



THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

APPLICATION TO PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

By
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Abstract

Over the past fifteen years, a variety of high profile performance failures and ethical scandals have rocked the business world. "Business ethics" has become a seeming oxymoron. Most ethical failures start with very small choices that can be difficult to recognize as ethical problems. They might simply be attitude issues, or pushing the boundary without crossing the "line." In a performance review, managers look for something specific, and discussions of attitude tend to be more subjective.

We propose managers should have a discussion around different parameters of what together make up

attitude, using the nine characteristics of the fruit of the spirit, as defined in Scripture. From a sample of performance appraisal instruments we found that employees were frequently being asked about faithfulness, but that patience and self-control - two characteristics often at the heart of so many ethical crises - were rarely mentioned. We show how these characteristics from the Scriptures might be used in a broadly secular setting and how doing so can become a foundation for encouraging an ethical discussion before there is an identified problem.

Introduction

There is a big difference between legal compliance and ethical performance. For legal compliance, the question centers on “going over the line.” For too many, the focus is on how close one can get to the line without crossing it. Ethical performance by contrast focuses on doing good, which is a great deal different from avoiding doing bad. Pushing close to the line seemed to be at the heart of the Enron problem (see *Enron* box) and may be a factor in other crises as well.

Another reason why simply following the letter of the law leads to trouble is rooted in the nature of the law. Laws generally look backwards, fixing past problems through regulation. In times of great change, such as dealing with a business world transformed by technology and globalization, there will continue to be many situations where there is no law in place to set the mark for what is right. Ethical performance focuses on appropriate actions where the law is silent. (see *Don Flow* box.)

The challenge of ethical performance management is evident in the myriad of ethical failures in business, from Enron, to mortgage and investment banks to British Petroleum. Yet managing for ethics is challenging. Failures and shortcomings are more difficult to “pin down” before they become something big. Discussions are often more subjective. What is the basis for having a conversation about ethics beyond compliance?

We believe the nine manifestations of the fruit of the spirit provide a great foundation for this discussion:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.” (Gal. 5:22-23, NASB)

Each attribute creates the opportunity for a discussion that would get at the root of ethical challenges. For an organization managed and run

Enron: The Slippery Slope of Moral Torpidity

In the Fall of 2001, Enron business practices were being audited by Arthur Andersen. Such audits are not simply black and white, but require judgment and a great deal of wisdom. But as the word started to get out about what was going on, Andersen’s auditor started shredding documents, and the world came tumbling down.

According to Bob Wright, a former Andersen executive, “I don’t think even Dave Duncan, the partner in charge of the Enron account—the one who shredded the documents—one day said, ‘I’m going to help Enron cheat.’ I think the reason he did it was the incredible pressure there is on any world-class organization to be the best all the time. Then you have a client who’s beating on you: ‘Why can’t we do this?’ And Enron wasn’t in there alone. There were attorneys, investment bankers, Enron management, beating on this guy who’s probably trying to slow things down. Maybe I’m giving him too much credit but I don’t think so. I think it’s one small piece at a time, and then you look back after two or three years and think, ‘Oh my gosh, what did I do?’”¹

¹Al Erisman, “Bob Wright: Courage in an Ethical Crisis,” *Ethix Magazine*, January, 2005, <http://ethix.org/2005/02/01/courage-in-an-ethical-crisis> (accessed July 5, 2013).

Don Flow: The Heart of Ethical Leadership

Don Flow has built a business of 32 auto dealerships in North Carolina and Virginia, and has established a strong ethical foundation with a set of values and practices that are exemplary. It is one thing to have such an intent, but another thing to make it real throughout the 800 people in the organization. Flow Automotive has done this through careful hiring and promotion practices that go beyond simply achieving compliance with the guidelines. Here is the way Don put it:

“I want to be careful saying all 800 believe the way I do. We think about different levels of commitment. At the bottom is Noncompliance. The next level up we call Grudging Compliance. That is, if somebody’s staring at you, you’ll do it; if they’re not staring at you, you’re not going to do it. Neither of these will work. Sometimes we let a person in the Grudging Compliance group stay for a little while. But our culture is strong enough that Noncompliance doesn’t work at all. His or her peers will say, ‘This is not how we do business here.’ They either leave or are fired.”

The next category is Genuine Compliance, where motivation is more external. These people say, “I really like the people I work with here. They pay well, they treat you well, if this is what you have to do to be successful here, I’ll do it.” We call those “good soldiers.” We can’t have them in positions of leadership. Over time, they may begin to see and believe, but they don’t move up if they haven’t made it internal.

