. Most employees hate them. Most employees try to ignore them, hoping they will go away. They pretend not to be aware of them. Some try to pass them off to others. Most see them as an inconvenience or intrusion into whatever they think their job is. Most will blame something else or someone else for them.

But blaming someone or something else will never solve the problem. It has never solved any problem. It merely creates another one.

"In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."

Albert Einstein

A rare few embrace problems and see them as an opportunity to find a resolution that will benefit the company in some manner and improve their skills and capabilities. These rare few understand that problems should not be ignored. These rare few understand that they can represent opportunity.

An opportunity to rise above mediocrity. To rise above others.

These rare few understand that without problems they might not be needed. These rare few understand that the acceptance and resolution of problems is one more way to defy mediocrity. These rare few consider a problem a challenge.

These are the people who are defying mediocrity. The people who are pursuing excellence. These are the uncommon people in life.

If your company didn't have problems, you might not be needed. Machines or robots could do most tasks if problem solving was not part of the job. Do you think that it is not your job to address problems? Do you think problems are someone else's responsibility? Do you think that problems will go away if you ignore them?

If so, allow me to point a few things out to you. First of all, problems will not go away. They will get worse and may even become irreparable if they are not addressed.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Secondly, passing a problem off to someone else may get the problem out from in front of you, but it represents terrible internal customer service and will do nothing to advance your career, to improve your skills, to endear you to your co-workers, superiors, and customers, or to increase your self-esteem.

**Hiding from responsibility never will.**

Do you want others passing off problems to you? If it were your company, would you want your employees doing all they could to ignore or pass off problems?

Do you think others do not notice when you passed off a problem? Do you think you earn respect, loyalty, appreciation from others when you shift responsibility for a problem onto someone else or when you ignore a problem and hope it goes away or that someone else will resolve it?

Would you?

"**There are three kinds of people;**

Those who make things happen,

Those who watch things happen,

And those who don't know what the hell is happening."

*Dr. Robert Anthony*

**Which are you?**

Which do you think will enjoy the greatest job security?

Which do you think will rise the fastest within an organization?

Which do you think will command the highest level of loyalty and support from peers and co-workers?

Which will you be?
Chapter 31. Integrity. Initiative. Attitude. Pride. The pillars of excellence. The four main weapons you must have in your battle to defy and defeat mediocrity.

Integrity

"It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are."

Roy Disney

There is a line from the old TV show Dallas that I have always remembered. It was spoken by the show's main villain, J.R. Ewing, who was played by Larry Hagman. After he had just finished destroying someone in a business deal and stealing his adversary's wife he was asked "How can you do that? How can you live with yourself?" J.R. turned and responded "Once you lose your integrity, the rest is easy".

If you know your values, your standards, you know what is right or wrong. You do not allow current circumstances to dictate to you what is right or wrong. This judgment has been made a long time before the temptation, or urgency or the current situation has arisen.

"Integrity is one of several paths, it distinguishes itself from the others because it is the right path, and the only one upon which you will never get lost."

M.H. McKee

The company policies will never cover every circumstance. You must have personal standards you live by no matter what others think.

Let me give you a personal example.

For 10 years I ran a company for the owners. During those 10 years it was repeatedly suggested to me that I should start a competing company while I was still running this company. It was been pointed out that I made them a great deal of money and I could easily run a much better and more profitable company on my own.

It was pointed out that I could personally make a great deal more money.

It was suggested that the owners of the company were not only making a great deal of money as a direct result of my efforts but that my efforts often seemed not to be appreciated.

It would be easy to start a competing company while still drawing a paycheck for the company I was running. As a matter of fact, the owner of the company I was running had done exactly this when he started that company.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

But what was also true is that I could not do this. I could not start a competing company even if there was no chance of the owners knowing about it. I could not justify this action even by telling myself that the man I worked for had done the exact same thing.

My personal standards made this 100% unacceptable. No amount of self-justification could have altered my feelings on this matter. Not the temptation of money. Not the fact the man I worked for had done the same thing. Not the fact my efforts were not always appreciated.

"It is the right path. It is the path made of principle that leads to character."

Al Pacino as Colonial Slade in Scent of a Woman

It was an easy decision to make. There really was nothing to think about. My personal values, my own standards, enabled me to make the decision long before I was ever faced with the question.

As long as I cashed a paycheck from this company each week my obligation was to do all I could within my power to make this company as profitable and successful as possible.

"When I do good, I feel good. When I do bad, I feel bad. And that's my religion."

Abraham Lincoln

It all starts with integrity. Integrity is about doing the best you can. Integrity is about honesty. Integrity is about doing what is right. You always know what is right or wrong.

Initiative

"Even in the most opportune times doors do not open themselves. The initiative must always be taken by those outside the doors."

Bess Myerson

Initiative is about being determined to make a difference. It is about doing something before you are asked to. It is about developing ideas and thinking about how to do your job better. It is about going the extra step. It is about seeing something that needs to be done and doing it whether or not it is "your job".
"Initiative is doing the right thing without being told."

William J. Siegel

Initiative is about seeing a way to help someone and helping them without worrying about getting credit for it.

Initiative is about doing the most with what you have to work with instead of finding reasons why you can't.

Initiative is about making the job of others easier and not worrying about making your own job easier. Initiative is about fixing the problem and not trying to figure out how to affix the blame.

Initiative is about showing me and not telling me. Initiative is about knowing that if you can do better, "good enough" will never be. Initiative is about producing results, not creating excuses.

Initiative is about not hiding behind union rules or civil servant protective policies to avoid doing the best you can.

Attitude

"Attitude. The magic word. With the right one you can accomplish most anything. With the wrong one you will wallow in mediocrity."

Derrick W. Welch

It all starts with attitude. An attitude of trying to become better at what you do. An attitude of doing the best you can every minute of every day. An attitude of setting an example for others. An attitude of self-assessment reflected in a constant quest for being a better, more capable person.

"Attitude is everything."

Abraham Lincoln

I am not talking about transcendental meditation, self-visualization, positive thinking, I'm O.K., you're O.K.. I am talking about attitude. One of the most powerful words in the English language.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

An attitude of helpfulness. An attitude of putting the responsibility of the job ahead of your personal agenda. An attitude of making the product better by doing your job better. An attitude of providing superior external customer service by providing superior internal customer service.

An attitude of "it is never good enough" instead of "that's good enough". An attitude of pride in what you do and how well you do it. An attitude of finding ways to do something, not reasons why you can't.

Pride

"Whatever your life's work is do it well. A man should do his job so well that the living, the dead, and the unborn could do it no better."

Martin Luther King Jr.

Pride. It always comes down to pride. Pride in what you do and how well you do it. Pride in doing the best job you can, no matter who is or is not watching you, no matter how seemingly mundane or insignificant the task is. Pride in constantly striving to be better at what you do.

Pride in knowing that how much you did will never outweigh how well you did it.

"When you take pride in what you do, you always do more than you need to do."

Arnold Palmer

Think about this. You spend over half of your life at work, getting to work, coming from work or thinking about work. Don't you think you should take pride in your work?

Don't you think a subpar work performance will affect you outside of the office? Don't you think it will lower your self-esteem?

An attitude of doing your best every day in every way has to carry over in a positive manner to all other areas of your life.

"Pride is a personal commitment; it is an attitude that separates excellence from mediocrity."

Successories
Derrick W. Welch

How could it not? You are building a mind-set of excellence or mediocrity based on your job performance. **Which are you building?** A mind-set that carries over into every other area of your life whether you want to admit it or not.

"Excellence is not defined by what you do but rather by how you do it."

*Derrick W. Welch*

Never forget that your work is a reflection of yourself. How do you look to others? To yourself?

"*If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well."

*Martin Luther King*

Take pride in what you do and how well you do it!
Chapter 32. Mediocrity does, indeed, love company. Dare to be different.

"The scarcest resources in any organization are performing people."

*Harvard Business Review*

One cause of mediocrity is pressure from other employees. Other employees who try to get you to join them in doing little more than you have to do to keep your job. They worry that if you do more they will look poor by comparison. If you strive for improvement they worry they will look bad by comparison.

If you develop ideas for corporate improvements, or undertake efforts to improve yourself and your capabilities, they may resent you as they will pale by comparison. This is a disgrace and a prime symptom of mediocrity.

"Beginning with childhood, most of us have been taught that the highest prize in the world is the approval of others. As we grow older, it becomes apparent that to defer constantly to others and seek their approval is not the most efficient way to get ahead."

*Chin-Ning Chu*

You must ignore these people and rise above them. What do you care about making them look bad? They are the ones making themselves look bad.

Are you going to let them make you look bad by allowing them to keep you down with them?

That is their problem.

Let them start worrying about how to do the job as well as you do it and before you know it the pressure will be on those who are not doing the job as well as they can. The end result will be that everyone will be better and the company will be better for it.

"I strive for excellence and some players don't. They strive for acceptance."

*Michael Jordan*

We all seek acceptance in life. The question is "at what price?". Seeking acceptance can often be a prime cause of mediocrity. It holds us back. It pulls us toward the pack. The pack of mediocrity. Seeking acceptance can prevent us from doing our best, from trying harder and offering new ideas.
Heaven forbid that we face possible scorn, ridicule, or resentment from those who embrace mediocrity.

Don't be afraid to make waves if it can help you do a better job or your company become a better company.

Because you are surrounded by mediocrity, you will often be confronted with an attitude of complacency and of doing things the way they have always been done.

Your suggestions for change or improvement, and, indeed, your own efforts to improve, will not always be greeted with the enthusiasm and recognition they deserve. Don't let this stand in your way.

Speak up if you need to. Let others know of your idea. If it can help the company in some manner it must be made known and given a chance.

Don't let someone else cause you to abandon an idea for improvement.

"You need to find the courage to do what must be done without regard to what others may think. Extraordinary people don't care what others think of them. However, most people have been conditioned to be affected by the opinions of others."

Chin-Ning Chu

Don't let fear hold you back. Fear of ridicule from your co-workers. Fear of failure. Fear of resentment from others in the company who thrive in a mixture of complacency and mediocrity.

This is all bull! Each of these fears stems from what others may think of you. Those trying to do better will always be a target for those who coast through life and do no more than they absolutely have to.

"Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds."

Albert Einstein

Think about this. These are the people at the root of your fears. These creatures of complacency. These marathon swimmers in a sea of mediocrity.

Are these the people whose standards you are afraid of?
Defy Mediocrity:  Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

**Wake up and smarten up.** Let your actions put you so far above these people that you can't even see them anymore. Because so many are mediocre, it is simply not very difficult to rise above them and separate yourself from this group.

These people will never have initiative or drive. They will try to hold you down. Like a swimmer trying to cross the English Channel with weights on his legs they want you to drown in the sea of mediocrity they flourish in.

"Do not lower your standards to accommodate others."

*Byrd Baggett*

Forget these people. They are mediocrity. Defy them by doing the best you can each and every day. Defy them by constantly seeking to become better and more capable.

**Defy them. Defy mediocrity. Choose to be uncommon.**

You can't control what someone else does, but you can control what you do. You must strive to do the best you can regardless of what others do. Remember, the vast majority embrace mediocrity.

They do nothing more than the absolute bare minimum and, even then, mediocrity would be a step up for many of these people.

Do your best and worry about yourself, not them. Don't take the attitude that you will if they do or you won't because they don't. This will drive you to mediocrity and you will be allowing other people's inactions or actions to determine your performance.

This must always be unacceptable. Sometimes excellence must stand alone.

**Mediocrity loves company. Have the guts to rise above it.**

Let me also again point something else out. Many will not want to see you get ahead. They will not appreciate your drive. They will not support your efforts to improve.

Many will be jealous. They will see you trying to better yourself and will feel worse about themselves as a result. It makes little sense but it is true.
"I do not care what others say and think about me. But there is one man's opinion which I very much value, and that is the opinion of James Garfield. Others I need not think about. I can get away from them, but I have to be with him all the time. He is with me when I rise up and when I lie down; when I eat and talk; when I go out and come in. It makes a great difference whether he thinks well of me or not."

\[\text{James Garfield --- Former President of the United States}\]

Be careful of listening to these people. They will often tell you why you can't do things and whether they are well meaning or self-serving, the result may be the same.

They will feed your fears and provide you with more self-justifications for not trying or for giving up or for settling far below your capabilities.

Let me close this chapter by pointing out something else. Something else that is very important.

There are far more people in the workplace who are trying to defy mediocrity than you might think.

Far more people like you are determined to rise above the tide and make a difference. Recent studies have proved this. \text{Studies that have shown that 48\% of American workers are frustrated by the way slackers are tolerated by management. 48\%!}

Which group are you in? Which group will you be in? Which group will you lead?
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Chapter 33. Stay above the fray.

"All unhappiness is caused by comparison."

Dr. Robert Anthony

Stop worrying about everyone else and start taking care of your own responsibilities, your own future. Stop worrying about what other people are paid or who got this or that. Stop worrying about who is doing this or that. Stop being jealous.

Stop spreading rumors. Stop asking about things that do not concern you. Stop gossiping. It hurts your reputation. It hinders productivity. It often results in unfairly hurting others. Tearing someone else down will never lift you up.

"One ought to examine himself for a very long time before thinking of condemning others."

Moliere

Are you so perfect that you have time to worry about the faults or successes of others? Is your job being done so well that there is no room for improvement and you can waste time worrying and complaining about others?

Don't get involved in petty office politics, gossip, rumors, and personality conflicts. They are unproductive, they will hurt your career, and they help no one. By even talking about them you are part of the problem.

Your goal should always be to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Do not get involved or you will be perpetuating the problem.

"Let everyone sweep in front of his own door and the whole world will be clean."

Goethe

Stop worrying about others and, instead, focus on your own responsibilities and efforts. Forget the politics. The time you spend being jealous or resentful of others can never be recovered and will do nothing to advance you.

If you spend all your time talking negatively, you will have no time to act positively.
Pointing out the problems and shortcomings of others will never result in your own self-improvement. How could it?

What it will do is negatively affect your performance, tarnish your reputation, and hold you back. It will blind you to opportunities, cause you to ignore the good in your job, your company, and in others. It will make others dislike you, distrust you, and not support you.

You must rise above these types of activities and emotions. You must rise above mediocrity. Like quicksand you either stand above and away from it or you are sucked into it and become submerged with no way out.

If you spend your time wrapped up in these types of activities when are you going to find the time to improve yourself, your performance, your department, your company?

*Sign on company bulletin board: "This firm requires no physical-fitness program. Everyone gets enough exercise jumping to conclusions, flying off the handle, running down the boss, flogging dead horses, knifing friends in the back, dodging responsibility and pushing their luck.". A story from Financial Times as reprinted in Readers Digest.*

All too many people make major problems out of minor issues. They grasp at the smallest detail or problem and focus in on it like a laser beam.

Life is too short. You simply do not have enough time to waste one minute on petty personality differences, office politics, envy, and water cooler gossip.

"People who employ their minds too much with trifles often make themselves incapable of doing anything serious or great."

*La Rochefoucauld*

Stay above the fray. Don't you have enough to worry about?

Let me also ask you how trustworthy do you think others will think you are if you spend time running down others?

Do you think they will only think you run down other people and not them? Would you turn your back on someone who is known to shoot people in the back?

It would not be a wise move to do so.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Do you think others will have trust and faith in you and confide in you when you tell secrets and spread rumors or badmouth employees, ownership or others?

How could they? I would be very careful for I would fear you would be doing this to me in conversations with others.

If you go around gossiping and badmouthing people do you think the people you are doing this with are naive enough to assume you will not be doing it to them as well?

How much do you think they will trust you? How much faith do you think they will have in you?

"When you betray somebody else, you also betray yourself."

_Isaac Bashevis Singer_

Finally, let me ask you if you ever worried about others repeating information you have spoken? Perhaps negative comments about the company or another employee? How about confidential information?

Well, there is one sure way to eliminate this worry --- don't say anything about others that is negative, don't say anything that you feel could come back to hurt you, don't say anything that you would not say to the person you are speaking about directly.

"Nothing so needs reforming as other people's habits."

_Mark Twain_

You only have yourself to blame when something you said filters back to the wrong party.

Choose to be uncommon. Defeat mediocrity by spending your time trying to make yourself better and making the organization better.

Stay above the fray.
Chapter 34. Commitment.

"God gives every bird its food, but he does not throw it into the nest."

J.G. Holland

The late great Earl Nightingale used to tell a story about a patron at a piano recital. According to the story the woman playing the piano was extraordinary. She enthralled the audience. After her performance the patron came up to her and complimented her on her skills. She told the pianist that she would love to be able to play as well as she could.

The pianist shocked her by responding "No, you wouldn't". The patron, taken aback, responded "Yes, yes I would love to play as well as you can". The pianist looked the patron in the eye and replied "No, no you wouldn't. You say you would, but you wouldn't. If you really would like to play as well as I do, you could. But you really don't want to or else you would have put in the 10 hours of practice a day for the last 18 years that I have."

The pianist was talking about the difference between wishing and wanting and the commitment needed to reach the level one aspires to. The reality of it was that the patron was not willing to put forth the effort and the commitment needed to become as good as the pianist.

"Commitment is a line you must cross...it is the difference between dreaming and doing."

Bernie Fuchs

Are you willing to make the commitment and put forth the effort and make the sacrifices needed to become as good as you can be? To reach the level you aspire to?

Words have meaning. Few have a stronger meaning than commitment. Most people have no idea what the word really means. They may talk about it and may even claim to be committed, but it is very doubtful they are.

"Nothing worthwhile ever happens quickly and easily. You achieve only as you are determined to achieve .... and as you keep at it until you have achieved."

Robert H. Laver

If you want to become better at what you do, you can. If you aspire to higher levels of responsibility, you can reach them. If you want to earn more, you can. All you need to do is commit to improving yourself so you have the capability to accomplish what you seek.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Stop wishing and wanting. Stop whining and hoping. Start doing something about it.

"If you want the reward you must be willing to pay the price. If you are not willing to commit to paying the price to reach your goals you must lower your goals to a level where they will fall in line with what you are willing to give to get them. There is nothing very complex here."

Derrick W. Welch

In the first edition of this book I wrote of a young woman who worked for me named Larissa Towns. At that time she was working as both a receptionist and as an order entry person. She knew she had more capabilities than these jobs required. She knew she wanted more out of her career. She also knew that she did not have the skills, education, or experience to move above that level.

She did not whine about not getting the chance to advance. She did not complain about others getting ahead faster than she was.

She did not stew in a pool of self-pity. Instead, she realized that she must become better and more capable. She knew she must increase her value to the company if she wished to move ahead.

So, at the age of 23 she decided to go to night school to gain the skills she needed to move to the level that she sought.

She had no illusions about the company owing her anything. She knew that by gaining more education and experience she would one day be offered the opportunity she sought. She knew that she must be ready and capable to take advantage of any opportunity that presented itself.

To make sure she was, she went to class 4 hours a night, three nights a week, while working full-time. When many other people her age were out socializing and living life, she was preparing for the future.

She was committed to developing the skills and talents she needed to reach her goals. She was willing to make the sacrifices needed to reach the level she sought.

She defied mediocrity. She understood that a key to overcoming mediocrity is commitment. Commitment to becoming better at what she did and was capable of doing, both short and long term.

Less than 6 months after the first edition of this book was published Larissa's efforts, sacrifice and commitment paid off. A long time employee, a department manager unexpectedly retired.

This created a shift of responsibility within the department which opened up the opportunity for a full-time position in the accounting department.
Who do you think got the position? Despite her lack of experience and education in this area I promoted Larissa into this new job. She had shown me the drive, commitment, and willingness to sacrifice for what she wanted. These qualities were far more important to me than a college degree in accounting or years of experience.

But never forget the giving and proving came before the getting.

On the opposite end of this spectrum is another individual who worked for me for over 9 years. He was always telling me and others how he needed more money, how he could not get by on what he was being paid. He frequently asked for pay advances and loans. When he was reviewed he spent most of his time in the review process talking about his fiscal wants and needs.

Notice the pattern here. What he needed. What he wanted.

Never once in the 9 years he worked for me did he do anything to improve his skills, to increase his impact or value to the company. Never once did he develop an idea or even a thought as to how to make the company better, how to reduce costs, how to increase productivity. Never once did he ever suggest an idea for improvement in any area. Not once in 9 years.

He never increased his knowledge of what he did, what the company did, what the competition did. He never made any effort whatsoever to increase his knowledge. He never took a course, never asked to attend a seminar, never even read a business book or a trade publication.

He did nothing in 9 years to make himself or the company better. He never sought out responsibility. He did not step forward and offer to help others. He never cross trained himself in any other area of the company. In fact, he resisted all efforts to cross train him. He knew nothing about current technologies.

Yes, he did an adequate job but he did no more than he needed to keep his job.

"Dreams are free, but goals have a price."

Ennis J. Gibbs

Yet, he wanted more. He needed more.

He gave nothing more and yet expected more. He needed more but did nothing to increase his value and impact with the company.

What he wanted and what he needed were the only concerns in his mind. It never entered his mind that to get more he needed to do more, to increase his value to the company, to gain the support of others through his internal customer service, to increase his knowledge, to learn more.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

In the 9 years he worked for me he could have earned a college degree simply by going to school nights or weekends. He could have suggested hundreds of ideas for improvement. He could have cross trained in nearly every function within the company. He could have sought out and taken responsibility in numerous areas. All of which would have made him more valuable, more skilled, more of an impact employee.

All of which would have earned him more money and promotions.

Since he did none of these things he had a very limited value to the company. He continued to want and need more money. He continued to place the blame and responsibility on others or on circumstances for his failure to earn more money or to have moved to a higher level of responsibility.

The opportunities to earn more and rise within the company surrounded him. However, it was up to him to take advantage of them and develop them.

They should not be given to him. Excellence will always be rewarded. Mediocrity is lucky to have a job!

"Success seems to be connected with action. Successful men keep moving. They make mistakes but they don't quit."

Conrad Hilton

Let me tell you about a man I once had the pleasure of meeting. His name was Carroll Cross and he was the CEO of his own company.

What was so special about Mr. Cross? Well, for starters he held over 15 patents and owned three other companies. Impressive to be sure, but this is not the point of my story.

Mr. Cross contacted me to see if I could help him plan for the future. He wanted to accomplish a number of things with his company and he felt he needed outside talent to help him reach his long term goals for the company. He wanted to lay a foundation for the future.

At that time Mr. Cross happened to be 91 years old.

Yes, you read that right. Mr. Cross was 91 years old. He had a 61 year old son. He worked 8 hours a day, four and a half days a week.

He was not a figurehead hanging on to a title. He had the first and last word in everything his company did. At the age of 91, Mr. Cross was thinking about the future and what he needed to do then to reach his goals in the future.
Many people would have been retired 20 or 30 years before. Not Mr. Cross. He was committed to doing what is needed to get where he wanted to go.

Are you? Are you willing to take responsibility for your future and improve your skills so that you can improve your value to your company?

Are you willing to stop whining about what you don't have and start improving the way you do things and increasing your capabilities so that your company can help you achieve what you seek in your career?

Are you willing to make the sacrifices needed to defy mediocrity and pursue the excellence that you are capable of?

It won't happen by itself. Wishing and wanting will get you nowhere. Commitment and action will.

"There are risks and costs to a program of action. But they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction."

John F. Kennedy

Let me close this chapter by giving you a couple of very personal examples of people with the guts to make the sacrifices needed to rise above mediocrity and reach for their goals. With the willingness to make the sacrifices required.


"The secret of success is consistency to purpose."

Benjamin Disraeli

My grandmother had this kind of drive. She had the willingness to pursue her goals. To make the most of her capabilities. To make the sacrifice and commitment needed to obtain what she was after.

After spending most of her best years raising a family she found herself in her 40's with no children at home. No job. No marketable skills.

But she did have a goal. She wanted to be a teacher. She wanted to make a difference in the lives of others.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

She had no intention of sitting home for the next 20 years wishing and whining and resenting her life. Instead she took action. She found out what she needed to accomplish in order to become a teacher and made a commitment to getting the needed qualifications.

She went back to college during a time when few women went to college at all, never mind women in their mid 40's.

She earned her degree as a teacher and spent the next 20 years teaching. Making a difference in the lives of hundreds of young men and women.

"Some people want it to happen, some wish it would happen ... others make it happen."

Michael Jordan

Which will you be?
Chapter 35. Procrastination. One of mediocrity's best friends.

"Knowing is not enough, we must apply. Willing is not enough, we must do."