The next level we call Enrollment. These folks believe and live it out themselves. They can’t imagine not working this way. We’re very careful that our significant positions of leadership are staffed only by folks in the highest category. Even a very high producer will not be in a significant position of leadership without this internalized understanding of how we operate.²

²Al Erisman, “Don Flow: Ethics at Flow Automotive,” *Ethix Magazine*, April 2004, <http://ethix.org/2004/04/01/ethics-at-flow-automotive> (accessed July 5, 2013).

with an explicitly Christian identity, the appeal can be made to the biblical foundation. Individual Christians can also use these as a check on their own performance. But even in a secular organization, these nine characteristics can become a topic for discussion related to ethical performance without explicit reference to this biblical text. This may provide the start of a more explicit ethical performance assessment.

In this research we asked whether these characteristics were being discussed even at an implicit level during performance evaluations. We gathered a number of performance evaluation instruments from businesses and non-profit organizations, reviewing them against the specific nine characteristics. We found that some of these characteristics were being carefully measured, but others were virtually ignored. In particular, faithfulness was commonly referenced and measured, while patience and self-control were rarely evaluated in performance reviews.

Background

In the performance management process, it is common to evaluate skills, behaviors and performance outcomes. But businesses are seeing the importance of evaluating more than these for two different reasons. First, business failures from Enron to banks and mortgage lenders suggest that successful management is the result of much more than simply technical skills. Linkletter and Marciariello ask, "What do managers and executives value and why? If organizations are about human beings, from where do these human beings derive their values?"³ A growing literature is recognizing that business needs to do a better job of moving beyond technical expertise to encouraging and embracing ethical values in its employees and leaders.

The second reason for considering more than skills, behaviors or performance outcomes in the performance management process is that the values of individuals are increasingly being recognized for their role in creating a positive organizational environment and a positive experience for the customer. These values have a large impact on the productive environment in the workforce and also influence customers' perspectives of the business.

Fruit of the Spirit – Employee Characteristics

While we believe that the fruit of the Spirit have implications for the workplace, it would be somewhat surprising to find terms such as "love" or "joy" on a performance appraisal instrument. So, our first task was to define these nine characteristics in ways which would make sense in an organizational context, with particular

emphasis on presenting these in a way that could communicate clearly to a person who did not self-identify as a person of faith, or recognize the authority of the Christian scriptures. We examined each of the nine descriptions of the fruit of the Spirit and identified ways each one might be expressed in a workplace setting.

Love

Love marks a caring and welcoming organization. In a workplace context, a person would express love by caring for others and making a strong unconditional commitment to their well-being; this attitude might manifest itself in an employee's relationships with subordinates, colleagues, bosses, suppliers, or customers. Employees who measure highly on "love" would be more likely to value interpersonal relationships compared with those who do not measure highly on love.

However, love could also be expressed by those who have minimal human interaction in their work; in such a case, love could be expressed by the extent to which the person sees their work as a means of ultimately offering value to others. In their book *Theory R Management*, Alderson and McDonnell illustrate the transformation that comes to the workplace when people are treated with love⁴. Dignity and respect come to characterize interactions with colleagues and customers. Ultimately, the organization may become known for this type of attitude which pervades its culture. Southwest Airlines, for example, has "LUV" as its stock symbol, recognizing the importance of this attitude.

Joy

Joy is characterized by feelings of great happiness or pleasure, and is infectious in providing motivation for work, and inspiration for others. This is not the same as superficial excitement, whipped up in an artificial way through cheers and slogans, but the deep satisfaction of doing that which provides meaning. Many do not experience this joy however, and there are frequent expressions of dissatisfaction from employees at every level of the organization.⁵ But research shows that it doesn't have to be this way; one's work can provide more satisfaction than a day at the beach when people are engaging in activities which are perceived to well utilize their skills and talents in service to others.⁶

At least some organizations are looking for people who find joy in their work. In *The Little IKEA Dictionary* written by company founder, Ingvar Kamprad for IKEA employees, he discusses how the "Ikea Spirit" differentiates the company and is "built on our enthusiasm." According to Kamprad, "If you are not enthusiastic about your job, a third of your life goes to waste."⁷

Similarly, Dennis Bakke, the former president and CEO of the energy firm AES Corporation, discussed his company's approach to developing a joyful workplace in his book *Joy at Work*. He argues that meaningful work in which people can reason, make decisions and be held accountable for their actions, creates joy, which in turn can help ensure "the successful functioning of the team, community or company."⁸

Peace

Organizations which experience freedom from destructive quarrels and disagreement are experiencing peace. This is not to advocate for the absence of conflict, because new ideas often involve struggle and compromise. Framing conflict in the context of shared objectives can keep the tension healthy. When times are difficult due to periods of high pressure and significant change, people frequently experience pain. But it is how people respond to this pain that matters.