Goethe

I must confess that I will never understand those who procrastinate. I cannot understand how you can put something off that should be done. I will never understand how you can agree to do something and not do it or at least not until you have been reminded of it over and over again.

I will not coddle those of you who are procrastinators. I don't give a hoot what the psychologists and psychiatrists of the world dole out as excuses or justification for those who procrastinate. These well-meaning professionals have a tendency to give anyone and everyone an excuse for their failings.

My goal is to take those excuses away. To remove those self-serving justifications that so many hold onto as crutches to lend credibility to what often are self-inflicted inadequacies.

Overcoming procrastination takes the same effort it takes to overcome any other bad habit in life. It takes self-assessment to recognize the problem, a determination to eliminate the weakness and a commitment to getting it done.

If you are a procrastinator, you know that putting off things that need to be done only makes things worse. It can cost you customers. It can cost you promotions. It can cause serious morale problems. It can turn a simple task into a major problem. It can cost you your job. It is inexcusable!

"The way to do things is to begin."

Horace Greeley

I see fewer things that are easier to overcome than the habit of procrastination. Don't think about things you need to do or should do. Do them.

The more you think about something the longer you delay doing something about it. The more you think about an unpleasant task the more reasons you will come up with not to do it or to delay doing it even longer.

"Putting off an easy thing makes it difficult; putting off a hard thing makes it impossible."

George H. Lorimer
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

If it must be done or needs to be done, do it.

Thinking about it and planning for it will do nothing but make the task seem that much more difficult, thereby feeding your fear of doing the task.

"Don't stand shivering on the bank; plunge in at once, and have it over."

*Sam Slick*

If you have a difficult task to begin, start to work on it. If you must make an unpleasant phone call, pick up the phone and make it. If you know you need to reorder supplies but keep putting it off, get out your order form and order them. If you have a letter to write, write it.

If the equipment you are working with must be cleaned each week then clean it each week. Putting it off will merely make it much more difficult to clean later and could damage the machine. If the machine breaks down it will delay production, disrupt your customer service, cost money, and could otherwise severely hurt the company.

If you have an idea for improvement try it.

Ideas without action are useless.

"In any moment of decision the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing."

*Theodore Roosevelt*

Mediocrity loves procrastinators.

Their actions or inactions spill over into so many other areas of the company's operations and drag so many others into the circle of mediocrity, that procrastinators are one of mediocrity's great allies.

"He has half the deed done who has made a beginning."

*Horace*

Defy mediocrity by defeating procrastination.
Chapter 36. For those of you in management or who hope to be in management one day soon.

"What we see depends mainly on what we look for."

John Lubbock

In psychology there is a term called the "Pygmalion effect". It refers to setting expectations for people to live up to. The theory is that if you treat people as though they are worthy of your expectations for them, they will seek to live up to your expectations of them. If you know I think you are good, it is very likely that you will work very hard to prove me right and live up to my expectations of you.

All too often management will not set expectations for their people to live up to. Instead, they develop a perception, right or wrong, of the capabilities of the individuals that work for them. They don't try to develop people. They make a decision of an employee's capabilities based on their perception of what that person is capable of. A perception that is often wrong.

My perception is my reality. So is yours. We must open our eyes and ears to other ideas and possibilities. Because we think it is, does not mean it is or must be.

Carl Sandburg made this point in a story in one of his books about folks from the east moving out west back around the turn of the century. He told the story about a farmer standing on the edge of his property on a hot and dusty day.

A family rode up to him on their way out West in a creaking, dirt covered old wagon pulled by two tired looking horses.

The family asked the farmer what the people in the next town were like. The farmer responded by asking the family what the people were like in the town they came from. The family replied that most of the people from the town back home were not very friendly and not very honest. The farmer then advised them that he suspected the people in the next town were pretty much like those people back home. The family shook their heads in disappointment and continued on their journey.

A short time later another family happened by and stopped and asked the farmer what the people in the next town were like. The farmer once again responded by asking them what the people back home were like.

The family replied by telling the farmer that the people back home were a friendly group of hard-working, honest people. The farmer then told the family that he reckoned that they would find the same type of people in the town up ahead.
You see, people's perceptions are their reality. Perceptions can, for better or worse, become self-fulfilling prophecies. We act according to our perception.

We treat people according to our perception of them and their capabilities. Acting according to our perception can make the perception we hold, again, good or bad, become a reality.

But, as a manager, you can help mold and modify those perceptions. If you, as a manager, think one of your people is not very talented or capable, then your actions and expectations will convey this and this could become your employee's perception of himself.

If, on the other hand, you feel, or act as though you feel, your employee is very talented and capable, your actions and expectations of him will reflect this and most likely he will strive to live up to your faith in him. This works. I know firsthand.

I have had great success in converting mediocre employees into excellent employees simply by being able to improve their perception of themselves by giving them expectations to live up to and letting them know I had tremendous faith in them.

No, it won't always work. But yes, many times it will and the little effort required is well worth it.

Try to set expectations for others to live up to. Telling someone you know they can do this or reach that objective is far more powerful and effective than telling someone they must do this or must accomplish that.

You are setting expectations for them to strive for. Expectations they will want to meet out of pride and not fear. Give them something to live up to.

Let them know you are counting on them and that you have faith in them. They won't want to let you down. Let them know how important their effort and input is. Let them know you have faith in them.

Many times they must know you have faith in them before they can find the faith in themselves.

The alternative is to set no expectations for them. If you expect little what do you think you will get?

Let me give you a personal example of how powerful the desire to live up to the expectations of others can be. Many years ago I was vacationing in Florida with my family. While there my youngest daughter Joanna spent time each night to work on a long letter she was writing to her boyfriend detailing our vacation.

Each night I teased her about what was in the letter and suggested to her I was going to read it when she wasn't looking.
One night when she was going to bed she left her letter out on the table in the other room. I teased her again by suggesting I was going to read it when she fell asleep. She turned to me and said "If I thought you would do that I wouldn't leave it out each night."

Talk about setting expectations. She made it very clear that she had great faith in the fact that I would not read her letter no matter where she left it and regardless of where she was. She felt I would never invade her privacy no matter how curious I was.

What do you think the chances of me reading that letter were after she said that? Zero.

**Expectations are powerful things.**

Another problem created by incorrect perceptions is that very often good people have to change jobs to get ahead.

The problem is that they are perceived by management as having one set of capabilities. Of having limitations that they may not even have. Because of this they are not given a chance to accomplish more. To be more involved. To be heard and make a greater impact.

As a result, they often have to change companies to move ahead. Many go to companies who can see their potential and who are not blinded by preconceived notions regarding their capabilities or limitations that may not even be remotely accurate.

Others will strike out and start their own business and the company may find not only have they lost an excellent employee, but now they have a new competitor. A lot of top talent is lost this way. Don't you be guilty of this. Don't let your perception pigeonhole your people.

Don't force them to leave your company. Think of the time, effort, and cost of training them. Think of the investment you have in each employee.

Think of the time, cost, and risk you will be faced with when you have to hire a replacement.

**Your people are often much more capable than you probably give them credit for. Start seeing their potential and start helping them develop it.**

**Don't let your perception of their capabilities and limitations blind you to the reality of their potential.**

As I have indicated people also live down to the expectations of others. Because of this each of us has a responsibility to create expectations for others to live up to. This is a particularly important responsibility of management and parents.

**In fact, this is a key trait that separates leaders from managers.**
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

"There are two ways of exerting one's strength: one is pushing down, the other is pulling up."

*Booker T. Washington*

Let me tell you a story to help make my point. I was once invited to attend the high school graduation party of a young man who was a friend of one of my daughters. Up until this time I had not had the opportunity to meet the young man's mother and step father.

Like many high school graduation parties this was an informal backyard party. On this particular day it was windy and overcast.

In an effort to provide some shelter in the event that it started to rain a tarp had been attached to a portion of the roof and rigged up to be held by a couple of poles.

The tarp extended about 12 feet away from the house into the yard. It looked like a pretty good job was done considering the makeshift nature of the project.

Shortly after I arrived the wind started picking up quite a bit. It wasn't long before the wind got so strong that one side of the tarp tore off from the roof.

As the loose corner of the tarp flapped in the wind the young man's step-father started to chastise the young man in front of the young man's guests and relatives. He was intentionally very loud.

He bellowed out how stupid the young man was and what a terrible job he had done in putting up the tarp. (It turns out the step-father had not helped put it up. He was too busy testing out the tap on the keg of beer.)

The step-father called him "brain dead" and "Mr. Lazy".

After each insult he proudly looked around at the people in attendance and bellowed out in laughter. Clearly in his mind he was building himself up in the eyes of the guests by tearing down the young man.

As the tarp continued to flap in the wind he did not get off his ass to fix the problem nor to help the young man correct the problem.

The young man climbed up on the roof, in the wind, in front of his guests and set about to correct the problem. To anchor the tarp to the roof the young man screwed 3 screws into the roof. It worked perfectly.

When the step-father saw how the young man had fixed the problem he started screaming about what an idiot the young man was and how now he was going to have holes in his roof.
What do you think this did to this young man's self-esteem? It destroyed it. His step-father beat him down. He felt that he was made more important, more powerful, and more significant by verbally beating this young man down.

His job as a parent was to infuse confidence in this child. To build up his self-esteem and self-confidence.

The world outside will beat him down enough. His job was to make his step-son stronger.

His job was to help this young man see the potential he had, to help him develop it, to tell him all he was capable of accomplishing, to set expectations for the young man to strive for.

We are all fraught with insecurities at times in our life. Being a teenager going out into the real world is a scary time. What this young man needed was encouragement, what he got was abuse.

As managers it is our job to build up others. Just like a parent's job. To make them more capable. To help them see and realize the vast potential they have within themselves.

**Leaders motivate and build. Shepherds merely keep the flock in line.**

We won't even talk about the damage done by despicable people like this step-father even though I have met managers just like this.

Managers who manage through fear and intimidation. Managers who place blame and take credit. Managers who tear down rather than build up.

We won't talk about this type of manager in this book. If you were this type of manager you would not be reading this book.

**Which will you be? A leader or a shepherd?**

*"Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you too can become great."*

*Mark Twain*

You become a leader by helping others see the potential they have. By helping others become better. By doing so you will be building better relationships, a better department, fierce loyalty, and creating support for your current and future efforts.

**For those of you who are not yet managers but hope to be in the future, these words of advice apply to you as well.**
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

You don't need to be a manager to help others see the potential they have and to set expectations for them to live up to. You don't have to have a title to be a leader.

When you help others become better you are helping to bring the best out in others.

Leaders bring out the best in others. Leaders are able to help people see and realize the potential they have within themselves.

Leaders make people better by their actions, words, and deeds.

Employees strive to live up to the expectations of those leaders.

You become a leader by proving you are a leader not by being appointed one.

Once you have proven you are a leader how long do you think it will be before you are appointed one? Who do you think your co-workers will support?

Who do you think they will work hard for? Who do you think will have their loyalty?

The person who helps them to become better or the person who does not even see the potential they have?

The common person or the uncommon person who helps others pursue excellence?
Chapter 37. The grass is often greenest in your own yard.

"Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed up in overalls and looks like work."

Thomas Edison

Dr. Russell Conwell, the founder of Temple University, used to tell a story about a man who owned a farm in Africa. According to Dr. Conwell, the man owned acres of farmland. He owned this farm around the time that diamonds were being discovered throughout the continent. He got diamond fever, sold his farm, and spent the rest of his life looking for diamonds. Diamonds that he never found.

While the former farmer wasted his life looking for diamonds throughout the African continent the man who had bought his farm went about his work every day. One day while crossing a stream on his farm he saw a sparkling stone on the bottom of the creek bed. He picked up the stone and brought it back to the farm where it sat on his mantle as an ornament.

One day, months later, a geologist happened to be visiting the farmer. When he saw the stone he asked the farmer if he knew what the stone was. The farmer told the geologist that it was merely a block of crystal and that his stream contained many such stones, although most were much smaller.

As you might expect, the farmer had no idea he had the largest diamond ever discovered sitting on his fireplace mantle. The farmer owned one of the richest diamond finds in history. The man who had owned the farm and sought his fame and fortune elsewhere died a poor man.

The moral of this story is that the opportunity you are seeking may be best found right at the company you are working for now. It is up to you to develop the opportunity.

"Natural talent, intelligence, a wonderful education—none of these guarantees success. Worldly success depends on pleasing others. No one is going to win fame, recognition, or advancement just because he or she thinks it's deserved. Someone else has to think so too."

John Luther

It is up to you to improve yourself so that you will be given the opportunity. It is up to you to improve your value to the company so the door of opportunity will open for you. You must earn the opportunity. It will not, and should not, just be given to you because you want it or think you deserve it.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

If, at first, it appears that the opportunity you are seeking is not with your company, look around. The opportunity you seek may be with the company after all, it may merely be in another department or division within the company.

It is up to you to determine what the opportunity is that you are seeking and to develop the skills and capabilities you need to reach your objectives.

It is up to you to help your company or your organization become the best it can be so that it can grow and thereby create the income and advancement opportunities you seek.

"People who are failures take credit for their successes, but they blame their problems on bad luck, other people or circumstances beyond their control. Successful men and women have a strong sense of internal accountability, which extends to their work and to all their relationships. Failures try to evade accountability at every turn."

Brian Tracy

Things will often look greener elsewhere when you are looking for the easiest path to the door of opportunity you are seeking.

But very often the best opportunity is right where you are now. You may simply not be seeing it because you are too busy looking elsewhere for the easier path.

The easier path that may exist only in your mind.
Chapter 38. There is a problem.

"Don't find a fault. Find a remedy."

Henry Ford

Pointing out problems is easy. Anybody can do it and most do. Defy mediocrity by developing solutions.

If you bring up problems, make sure you are also developing and offering solutions.

Problems are easy to find. Bitching and moaning is easy. It takes no intelligence. It takes little effort. It accomplishes nothing but making others dread seeing you coming. It makes your boss wish he or she never hired you.

How favorable would you view a boss, employee, or co-worker who did nothing but whine, complain, and bring problems to your attention all day? As someone who deals with far too many people like this each day, I can assure you that you would not be very favorably inclined toward these people.

You would much prefer people who solve problems, people who stop a problem from ever reaching your desk, and people who offer solutions to problems along with the presentation of the problem.

These are the type of people that upper management and ownership seeks.

"The best way to escape from a problem is to solve it."

Brendan Francis

Stop whining about problems and do something about them.

Has whining about anything solved any problem you have ever had since you were older than 2 or 3? Even then if you got want you wanted it was only because your parents were sick of hearing you and wanted to shut you up.

It does not work this way in the employment arena!

In fact, even as a child it did not always work, did it? More often than not your whining was rewarded with a swat on your backside. In the working world it might get you rewarded with the company door hitting you on the way out.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Has it ever produced a solution? You are wasting valuable time and resources.

"Peak performers concentrate on solving problems rather than placing blame for them."

Charles Garfield

No one, and I mean no one, wants to deal with an employee who points out every problem over and over without ever offering any suggestions for resolution.

If you want to defy mediocrity start solving problems.

You are far better off being known as a problem solver than you are being known as a whiner and complainer. A problem solver is a rare and extremely valuable person to have on staff. A whiner and complainer simply becomes another problem.

You were hired to help solve problems, not become one by pointing out every problem that you can find.

Stop dwelling on the problems and start focusing on the solutions.

A good example is weekly meetings with various people in the company. All time is spent talking about problems.

The problems never seem to end. Constant review of them severely hurts morale. It makes them seem larger than they are. They can appear overwhelming.

Spending all your time talking about your problems also takes away from the time you could, and should, be using to find solutions to those problems.

"Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must first be overcome."

J.R. Simplot

Don't be afraid to try things and take a risk in your quest to solve the problem. Speak up with your ideas for a resolution. If you analyze the problem looking for the perfect, risk free, guaranteed solution you will never even attempt a solution. You will never find it.

Remember, Edison failed over 11,000 times before he created a light bulb that worked. If he had waited to find the perfect solution to his problem, or had spent all his time speaking of his problems and failed attempts, we might all be living in the dark.
"A failed attempt is not a failure. It is a teacher."

Derrick W. Welch

Failure merely teaches you what won't work. It may teach you what might work or point the way to other ideas and possible solutions. It may have taught you that you have found part of the answer.

"Executives who get there and stay suggest solutions when they present the problems."

Malcolm S. Forbes

Identifying problems only is a trademark of mediocrity. Finding resolutions to the problem and thereby eliminating the problem is yet one more way mediocrity is defeated and excellence is embraced.
Chapter 39. Why were you hired anyway? What is your real job?

"Profit is a must. There can be no security for any employee in any business that doesn't make money. There can be no growth for that business. There can be no opportunity for the individual to achieve his personal ambitions unless his company makes money."

Duncan C. Menzies

Understand from day one and every day after that, that you are on staff to produce profits, not products or services. Products and services are merely the vehicles used to accomplish the goal of profits.

For those of you in the public sector or in a non-profit organization, you were hired to improve productivity and service and the same comments apply but for you folks increased productivity and improved service is the objective.

Anything that is undertaken that does not directly, or indirectly, produce profits (or improve productivity) should be questioned. Anything that has the potential to increase profits and productivity should be suggested and, if possible, attempted.

The more you can impact the bottom line of your employer, the more valuable you will be. The most important resource in any company is its people.

They cannot succeed without your maximum effort. This is why you were hired. The company felt you had the skills and talent to help them accomplish their objective. You are a piece of the overall puzzle. People often forget about this.

"Whoever admits that he is too busy to improve his methods has acknowledged himself to be at the end of his rope. And that is always the saddest predicament which anyone can get into."

J. Ogden Armour

Think before you act and ask the questions. Don't be a robot. Think about what you are doing and why. Think about how you can do it better and help others do the same. Think about how you can improve quality.

Think about how you can improve productivity. Think about how you can cut costs without sacrificing quality. Think about how you can eliminate steps and redundancy without sacrificing quality.

Think about what you do and how you are going to do it before you do it.
Always remember your real value to the company lies in your ability to help them increase profits and/or productivity.

Those in pursuit of improvement, those pursuing excellence think before they act and act accordingly.

Those who embrace mediocrity merely continue doing things the way they have always been done. They continue functioning as robots mindlessly taking the same path they have always taken.

The path of mediocrity is a well trodden path. The path taken by most always is.

Which will you take?
Chapter 40. The domino effect.

"It is not only what we do, but also what we do not do, for which we are accountable."

Moliere

Did you ever play dominos as a child? If you did, you know that one of the most enjoyable things to do with those spotted wooden blocks was not to play the game of dominos, but to stand them up on their ends, one after another, and then to knock the first one over. When you knocked the first one over it, in turn, fell on the second one, which, in turn, fell on the third one, which, in turn, fell on the fourth one, and this sequence continued until the last domino in line fell over.

The primary action you took was to knock over the first block. The secondary result was that you knocked all the others over as well. Your action of knocking over one caused a series of secondary actions.

I call this the domino effect.

It is the same way in life. Every action you take in life produces a number of secondary results beyond the primary result you see. In every area of life this is true.

If your actions are positive, you will realize many positive secondary benefits as a direct or indirect result of your primary action. The same thing is true on the job and the same thing is true for inaction and negative actions.

For example, if you are a manager and you have an employee who comes in late every day, his actions will cause a reaction on your part.

If your primary action is to take no action, the primary result will be that the problem will continue.

The secondary results are that you may have a morale problem among other employees who resent the fact that this employee is allowed to come in late all the time. You may see others begin to follow the example set by this employee.

Why not? After all since this employee is allowed to come in later every day why can't the other employees?

Remember the mind-set of mediocrity, the mind-set of many, follow the negative example they see set by others. They do not set the example. They constantly look for what they can get and get away with.
At the very least you will have a problem with your productivity since this person cannot be counted on. A problem that will get much worse if others follow suit.

You may face a discrimination suit if you discipline another employee for the same attendance problems when you did nothing about the problem employee. You see, your inactions also produce many results beyond the primary one.

Now, if you had taken action against this employee and your primary action was to terminate him, you have also caused a number of secondary results. You now may need to hire a new employee or, at the very least, reassign his job duties.

You will have increased training costs as the new person must be trained to do the new job. You may suffer a temporary reduction in productivity. You may face higher unemployment rates as your former employee may file for unemployment and get it despite your objections.

On the positive side you may see improved attendance and productivity as you have now sent a message to other employees.

You see the effects of your primary actions ripple out well beyond the primary and most visible result. A domino effect is created.

"Everything you do, or do not do, has an effect, positive or negative, on someone or something else."

Derrick W. Welch

If your productivity goes up more product is pushed through and operational costs are lowered. This means increased profits. Increased profits may mean the company can increase wages or provide better benefits. It may mean the company can sell its goods and services for lower prices thereby increasing sales and creating a self-perpetuating cycle of lower costs and increased profits due to economies of scale.

It may mean the company can invest in product development and test new markets thereby opening up the possibility of increased market share and sales.

If you improve quality, you will produce fewer unacceptable products or services. This will reduce costs and improve productivity since redoes are lowered. It could also result in an improved perception among your customers regarding the quality of your company's products and services.

This could lead to an ability to charge higher prices due to the customer's perceived value of your products and services being higher. This, again, can lead to increased profitability and increased market share.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Increased profitability can allow your company to spend more on developing new products and opening new markets. This could lead to even higher profits which could lead to higher wages, improved working conditions, better benefits, and more advancement opportunities.

All of these can lead to increased income and opportunities for you!

Your efforts to increase quantity and quality will make your co-worker's jobs much easier.

This will result in improved relations between you and your co-workers as well as between your department and other departments.

This improves morale and increases respect between you and those you work with and for.

Compare this to the domino effect created when you stay out sick when you could have worked. Or when you constantly come in late or do shoddy work. What do you think will happen?

Let me give you a brief overview of the negative side of the domino effect.

Your co-workers will resent you and will not support your efforts or aspirations in any way. Your boss might start thinking of ways to replace you, not to promote you.

The costs associated with your efforts will increase and this will cause profits to decrease. In the extreme case sales could decrease due to higher prices needed to restore profits. This could result in layoffs that could affect you and your co-workers.

If your company absorbs the higher costs instead of increasing prices to compensate for your poor efforts, this will result in lower profits which means lower, or perhaps even no, raises. It could mean employment cutbacks and wage freezes.

It could hinder your company's ability to develop new products and services as well as open new markets or expand existing markets. This would cost them market share.

The cycle of positive effects or negative effects resulting from your actions or inactions is far-reaching. Never underestimate the effect your actions and inactions have.

Let me give you another example. Think about what happens when a salesperson turns an order in that is not clearly written up and does not have complete processing instructions.

When the order comes in for processing a number of things could happen, all of which demonstrate a negative domino effect.

First, the order entry people can reject the order and send it back to the salesperson for clarification. This delays processing of the order which negatively affects customer service. It also costs money since time had to be taken to review the order, decide to return it, actually return it, and then it must be redone and resubmitted by the salesperson.
Another option would be for the home office folks to call the salesperson and seek clarification. This takes time and time costs money.

Furthermore, in both of these cases the customer may need to be contacted again to get the needed information. This could shake the customer's confidence in both the company and the salesperson.

Another option would be for the home office to contact the customer to secure the needed clarification. The negative effects that I pointed out above apply here as well.

Perhaps the home office guesses at what the missing or unclear information is and processes the order based on that. When they do this, they are perpetuating the negative side of the domino effect. They may assume wrong and process the order incorrectly. This would mean they have wasted time and money to deliver an incorrect product.

The customer will refuse to pay for the product and could cancel the original order. Even if they do not cancel the order it now must be redone, thereby costing the company money and lost productivity.

These are just some of the many different negative things that can happen all as a result of the salesperson not doing his or her job properly. The domino effect works both ways.

Yes, many times the secondary results of your positive primary action will be small and the results apparently not very significant. But this is what defying mediocrity is all about.

You are realizing a primary gain and, by doing so, you are enjoying many secondary benefits that improve you and your company in many other ways.

"In a balanced organization, working toward a common objective, there is success."

T.L. Scrutton

If you and all your co-workers embrace a program of ongoing improvement, you are embracing a way of doing business that extends well beyond simply saving money and increasing profits. You are creating a focus for your company.

You are creating an objective for every single person in your organization. You are creating a culture for your organization. You are creating an internal mission statement that will guide the actions of all who are in your organization. You are instituting an evolutionary program designed to embark on a never-ending journey of improvement.

You are seeking to improve every area of your operation. From how you produce and deliver products and services to how you purchase and inventory products.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

From how you sell to how you service, you are constantly seeking ways to do it better, faster, and at a lower cost.