Peter Frost writes, "What turns pain into toxicity [at work] is when others respond to that pain in a harmful rather than healing way."⁹ Peacemakers can enable creativity and cooperation leading to great new ideas that benefit any organization. Employees can contribute to the peace of the workplace through avoiding gossip and supporting others, as they work toward the common good of the organization.

Patience

Patience is the recognition of the need to consider the long term. In our increasingly short term world, there are too many examples of individuals looking for shortcuts, pursuing short term gain at the expense of longer term outcomes, or simply leaving at the first sign of difficulty.

In a study of 400 executives, 80% said they would decrease spending on long term priorities in order to meet short term goals.¹⁰ Bankers and borrowers pursued short term gains with sub-prime mortgages and real estate speculation leading to far-reaching economic problems for the world.

In contrast, after experiencing production failures during 2009 and 2010, the leadership of Toyota acknowledged that their focus on speed had contributed to the problems, and made the decision to add time to the planning and design process of new vehicles.¹¹ Our world of work is crying out for those who will restore patience to the workplace.

Kindness

Kindness stands out when it is offered at work, and much of the research on organizational citizenship behaviors and extra-role behaviors reflects this concept: A colleague recognizes a person who is struggling and offers a hand or someone to talk with; a boss sees an employee who is dealing with a difficult personal situation (a divorce, a sick child) and cuts some slack for a period of time.

People extending kindness are not characterized by always "going by the book," but recognize the need to

The Fruit of the Spirit in Action at the Workplace

Love..marks a caring and welcoming organization.

Joy..is the deep satisfaction of doing that which provides meaning.

Peace.. enables creativity and cooperation leading to great new ideas that benefit any organization.

Patience..recognizes the need to consider long term outcomes.

Kindness..goes beyond "by the book" behavior and recognizes the need to allow for individual circumstances.

Generosity..leads to long and loyal relationships by leaving something in the deal for others.

Faithfulness..keeps one's word in delivering what was promised.

Gentleness.. is humility practiced in spite of a position of power, allowing for communication and trust.

Self-Control..is necessary for a healthy workplace; otherwise it self-destructs.

allow for individual circumstances. "Kindness may not have yet caught on within business, but there is plenty of evidence that it is a key component of our evolutionary heritage, and instrumental in cooperative, collective behavior."¹²

Generosity

The habit of giving freely, without expecting anything in return would seem to be at odds with the profit maximization goal of most businesses as well as to the task of career advancement. But when everyone is simply looking out for their own interests, the cut-throat environment stifles collaboration and creativity.

Max DePree, long time CEO of Herman Miller

wrote, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant.”¹³ Some businesses (e.g., Nordstrom, Costco) have demonstrated that generous return policies can actually improve the bottom line. They seek the win/win, recognizing that leaving something in the deal for others may be the best path to a long and loyal relationship. Generosity can permeate an organization when it starts with the leader, but it can have a supportive impact no matter where it is practiced.

Faithfulness

Faithfulness is demonstrated by sticking with the task to completion, keeping one’s word in delivering what was promised, or simply showing up even when you don’t feel like it. It is often not as glamorous as laying out a vision but it is vital to any kind of work.

Raffoni notes that “Strategic planning gets all the cachet and all the ink, but the most creative, visionary strategic planning is useless if it isn’t translated into action.”¹⁴ This topic was further developed in the book *Execution*: “If you don’t know how to execute, the whole of your effort as a leader will always be less than the sum of its parts.”¹⁵ The authors define execution as “[the] systematic process of rigorously discussing hows and whats, questioning, and tenaciously following through, ensuring accountability.”¹⁶ Faithful commitment is the key to producing results.

Gentleness

Gentleness is characterized by true humility that does not consider itself too good or too exalted. It is best seen in the hard conversations at work, such as during a

performance review or a necessary termination. It may be seen in the way a teacher challenges a student. These tough conversations are done with a sense of humility in spite of a position of power, allowing for communication and trust and avoiding the degradation of the individual.

If gentleness is not exhibited in the workplace, long-lasting loyalty and trust are not developed and change is impeded. In Jim Collins’ classic study of exceptional companies, he identified the characteristics of Level 5 leaders as those with “a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.”¹⁷ These exceptional leaders exhibited gentleness – but not weakness – in their interactions with others.