You have a common goal with your company.

You are bringing individual objectives in line with corporate objectives.

If you follow the advice I am giving you in this book, you will see stunning improvements in your morale and the morale of your co-workers. This will lead to improved productivity, improved attendance, better service, increased quality, and a greater commitment from all people in every area of the company.

In the battle to defy mediocrity the domino effect can be one of your best weapons.
Chapter 41. What is your style? It can make a huge difference!

"Men acquire a particular quality by constantly acting in a particular way."

Aristotle

There are two basic types of employees and managers. One is a proactive employee and the other is a reactive employee. There is, of course, a third type of employee or manager that I have seen all too frequently and that is the person who does nothing and hopes that the problem takes care of itself and goes away or that someone else will resolve the problem.

These are most often procrastinators or people incapable of making a decision. I call this type of employee the hemorrhoidal employee. They just sit on the problem and hope it goes away.

I know that this is not the type of person that you are, otherwise you would not be reading this book. Therefore, let's move back to our discussion about proactive and reactive employees and managers.

To simplify my writing, I will focus in on managers, but rest assured I am speaking of both managers and employees. I will use the term manager simply to avoid the redundancy of saying manager or employee repeatedly.

In my opinion, the majority of managers at all levels are reactive. The reactive manager manages, as the word indicates, by reacting to a situation or set of circumstances that has developed.

Costs are high, so they react by trying to determine how to lower those costs. Returned products are increasing in number, so they look for ways to improve quality. Bills are late in going out, so they seek ways to speed up the billing process.

Past due accounts are paying even slower, so the reactive manager seeks out ways to speed up collections and get those past due bills in.

Absenteism is high, so the reactive manager takes actions to stem this problem. Complaints are coming in more frequently, so the reactive manager takes steps to improve customer service.

"It is never very clever to solve problems. It is far cleverer not to have them."

E.F. Shumacher
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

In each and every case they have reacted to a problem. This is the problem. They have let the problem come into existence. They must now deal with the problem. Occasionally the reactive manager will act in a proactive manner, but this is much more infrequent.

The proactive manager is a manager who is often taken for granted. You see, the goal of the proactive manager is to think short and long term.

He thinks today about tomorrow. His goal is to prevent problems from ever coming into existence.

Of course, he must also manage as needed in a reactive style, usually addressing problems created by others, but, unlike the reactive manager, the proactive manager does this much less frequently since he has prevented so many problems from ever coming into existence.

**The proactive manager is a rare and invaluable talent.**

Unfortunately, the very strengths of the proactive manager are what often leads him or her to be so unappreciated. By thinking short and long term, by planning ahead with foresight and decisiveness, the proactive manager never has to deal with many of the problems that the reactive manager must contend with.

The illusion, of course, is that the reactive manager is busier and therefore a more valuable manager.

After all, look at all the problems he deals with every day. Look at all the fires he must put out. His desk is always a mess, covered with problems and projects.

On the other hand, how important can the proactive manager be? He does not look that busy. His desk is normally clear and well organized. He does not put out fires and handle problems all day long. He is often taken for granted and under appreciated.

His department or division runs so much smoother than all the others it almost seems to run itself. Too good for his own good? Perhaps.

But which way would you rather have your company, division, or department run? Who would you rather work with or for?

"The best preparation for tomorrow is to do today's work superbly well."

*Sir William Osler*

By thinking both short and long term, the proactive manager improves every area he is responsible for. He thinks of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.
He learns from yesterday's mistakes and missed opportunities to take steps to insure that they will not occur again in the future. When he must manage in a reactive manner he does so as quickly as possible considering the circumstances and does so in a decisive manner.

He does not let the embers smolder. He puts the fire out.

He capitalizes on strengths while working to improve weaknesses in every area. He works to make sure it is done right the first time and, by doing so, does not have to worry about how to fix it or redo it when a problem comes up.

By being proactive, he helps his company in numerous ways that are never seen.

After all, you can see a correction to a problem but it is very difficult to see the problems that were prevented from ever occurring as a result of steps taken by the proactive manager weeks, months, or even years before.

An in-depth discussion of these styles will be the subject of another book but, in short, the proactive manager saves money, time, and frustration.

The exact same managerial philosophy used by the proactive manager will serve you best in your quest to pursue excellence and defy mediocrity.

But it will be up to you to think in a preventive or proactive manner in conjunction with every area of operations that you are responsible for. It will be up to you to foster this style and attitude in others.

Control your quality at the beginning and you will have fewer rejects, reduced service demands, increased productivity, and an improved reputation for quality. This means lower costs and higher selling prices. This means increased profits.

Hire right to begin with and you will have more loyal and productive employees. This means you will turn out better quality, lower cost work. This means less time hiring and training new employees. This means increased productivity, higher profits and better morale.

No matter what area of your business or department we are talking about, do it right the first time and you won't find yourself having to function in a reactive style as often in the future. Think and act with an eye to both today and tomorrow.

If you take steps at the beginning to prevent problems or costs in the future, you will have no need to worry about the problem later on.

Think about a problem employee. If the problem employee is ignored by management the problem continues.
That is bad enough but don't forget the domino effect. Others mirror the problem. They begin to disrespect you. Morale declines. Your leadership is questioned. You lose credibility. On and on it goes.

But if you address the problem opposite results occur. You set the example. You make a point. Yes, you have been reactive to the point that you reacted to the problem employee but you are also being proactive in that you will prevent future occurrences of this same problem since those around you and under you will know what to expect. You have been pro-active by setting a standard, by establishing an expectation for others to live up to.

In cases like this the proactive step would have been to hire right and avoid the problem altogether. However, no matter how good you are at hiring sometimes an employee simply does not live up to your expectations.

Therefore, you must be reactive and deal with the problem rapidly and aggressively to create a proactive stance designed to eliminate future problems of the same type.

Let me give you a few more examples of what I am talking about, and, since taking a proactive approach is so important throughout the company, let me use some examples of proactive corporate strategies.

Taking the time to hire right will save the company personnel problems and costs.

If they hire without taking the time to see enough people to enable them to hire the best person they can afford and if they hire without thoroughly checking out the person they are considering, it could be a very costly mistake.

Morale problems could result. Reduced productivity and/or quality could occur as a result of a poor hiring decision that could have been avoided. Increased sick time and workers' compensation costs could result if a person was hired with a poor or questionable history in these areas.

Higher unemployment costs could also result if the company was forced to, and was able to, correct the hiring mistake.

This does not even consider the tremendous waste of time spent training an employee who did not work out and should not have been hired and the cost of hiring and training a new employee to replace this one. Nor does it consider the potential wrongful termination suit that could come in this suit happy society we live in.

Look at machinery. If someone purchases the lowest cost piece of equipment they can to resolve an immediate need, they are thinking only of the short term.

In the long term however, consumable costs could be much higher than they would have been with a higher priced alternative product. The lower cost machine may break down more often and, since it has a poor warranty, the company could be paying higher service costs.
Don't forget the lost time which lowers productivity and hinders the company's ability to service their customers.

By doing their homework they might have found out that the higher cost machine had a much better maintenance record and lower operating costs and, as a result, in the long run would have saved money, time, and frustration.

They could have prevented numerous related problems by thinking about and analyzing both the short term and long term results of their actions and decisions.

What about lease rates for a facility? By properly negotiating a lease with an eye on both today and tomorrow the company could save significant amounts of money.

A proactive manager would consider the rate today and build in controls to contain the rate each and every year of the lease. They would also include options for extensions as well as escape clauses.

The proactive manager would dictate that all potential problem clauses are removed or negated. They do not want to deal with the cost or expense 5 years down the road.

I once had a very high spirited Dalmatian named Niki. When I got Niki I took a proactive action by having my yard fenced in. Had I been reactive I might have found myself chasing her all over the neighborhood and might have even lost her. It was much easier to never let her out than it would have been to try and get her back home.

I simply took steps to make sure I never have to deal with the problem.

Take a proactive attitude in everything you do.

It will be much easier and less costly to prevent the problem from ever coming into existence.

Think of this as a form of preventive maintenance for every thing you do.

Think. Plan ahead. Be proactive and not just reactive.
Chapter 42. Thinking. The ability that sets us apart from robots.

"Creativity can solve almost any problem. The creative act, the defeat of habit by originality, overcomes everything."

George Lois

We, you and I, are not robots. We can think. This ability is what sets us apart from robots. If we don't use this ability every day to do the best job we can, our employers are better off with robots. They never call in sick. They never take a break. They never take a vacation. They need no benefits. They will work 24 hours a day and never get paid a penny.

"One machine can do the work of fifty ordinary men. No machine can do the work of one extraordinary man."

Elbert Hubbard

They can do all these things better than you and I. But they can't think.

They can't question. They can't learn from their mistakes and improve.

They can't engage in self-assessment.

They do not have the greatest resource known to man.

You have it.

You own it free and clear. Your mind is your greatest asset.

To become the best you can become all you need to do is use it.

To find a better way to do anything all you need to do is put that magnificent thinking machine to use.

We have the one thing capable of solving every problem we have. We have the key to our quest to be the best we can. The problem is we simply do not use it enough. We function too much as robots.

The late great Earl Nightingale, much like Abraham Lincoln, would often use a short story to make his point. One of his stories comes to mind as an effective way to demonstrate the importance of asking questions and thinking creatively.
According to the story, many years ago when a person who owed money could be thrown into jail, a merchant in London had the misfortune to owe a huge sum of money to a mean moneylender.

The moneylender, who was old and ugly, fancied the merchant's beautiful young daughter and he proposed a bargain.

He said he would cancel the merchant's debt if he could have the girl instead.

Well, both the merchant and the daughter were horrified at this suggestion so the cunning moneylender proposed that they let providence decide the matter.

He told them that he would put a black pebble and a white pebble into an empty bag and that the girl would have to pick out one of the pebbles.

If she chose the black pebble, she would become his wife and her father's debt would be canceled. If she chose the white pebble, she would stay with her father and the debt would still be canceled. But if she refused to pick a pebble, her father would be thrown in jail and she would starve.

Well, reluctantly the merchant agreed. They were on a pebble strewn path in the merchant’s garden at the time as they talked. The moneylender stooped down to pick up the two pebbles.

As he did, the girl, sharp-eyed with fright, noticed that he picked up two black pebbles and put them into the money bag.

He wasn't taking any chances. He then asked the girl to decide her fate and that of her father.

Now I will interrupt this story to ask you, what would you have advised the girl to do?

The choices seem bleak. If you advise her to take a pebble to save her father she must sacrifice herself. If you advise her to refuse to take a pebble and to expose the moneylender as a cheat, her father goes to jail.

What would you advise her to do? Is there any way she can save both herself and her father?

If there was ever a time that showed the importance of creative thinking and innovation, this was certainly it.

I will tell you what she did on the next page.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Well, the girl reached into the moneybag to pick a pebble. Without looking at it, she fumbled it and let it fall to the path where it became lost among all the others. "How clumsy of me," she said. "But don't worry, you'll be able to tell the color of the one I took by the color of the one remaining."

Since the remaining pebble was, of course, black, it had to be assumed that she had taken the white pebble. Since the moneylender could not dare to admit his dishonesty, the father's debt was forgiven and the girl remained with her father.

"Any activity becomes creative when the doer cares about doing it right, or better."

John Updike

Creative thinking, innovative approaches to problem solving, and the ability to adapt to ever-changing circumstances can be the sole reason a business survives. All too many think that these terms and functions apply only to areas like marketing, advertising, packaging, and new product development.

They are wrong.

"Habit and routine have an unbelievable power to waste and destroy."

Henri De Lubac

Creativity and innovation must be demonstrated throughout all levels of a company. These qualities should be fostered by management in employees. These functions must be undertaken by someone within an organization, if that organization is to survive and grow.

That someone should be you. You must constantly be asking the questions and seeking the answers. You can make a difference. A big difference.

"You possess the greatest power ever created and it sits right between your two ears. You own it, free and clear. To solve all your problems, to reach all your goals, all you need to do is put it to work."

Derrick W. Welch

It sits and waits for you to use it.
Chapter 43. You've got to have faith.

"Most battles in life are won or lost in your mind long before they are ever actually fought."

Derrick W. Welch

You have got to have faith in yourself and your ability to do the job better. Think about how much faith those fine people that hired you had in you when they did hire you. They checked you out and made a decision to hire you based on many factors, but the most important factor was that they felt you could do the job and do it well.

These men and women from human resources and management made a decision based on their faith in your ability to be a valuable asset to the company. They felt you would help make the organization better. That you would add value.

They took a chance with you. They took a chance that you would make them look good. Along with this came the chance you would make them look bad. If you did not work out, it would be a negative reflection on them that they made a bad decision in hiring you.

"Men habitually use only a small part of the powers which they possess and which they might use under appropriate circumstances."

William James

These people had faith in you and it is incumbent on you to live up to the expectations they had when they hired you.

Don't ever doubt you can do the job and do it very well. The people who hired you are professionals. In their opinion you can do the job. Strive to prove them right, to justify their faith in you.

"Impossible is a word to be found only in the dictionary of fools."

Napoleon Bonaparte

Have faith in your own abilities and in the abilities of others to recognize and reward your abilities and efforts. It starts with you. It always does. How you think about your capabilities is most important.

Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

"Whether you think you can or think you can't, you are right."

*Henry Ford*

Most of us are far more capable than we allow ourselves to think we are. We all have a tendency to think of why we can't succeed. Of why we will fail. Of why something won't work. We fear failure.

We worry about the ridicule of others. We allow our fears to prevent us from even trying.

Instead we spend our time coming up with numerous reasons why we can't or shouldn't. These types of excuses and self-justifications are always easy to find.

"Some men have thousands of reasons why they cannot do what they want to, when all they need is one reason why they can."

*Willis R. Whitney*

We listen to others who give us reasons we grab onto and hold onto for dear life. Reasons why we can't or shouldn't even try.

Reasons like "don't bother the company doesn't care", "when others do we will", "they are not paying you to do that".

Mediocrity always has many self-serving reasons why you can't or shouldn't do the things you can to improve yourself and your company.

"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

*Eleanor Roosevelt*

We see the obstacles and not the opportunities. We hold ourselves back. We allow self-doubt to replace self-confidence. We tell ourselves why we can't and shouldn't and, by doing so, justify not even trying. This causes us to fail without even giving ourselves the opportunity to succeed.

I guarantee you are far more capable than you think you are. Your capabilities are far greater than you believe they are. You are far more capable than many others think.
"Few men during their lifetime come anywhere near exhausting the resources dwelling within them. There are deep wells of strength that are never used."

Admiral Richard E. Byrd

You've got to test yourself. You've got to push yourself. It is the only way to determine what your real limitations are, what you are truly capable of.

Any other way you are putting self-imposed limitations on yourself or you are letting others decide your limits and capabilities for you.

You don't agree with me? Then let me ask you, who has determined your limitations?

Who has determined all these things you can't do, that you are not capable of doing? Who has determined that others are more capable and that you have greater limitations?

"Most of your self-limiting beliefs are not true at all. They are based on negative information that you have taken in and accepted as true. Once you have accepted it as true, your belief makes it a fact for you."

Brian Tracy

What are these perceived limitations based on? Have you merely decided they exist? If so, you are cheating yourself. Have others decided this and you have accepted these limitations?

Shame on you.

This is disgraceful. You are letting others decide your future and your life.

Are these limitations self-imposed in your mind based on failures? Come on, you know failures are merely teachers, merely stepping stones on the path to success. They are nothing more than a brick in the foundation of success.

If you are basing your self-imposed limitations on failures, or letting others do the same, you are embracing mediocrity because you will never become better, you will never grow, and you will never even begin to approach your true capabilities.

How could you since you won't even let yourself try?
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

"The potential for who we are and what we could be is so vast that we have not begun to scratch the surface."

Chin-Ning Chu

We let our lack of self-confidence, our lack of self-esteem, our lack of faith, our fears, convince us that others, not we, are capable of doing the job, getting the promotion, improving quality, increasing productivity, increasing our impact and value to the company. We think somehow others are preordained.

I guess what I would like to know is how do you see these invisible signs, the unseen indicators that point out who is and who is not preordained to be able to do this or get that. I say invisible because they must be invisible as I have never seen them.

"If you hear a voice within you saying "You are not a painter," then by all means paint... and that voice will be silenced."

Vincent Van Gogh

I have never seen where it was written that they can and you can't. That they have what it takes and you don't. Have you? Or is this just something in your mind. Something you have decided. Something you use to justify your own shortcomings or lack of effort.

Does somebody walk around with a sign saying they are the chosen one? Is somebody going around selecting people and telling all who will listen that person is the chosen one? That is the person who can do the job, that is the person who can be promoted, that is the person who will accomplish much more than you?

"Success doesn't come from the way you think it does, it comes from the way you think."

Robert Schuller

Of course not. The difference is in what is in their minds.

They think they can so they do. They convince themselves they have the talent and capabilities so they have them. They see what they need to gain to qualify for the accomplishment and they make the effort to get it. Whether it is more education, more training, better communication skills, more effective leadership skills or whatever it is.

Whatever it is they feel they need to place themselves in a position to accomplish the goals they commit to getting.
Do you?

In almost every case these people are not in the positions they have because of luck, or connections, or anything else.

They are in them because of hard work, dedication, creative thinking and commitment. All the things it takes to reach the level they have obtained.

"Self-doubts that grow unchallenged grow stronger. Challenge them and you grow stronger."

Price Pritchett

Because they have faith in themselves. Because they use the power of self-assessment. Because they ignore the negative attitudes that others have.

Self-serving negative attitudes that allow some to feel justified in doing far less than they could or should.

Attitudes that prevent you from ever accomplishing all you could and should.

"We may go to the moon, but the greatest distance we have to cover still lies within us."

Charles de Gaulle

To think otherwise is merely a way to justify you not accomplishing what you should or could.

You kid yourself by telling yourself and others how they got the job or the raise or the promotion --- they knew someone --- they are lucky.

"Fear defeats more people than any other thing in the world."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

You have got to have faith in yourself, your talents, and your abilities. Enough faith to allow you to leave your comfort zone. To extend yourself. To think of how to improve yourself, to do what you do better. To stick your toe in the water and test new ideas, new ways of doing things.

Unless you leave the comfort zone you can't grow. You can't become better at what you do. You can't increase your value to the company.
If you can't increase your value to the company you can't advance, your income won't increase, and your responsibilities will stagnate.

You have got to think positively. To step out of your mental comfort zone. To ask "Why not me?", "Why can't I do it?".

If you can't do this you are never going to even begin to approach all you can do.

"Your comfort zone can be an anchor. Anchors have a use. They offer a benefit. They stop the object attached to the anchor from moving forward."

*Derrick W. Welch*

Your comfort zone is that which is familiar to you. It is a safe harbor. Staying in it protects you in your mind from all those fears you have.

But let me be clear here, positive thinking without positive action will get you nowhere, positive thinking, as important as it is and it is very important, will accomplish nothing without positive action.

You can sit in a room all day long thinking "yes I can do it", "yes I will succeed", "yes I can do a better job", "yes I can develop new ideas", "yes I can increase my knowledge", but unless you do something, unless you take positive action, you will get nowhere, you will accomplish nothing.

How could you?

"Accept the challenges, so that you may feel the exhilaration of victory."

*General George S. Patton*

Who will give you anything in life? No one. No one should.

You get what you earn. You must use the power of positive thinking to train your mind to understand that you can do it, you can do more, you are capable of more, but without positive action to accompany your positive thoughts you will get nothing.

**We are most often our own worst enemy.** We hold ourselves back. We prevent ourselves from improving and pursuing excellence.

Have a little faith in yourself. After all, you don't want to let those down who hired you, do you? As importantly, you don't want to let yourself down.
Chapter 44. Go looking for responsibility.

"Do the thing and you shall have the power."

*Emerson*

Most people don't want responsibility. They don't want the pressure of having to make decisions and of having responsibility for results. They may say they do and they may want the money or promotion, but the reality is that they don't want responsibility.

They will hide from responsibility and avoid decisions or, at best, make a decision based on the way the corporate wind may be blowing.

Have you ever seen the old TV show Hogan's Heroes? If you have you will remember Sergeant Schultz. The setting for Hogan's Heroes was American prisoners in a German POW camp during World War II. For those of you who are not familiar with the show it was a sit com.

Sergeant Schultz was a central character in this weekly series. Lovable old Sergeant Schultz did all he could to avoid any level of responsibility. To this end he always claimed to know nothing about anything.

His most memorable line, spoken in almost every episode was "I see nothing, I hear nothing, I know nothing".

He did not want to become involved in anything. From prisoner escapes to visiting brass he wanted to "see nothing, hear nothing, know nothing".

He did not want to be bothered with doing his job. He did not want to do much more than show up for work each day and get by.

Perhaps you know some people like this.

Yes, most people will run from responsibility faster than a cat will run from a dog.

"Success on any major scale requires you to accept responsibility ... In the final analysis, the one quality that all successful people have....is the ability to take on added responsibility."

*Michael Korda*

A person in search of added responsibility will not have to look very far. Much like mediocrity surrounds you, the opportunity to gain added responsibility presents itself at every turn.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Whenever you see the chance to extend yourself, take it. Whenever you see a chance to do more than that which is expected of you, do it.

Whenever you see someone you can help, help them. When you see a deed that others are ignoring, do it.

Don't wait for someone to come to you and give you responsibility.

Take it and prove you can handle it and you will have it.

Taking responsibility will make you more valuable and important. Others will support you and look up to you or look out for you. Both very desirable benefits.

Don't wait for someone else to decide to give it to you.

Look for it, take it, and start controlling your own future.
Chapter 45. I don't know.

"There is no disgrace in not knowing when knowledge does not rest with you; the disgrace is in being unwilling to learn."

_Benedetto Varchi_

"I don't know". For many, these words are terrifying. A big problem is that many are afraid to admit this. Instead, they make assumptions, avoid action, and are unable to make a decision, or make an uninformed decision.

I have seen countless numbers of people who have failed or, at the very least, stalled, in their careers because they were afraid to ask questions and admit they did not know something or needed help. Somehow they felt this made them look stupid, or less than effective, or less than perfect, or inadequate.

"This man must be very ignorant, for he answers every question he is asked."

_Voltaire_

But there is nothing wrong with saying "I don't know".

There is nothing wrong with not knowing or understanding something.

I will never understand this fragility of ego. Isn't it true that we all know nothing until we are taught? Isn't it true that we often need to be told the same things over and over?

No, there is nothing wrong with admitting you do not know something or do not understand something.

Quite the opposite, in fact. However, there is something wrong with not finding out what you need to know. There is something terribly wrong with making assumptions instead of asking for assistance.

"When you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow you do not know it; this is knowledge."

_Confucius_
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

The person in pursuit of improvement, in pursuit of excellence, puts his ego aside and defies mediocrity by seeking the needed clarification, the needed information.

They are not afraid to say "I don't know" or "I don't understand".
Chapter 46. Relentless.

"Only the mediocre are always at their best."

Jean Giraudoux

You must be relentless in your pursuit of improvement. In what you do and how you do it. In how you service your customer, internal and external. In how you perform.

It is not a one shot deal. It is not something you can work at when you think about it or have time. It is not something you can spend a few weeks working on and consider it done.

The pursuit of excellence does not have a finish line.

You will never reach the point where no further improvement is possible. Improvement is always possible. You will never be able to say "I can't become better".

"Aim at perfection in everything, though in most things it is unattainable. However, they who aim at it, and persevere, will come much nearer to it than those whose laziness and despondency make them give it up as unattainable."

Lord Chesterfield

If you are to defy mediocrity, you must work at it every day. You must do the best job you can while constantly thinking of how you can do a better job.

Mediocrity is a powerful adversary. It has many allies. It surrounds you.

To defeat it, to rise above it, you must be relentless in your efforts to do what you do better. Not just for a few days or weeks. Not just before your annual review is coming up. Not just when you think someone is paying attention to what you are doing.

"There's no future in saying it can't be done."

Harvey Mackay

To do the best job you can and to become better at what you do, you must be relentless in your pursuit of improvement.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

"Excellence is not just a word. It is an unwillingness to settle for anything less than your best. It is a refusal to lower your standards. It is a feeling, a passion, a way of life. It is a relentless commitment to constant improvement."

Derrick W. Welch

Words have meanings but far too many people use them, utter them, and throw them out without any concept of what they really mean.

Saying you pursue quality and then doing nothing more than what you always do fools no one and makes you look foolish.

Saying words that sound good, that are the current buzzwords, that may be spoken to impress people without the corresponding actions and commitment is foolish and makes the ones speaking them seem foolish.

I have more respect for someone who is honest about their apathy or complacency than someone who tells me all these proactive positive things they are planning to do and does nothing about them.

It is action that counts. Not words.

You can't just talk about it. You must exemplify it! You must strive for it every day.

"Don't let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do."

John Wooden

But you need to make the most of what you have right now while working to improve your capabilities.

We all need to improve, to get better at what we do and how we do it, but we need to make the best use of the talents, skills, and knowledge we have right now while working to become better.

Myself, I would like to have better communication skills. I would like to be a more proficient writer. I look at some things I have written in the past and I say to myself "who the heck wrote that?". I would like to be a better speaker.

"To be upset over what you don't have is to waste what you do have."

Ken Keyes, Jr.
I aspire to this type of ability. I read the books of others who have far greater writing skills than I do.

But if I had waited until I had skill levels that matched those I sought I may never have written one word. I might never have written my first book or my second book. I am now working on my third book. Hopefully I am becoming better at what I do.

The only way for me to get better was to start with the talents and skills I had. To begin. To make the most of what I had at the time and utilize my power of self-assessment to see where I needed to improve and work on improvement while I went along.

If I waited until I got to the level I want to be at it would merely be giving me an excuse not to make the most of whatever limited talents and capabilities I now have. I would be stopping myself from doing what I could.

Besides, when would I ever know if I had reached the level that I sought?

"It may be all right to be content with what you have; never with what you are."

B.C. Forbes

Don't wait. Start. Now!
Chapter 47. Versatility.

"Always do more than is required of you."

General George S. Patton

You should cross train yourself in as many other areas of the company's operation as you can. This will accomplish a number of things. It will give you more knowledge about your company and customers. Increased knowledge in these areas will allow you to ask more questions and find more ways to improve.

The more you know about how and why things are done, the more opportunity you have to improve the way things are done. The more you can help to improve things the greater your impact is going to be within the organization.

Cross training also enables you to become more skilled and, therefore, a more valuable employee. It demonstrates initiative and commitment.

It will give you a greater understanding and appreciation of job responsibilities between departments and of what other people really do and how they do it.

This will allow you to see how each person and department interacts and how they depend on your efforts and the efforts of others.

This will give your internal customer service efforts a tremendous boost.

The more you can improve internal customer service, the more you will improve productivity, quality, and external customer service. All of which result in lower costs and higher profits.

It will make you more valuable, as you will now be able to step in and help others when they are busy and you are slow.

Furthermore, you will be building support and loyalty among your co-workers as you are now able to effectively step in and help them when they need help.

Everyone appreciates a helping hand.

This will also provide variety to you while serving to give you an inside view of the other departments within the company you may one day wish to work in on a primary basis.

The more you know about the jobs of others the more versatile and valuable you become. I would make it a priority to know your boss's job inside and out.

The more you know about his or her job the more you can help them.
Furthermore, when they have a chance to move up you will have a much better chance to move into their slot. You can also step into their shoes during vacations, absences etc. If they leave you will also have the best shot at filling the position.

Every team places great value on versatility.
Chapter 48. It is your company.

"To defy mediocrity merely do your job as though you yourself owned the company."

Derrick W. Welch

"I am not management." "It's not my company." "I only work here." The mind-set of mediocrity.

The mind-set of excellence says "It is my company", "It is my job", "It is my responsibility".

Start thinking and start acting as though the company is yours and you will start seeing changes in your attitude and effort that you can't even imagine.

It is a powerful change in mind-set. Things you never even used to think about will begin to interest you. Things you never even considered will begin to bother you.

Your commitment will dramatically improve. You will constantly think of how you can do better and become better. Of how you can help others. Of how you can reduce waste. Of how you can improve productivity. Of how you can improve quality.

You will begin to ask questions about things you never even considered before. The types of questions outlined in an earlier chapter.

Ideas for individual improvement, as well as corporate improvement, will suddenly appear in your mind.

You will do more for your career than just about anything else you could ever do.

"The top 3% in every field treat their company as if it belonged to them. They act as if they own the place. When they refer to their company, they use words like "we" and "our" and "my" and "us". The average employee, on the other hand, always refers to the company as if it were something separate and apart from him or her, as if it were just a job, with no other meaning or significance."

Brian Tracy

You do not have to be a manager or supervisor to have responsibility. You do not have to be an owner or an executive to put the company's interests first.

Do your job as though you yourself owned the company and maybe one day you will.
Never forget that unless the company survives you will not have a job. Unless the company prospers it will be unable to help you accomplish your goals.

From reporting theft to answering a ringing phone, from shutting off the lights to keeping your working area safe and clean, you have a responsibility.

A responsibility to do the best you can.

A responsibility to look out for the company's interests as though they were your own.

Acceptance of this responsibility is one more example of how you can defy mediocrity.

"Here's an easy question: If you were an employer and you had two people working for you, one who treated the company as if it belonged to him, and another who treated it as just a job, a place to come from nine to five each day, which one of these two would you be most likely to promote? Which one would you want to invest in? To which of these would you give additional training? For which of the two would you create opportunities for advancement? I think the answer is obvious."

Brian Tracy

As I have told you many times before, if you want the company to look out for your interests, start by looking out for the interests of the company.

Who do you care about most in your life?

Those that care the most for you of course. Those that take an interest in you. Those that help you reach your goals. Those that do things for you.

It is no different in your company.

The voice of mediocrity says "It is not my job". The voice of excellence says "It is my job. It is my company".
Chapter 49. When you get discouraged. We all do!

"Let no feeling of discouragement prey upon you, and in the end you are sure to succeed."

Abraham Lincoln

No matter how good your attitude is, no matter how positive your thinking is, there are going to be times when you get discouraged. This is not bad it is merely human nature. It is inevitable.

You are going to have times when you are upset about something or someone on the job. There are times when problems and pressures at home or in your personal life are going to negatively influence and affect your performance on-the-job.

There are times when self-pity will creep in. It is only natural.

"To be human means to feel inferior."

Alfred Adler

Self-doubt? Of course. We all have it from time to time. Anyone who says otherwise is lying to you.

None of us is immune to these feelings. We all are guilty of them from time to time. Things can overwhelm us at times. Circumstances can seem insurmountable.

Problems seem to be impossible to solve. Things don't seem fair and many times they probably are not fair.

Yes, many times your feelings of discouragement will have a valid foundation. You may be justified in feeling the way you do.

"There are few human emotions as warm, comforting, and enveloping as self-pity. And nothing is more corrosive and destructive. There is only one answer: turn away from it and move on."

Dr. Megan Reik

But at some point, and the sooner the better, you must break out of it.

You must step up and move on.
Never give up.

Never allow yourself to stay defeated or down.

Try to put things in perspective.

Try to understand that as frustrating as things may be, as unfair as they may appear, as insurmountable as problems may seem to be, many would gladly trade places with you.

Many would welcome your situation in life. They would welcome the opportunities you have, the talents you possess, the potential you have within you.

Many who have a far more difficult path in life.

Today, upon a bus, I saw a lovely maid with golden hair,
I envied her, she seemed so gay, and I wished I were as fair.
When suddenly she rose to leave, I saw her hobble down the aisle;
she had one foot, and used a crutch, but as she passed, she had a smile.

Oh, God, forgive me when I whine; I have two feet, the world is mine.

And when I stopped to buy some sweets, the lad who sold them had such charm. I talked with him, he said to me. "It's nice to talk to men like you. You see", he said "I'm, blind."

Oh God, forgive me when I whine, I have two eyes, the world is mine.

Then as I passed along the way, I saw a child with eyes of blue. He stood and watched the others play; it seemed he knew not know what to do. I stopped for a moment; and then I said "Why don't you join the others dear?" He looked ahead without a word and then I knew he could not hear.

Oh, God, forgive me when I whine, I have two ears, the world is mine.

With two feet to take me where I'd go,
With eyes to see the sunsets glow,
With ears to hear what I would know,
I'm blessed indeed.

The world is mine. Oh, God forgive me when I whine.

Author Unknown

I repeated that poem here not to minimize your problems, frustrations, anger, or feelings of discouragement. I understand how at times it seems as though nothing is going right, nothing is going your way.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

How it seems as though anything and everything that can go wrong is going wrong.

I understand how there are times when the problems you face, the obstacles that seemingly stand before you, the failures you have experienced, can seem overwhelming.

I understand how you can become so wrapped up in your own circumstances that the problems of others mean little.

I understand how discouraging these things can be. I only ask that you try to put things in perspective and see that for most of us things could always be far worse.

"Men are not troubled by things themselves, but by their thoughts about them."

Epictetus

You can't allow yourself to be immobilized by these feelings. You can stew in an abyss of negativity and feel like a rat in a maze unable to find your way out or you can study your situation, engage in self-assessment and start taking the steps you need to move in the direction you want to go.

Most do the former. Those that rise above mediocrity do the latter. It won't be easy.

If excellence was easy we would not live in a world filled with mediocrity.

Choose to be uncommon. I ask that you think of the alternative.
Chapter 50. To our dedicated and sometimes underappreciated public servants and the men and women of our military.

"I've given before this group the definition of happiness for the Greeks. I'll define it again: the full use of your powers along the lines of excellence."

John F. Kennedy

I feel very strongly that those of you who have chosen public service or the military as a career have chosen a difficult path. A path that is often paved with potholes and rest stops designed to protect and, in many cases, foster mediocrity.

It will take an exceptional effort to rise above mediocrity and pursue individual excellence for many of you.

Those of you in public service are often a maligned group. Yes, in some cases with very good reason. Some enter public service for the wrong reasons. But in these cases the actions and attitude of a few within the public service sector are tarnishing the efforts and image of the many. The many fine dedicated workers who are responsible for making our great country run and work.

Those of you willing to engage in the battle against mediocrity must rise above those who use the system to avoid the individual pursuit of excellence. You must ignore those doomed to a life on and off the job of mediocrity.

You folks are a favorite target of many. At least until they need help from you folks who have dedicated yourselves to a career serving the public.

You folks have a difficult and often thankless job. You work within a system that often makes it harder to pursue individual excellence. It is often a system that seems to support and encourage mediocrity.

Unions, politics, contracts, and a certain percentage of employees who are merely along for the ride and who hide behind every union rule and every protectionist measure in the contract to avoid doing much of anything.

Wage increases that reward excellence and mediocrity at the same level.

People who pull you down, who want to hold you back, who resent you working harder and smarter. Who embrace and, in fact, fiercely defend the status quo.

Some of you must function each year worrying about the career-ending changes that could come with the next election.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Many of you must be self-motivated to produce more, to do a better job, to interact with an often ungrateful and unappreciative public.

"The reward of a thing well done is to have done it."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

It will take a special effort and fierce personal pride in doing the very best you can. It is up to you to raise the standards, to set your own expectations, to fight through others, to improve morale, to improve productivity. All for the personal results of defeating mediocrity.

I assure you this is a battle you can win. I assure you the rewards of winning this battle will be worth it.

To those brave men and woman who keep our country safe inside and outside of our borders you have my public thanks and undying gratitude. To those of you who make this country work by your efforts at the local and national level you have my appreciation.

To those of you who can rise above a system often built to house and reward mediocrity you have my utmost respect!

"Hold yourself responsible for a higher standard than anybody else expects of you. Never excuse yourself."

Henry Ward Beecher

Those in management also have a difficult task. Often you do not have the same weapons that we in the private sector have.

You may not have the positive motivating tools of raises and promotions to the degree those in the private sector have.

You often do not even have the negative reinforcement tools of disciplinary actions such as warnings and terminations. You are handcuffed by rules, unions, and bureaucracy.

To those of you who are able to overcome these tremendous constraints you have my deepest respect.

You are the type of manager, the type of leader, the type of officer, that all should aspire to become.
Chapter 51. More weapons in your battle plan to defeat mediocrity.

"Most successful men have not achieved their distinction by having some new talent or opportunity presented to them. They have developed the opportunity that was at hand."

Bruce Barton

Mediocrity surrounds you. As an employer, employee, or customer you are face to face with it every day. Every time you deal with someone who could do their job better, much better in most cases, you are dealing with a creature of mediocrity.

But every time you could do your job better and don't, you become a creature of mediocrity.

So many in the ranks of mediocrity and so few in the ranks of excellence. Which do you choose to be in?

I have given you many tools you can use in your pursuit of excellence. Here are a few more.

Always try to help others. The day may come when they help you, including possibly saving your job or supporting your promotion. But don't do it for these reasons. Do it because it is the right thing to do. The benefits will follow one day.

Tackle the jobs no one else wants.

"I'm not perfect, but I strive for excellence."

Marva Collins

Always try to exceed expectations. Do more than you are asked to do and than you are expected to do. Extend yourself.

"It is far more important to be able to hit the target than it is to haggle over who makes a weapon or pulls the trigger."

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Stop worrying about who gets the credit or who gets the blame and worry instead about getting the job done. Don't step up and try to grab the credit. Rarely will one person deserve all the credit or, for that matter, all the blame. Others will always resent someone who tries to grab the credit and assign the blame.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

Don't you resent this when others do it? Share the credit. You will succeed with the help of others and fail without it.

Make sure you are fully aware of what your company's objectives are and how you and those in your department fit in. What are the objectives? Improved quality? Increased sales? Higher profits? More rapid service? The point is to understand the larger objectives and what role you play in reaching them.

There is a big picture involved. Think of the big picture as a puzzle. You are a piece of that puzzle. No matter how small or insignificant you might think your job is, remember the puzzle will never be completed properly without your part or piece.

Also remember, no matter how large you think your piece in the overall puzzle is it will never be completed without all the other small pieces. Never overestimate or underestimate your importance.

"Do your work with your whole heart and you will succeed -- there's so little competition."

Elbert Hubbard

Enthusiasm. Everyone likes to work with those who are enthusiastic. They are more enjoyable to work with and to work for. They make work more enjoyable. Be enthusiastic. It is contagious.

If you are like most people, you enjoy working with enthusiastic co-workers much more than with sour puss whiners. Don't you think your co-workers and bosses feel the same way?

"Do or do not. There is no try."

Yoda

Dependability. People must be able to count on you to be at the job, to do it as well as you can, and to do what you promise you will do. No matter how talented you may be, unless you are on the job and can be counted on you are of no value to the company or your co-workers.

"Don't tell me how hard you work; tell me how much you get done."

James Ling
A commitment to working hard. Remember, all companies want to increase productivity and profits. This is the objective of being in business. To accomplish this they need many things. One of these is people who are not afraid of hard work.

"It is O.K. to disagree as long as you are not disagreeable."

Bill Walton

An ability to get along with others. The work force is made up of a wide variety of people. It would be naive to think you will have good chemistry with all of them or that you will like and respect all of them.

Nor will all of them like and respect you. If they did it would be an ideal world, but despite what some motivational speakers and authors might tell you, this simply is not going to happen.

"Life is too short for the indulgence of animosity."

Walter Scott

But this does not matter. This is not the objective. The objective is to be able to get along with your co-workers in a manner that maximizes your results and their results.

Resourcefulness. Being resourceful is a valued quality in any business. Being able to think of better ways to do things. Being able to identify and solve problems. Being able to help others improve the results they produce. Asking the questions and finding the answers.

Do every job as though your job depended on it. It might!

"Assumption must never replace effort."

Derrick W. Welch

If in doubt, ask. If you do not fully understand something, ask for clarification! Never assume, always ask.
Chapter 52. The enemy within.

"Conquering others requires force. Conquering oneself requires strength."

Lao Tze

Of all the opponents that we will ever face, of all the obstacles that we run into, of all the problems we will ever encounter, of all the enemies that attack us, few will be as powerful or as damaging as the enemy within.

We are most often our own worst enemy.

Our attitude. Our inability to see our weaknesses and do something about them. Our inability to see our talents and use them. Our fears. Our attitude of entitlement. The expecting without producing. The wanting more without giving more.

Procrastination which holds us back. Self-doubt which destroys our confidence. The lack of commitment. Our lack of self-discipline. Our unwillingness to sacrifice. Our desire for rewards without a willingness to pay the price. Our inability to work within the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Greed. Jealousy. Apathy. Complacency. Excuses. A lack of self-assessment. A refusal to accept responsibility. Our bitterness over perceived injustices. Our refusal to do things because others won't or don't. Envy. All the things we have covered in other chapters.

These are all soldiers in the army of the enemy within.

But very often on the battlefield of life we are the only real enemy on the field. We defeat ourselves.

"I knew the only thing that would stop me was if I quit on myself. You have to face your challenges and give your all. Those are my words to the world. That's a winning mentality."

Evander Holyfield after defeating Mike Tyson in one of the greatest upsets in boxing history.

Those of you who are boxing fans know this story. It happened in November 1996. Evander Holyfield defeated "Iron Mike Tyson" in one of the greatest upsets in boxing history. Tyson was supposed to be invincible.

No one could stand up to this man. When you fought Mike Tyson you lost. Plain and simple. If you stepped in with "Iron Mike" you were probably going to be carried out early.
In fact, every fighter in recent memory who had fought Tyson just about had to be carried into the ring. Yes, you read that right. Most fighters who fought Tyson had to be pushed and pulled into the ring. You could see it in their eyes. They were terrified before the fight even started.

Bigger, stronger, younger. It did not matter.

Most of Tyson's opponents lost the fight long before they ever stepped into the ring. They had no chance. They could not stand before this man never mind win. That's what the experts said.

They believed the experts.

They listened to the enemy within.

Next up in the long line of victims was Evander Holyfield. What chance did he have?

Yes, he had been a great warrior but he stood no chance against "Iron Mike". He was a warrior with nothing left. He was too old. He had fought too many battles. He was only a blown-up cruiser weight. The odds on the fight opened at 25-1 in favor of "Iron Mike".

Many feared for the health and for the very life of Evander. He had a bad heart. He had lost his stamina. He could never make it past the first round or two.

In fact, 47 out of 48 of the top sport writers in the country picked Tyson to not only win but to win in the first few rounds.

Some wrote it was indecent and inhuman to even let the fight take place. The experts had spoken.

Any rational person would have listened. All those who had gone before did. Many fell down at the first sign of a punch.

Not Evander. He did not listen to the enemy within nor the enemies outside. He beat the enemy within and by doing so he beat the invincible "Iron Mike Tyson" in a stunning 11 round technical knockout.

"The best place to find a helping hand is at the end of your arm."

Elmer Leterman

The person in the mirror is either your enemy or your ally. Which is it? The only thing that is preventing you from becoming better is you. The only person stopping you from accomplishing all you can is you.
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

The only obstacle in your way is the person in the mirror.

Mediocrity's greatest ally is the enemy within.

The person in the mirror is the enemy within.

It is an enemy I must fight every day. An enemy I do not always defeat.

It is an enemy you must fight every day.

"We have 40 million reasons for failure, but not a single excuse."

*Rudyard Kipling*

Excellence is waiting to get out. Excellence is only waiting to be invited. What are you waiting for?

We may blame others. We may blame circumstances. But when the dust of reality settles most often the only enemy really standing in our way is ourselves.

If we can defeat the enemy within we will have won the battle against mediocrity.

It is this simple!

I have tried to provide you with a battle plan. I have tried to provide you with the weapons you need to win this war.

The most powerful weapon you can have I can't give you in this book.

But I don't need to. You already own it.

It is a mirror.

Excellence is within each of us. It is within you.
Closing Thoughts.

"The secret of joy in work is contained in one word—excellence. To know how to do something well is to enjoy it."

Pearl Buck

When you do the best job you can, you will enjoy your job much more. The pride you take in your abilities and accomplishments will carry over into all areas of your life.

There is no question about this. You can't just turn mediocrity on and off. You can't do an average job at work and then pursue excellence off the job.

Mediocrity is an insidious enemy. It will dog you in every area of your life. You must defy it on the job to defeat it in your life.

"The seeds of dissatisfaction will produce a harvest of change."

Derrick W. Welch

The key to success in any type of improvement plan is that the attitude of acceptance for the old way of doing things must be replaced by an attitude of doing things a new and better way.


It begins with you.

If you follow the guidelines I have given you in this book, you will be maximizing your talents, capabilities, and career opportunities.

But I can only give you the tools. You must wield them. You must take the initiative. You must make the commitment. You must analyze your weakness and determine how to improve yourself and your capabilities and then take the needed steps to do it.

"Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative."

Derrick W. Welch
I know it is hard to believe that the simple traits I have given you in this book would place you in the minority of employees. But I assure you they will.

Mediocrity is an enemy encamped in your mind. The easiest of all enemies to defy. The most difficult of all enemies to defeat.

The rewards of victory will astound you.

There is only one person who can stop you from becoming the best you can at what you do. The person in the mirror.

I won't wish you luck because if you follow the advice in this book you won't need it.

My best,

Derrick W. Welch
About the author

Derrick Welch has spent over 30 years in senior management positions in various industries. Derrick has degrees in business administration, marketing, and management.

Companies from around the country, from Fortune 500 companies to one man shops, from virtually every industry, have used Derrick's books to maximize the performances of their employees, to improve morale, and to increase profitability and productivity. He hopes you will as well.

Derrick has a simple goal. It is to help you succeed. It is to help you reach your professional goals. It is to help your company become more productive and more profitable. He hopes this book is a strong start in that direction.

**Derrick is also the author of "In Pursuit of Profits: How To At Least Double Your Profits Without Increasing Your Sales"**. This book includes over 1,000 cost control, expense reduction, and income producing strategies.

For complete details about this book please go to:

**Inpursuitofprofits.com**

For more information about Defy Mediocrity please go to:

**Defymediocrity.net or Choosetobeuncommon.com**

You can contact Derrick directly at

**Derrickwelch@comcast.net**
Defy Mediocrity: Choose to be uncommon. Think of the alternative.

What others are saying about In Pursuit Of Profits

"If you are interested in dramatically improving the operations and profitability of your company, your job stability, or the direction of your career read "In Pursuit Of Profits: How To At Least Double Your Profits Without Increasing Your Sales" and "Defy Mediocrity" by Derrick Welch.

"In Pursuit Of Profits: How To At Least Double Your Profits Without Increasing Your Sales" will show you how to slash costs while increasing income and improving cash flow in every area of your company by 25% to 50% or more.

This book contains over 1,000 cost control, expense reduction, and income producing strategies you can start using immediately to dramatically improve the daily cash flow and bottom line of your company, division, or department.

Think of what it could mean to the bottom line of your company, your job stability, or the direction of your career if you could help at least double the profits of your company, division, or department while dramatically increasing your daily cash flow without increasing sales. "In Pursuit Of Profits" will show you how!

"Defy Mediocrity" will show you how to overcome the apathy, complacency, high absenteeism, tardiness, poor quality, decreasing or stagnant productivity, and attitude of entitlement that exist in so many organizations today. This book will show you how to remove the self-inflicted road blocks we put in front of ourselves that stop us from reaching the professional heights we could and should reach.

Owners, executives, managers, and employees from companies, both large and small, from virtually every industry are using these books to improve their skills and the operations of their organization.

From companies who have purchased copies for every employee to Fortune 1000 CEOs, executives, and managers.

From employees who want to stop worrying about layoffs and start thinking of promotions, to managers and business owners who want to dramatically increase profits and improve their cash flow without increasing sales."

Carolina Business
Derrick W. Welch

"Are you a business owner who'd like to improve your bottom line? Are you a department or division head or a supervisor or an employee who'd like to prove to the boss that you can improve the company's bottom line? If so, read In Pursuit Of Profits: How To At Least Double Your Profits Without Increasing Your Sales by Derrick W. Welch. A book that contains more than 1,000 down-to-earth, hard-hitting strategies that you can use to dramatically impact your company's daily cash flow and bottom line."

Office Systems

"Using the strategies in this book we were able to reduce our cost of goods sold by over 10%. An effective dollar savings of over $350,000, which for us resulted in a profit increase of over 800%.

William Clay, CEO, Walker-Clay, Inc.

"Welch speaks from experience when he discusses the corporate world. Every strategy in the book is proven and versatile."

The Enterprise

"You won't find any theories, unworkable concepts, or idealistic management techniques in this book. What you will find is down-to-earth, hard-hitting, actionable advice that will make a tremendous difference on the bottom line of your company or the direction of your career!"

Joe Kameese, Chairman and CEO, American Business Connections

"In Pursuit Of Profits: How To At Least Double Your Profits Without Increasing Your Sales" helps management and employees think about costs and profits in a new way with over 1,000 proven and actionable strategies.

Northwood University

"Just one idea from this book added $100,000 to my bottom line!"

Robert Sullivan, CEO, Sullivans