Self-Control

Self-control is the ability to control one’s emotions, behavior and desires, and is required in the face of temptations to cut a corner, bend a rule, or act in an outright dishonest way – particularly when there is the significant opportunity for gain. Executives worth hundreds of millions of dollars are now in prison because of the lack of self-control. And this is not restricted to top level executives or politicians. The person at the lowest position in an organization may be tempted to use company resources for personal gain. Self-control is that check on each individual that is necessary for a healthy workplace. Without self-control, workplaces self-destruct.

The Study

While we have made the argument that all nine characteristics could lead to positive organizational out-

The Methodology

Performance appraisal forms from a variety of organizations were evaluated to assess the extent to which they either directly or indirectly measure the fruit of the Spirit in their employees. Those providing the instruments were assured that the name of the company and the specific instruments would be kept confidential. A total of 16 performance appraisals from publicly traded companies (n=4), private companies (n=8) and not-for-profit organizations (n=4) were evaluated. These organizations ranged in size from a few dozen employees to large multi-nationals.

Each performance appraisal instrument was content analyzed by three trained raters to identify statements which might correspond to one of the nine characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. For example, the item “Maintains the dignity of others” was evaluated as a reflection of love as we have defined it here.

What we do not know at this point is whether, through a factor analysis, we would find that these nine characteristics are independent, or if there is a correlation between some of the nine items. That further work is called for. In addition, we didn’t have enough data to make comparisons between different types of organizations. For example, it would be interesting to know if not-for-profits are more likely to evaluate certain characteristics relative to for-profit organizations, or whether publicly traded companies are less likely than privately owned companies to measure characteristics such as patience, given such an emphasis on short-term quarterly results. However, even without being able to make such comparisons, our preliminary data suggest some intriguing findings.

comes, we were not sure whether and to what extent organizations would be concerned with them. Further, we wonder whether some characteristics might be included more often than others. We believe a good gauge of organizational values would be what they discuss in their performance appraisal process. Consequently, a pilot study is taken to examine a variety of performance appraisal instruments from a broad range of organizations to see to what extent the concepts of the fruit of the spirit might be represented in them (see box *The Methodology*).

Results

From a sample of sixteen performance appraisal instruments we found appraisal items corresponding to each of the fruit characteristics, with some represented more frequently than others. Some instruments had more than one item which corresponded to a given fruit characteristic, and so our totals in several cases exceed sixteen. In a few instances one performance appraisal item was identified as reflecting more than one fruit characteristic. For example, "Makes people feel valued" was identified as reflecting both love and kindness, and was counted twice, once in each category.

Using a frequency count, we found the following

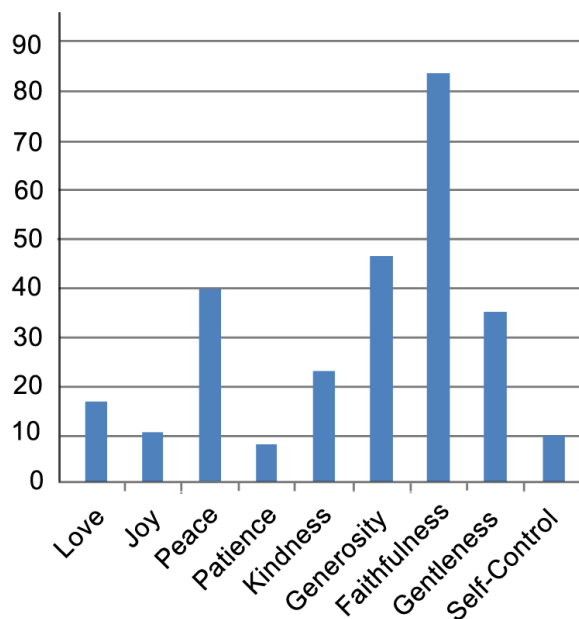


Figure 1. Frequency Count for Fruit Characteristics in Sample Appraisals

number of performance appraisal items (in parentheses), corresponding to the fruit characteristic which they reflected, across the sixteen instruments: Love (17), Joy (10), Peace (40), Patience (8), Kindness (23), Generos-

ity (46), Faithfulness (84), Gentleness (35), and Self-control (9). These data are graphed in Figure 1.

In addition to frequency count for each of the fruit characteristics, we also looked at the simple (yes/no) question of whether or not a given fruit characteristic was reflected in a given performance appraisal instrument. In this case, the highest score possible for any given characteristic is 16, since we had evaluated 16 performance appraisal instruments. Our data here show a similar, but not identical pattern to Figure 1; each parenthetical number indicates the number of

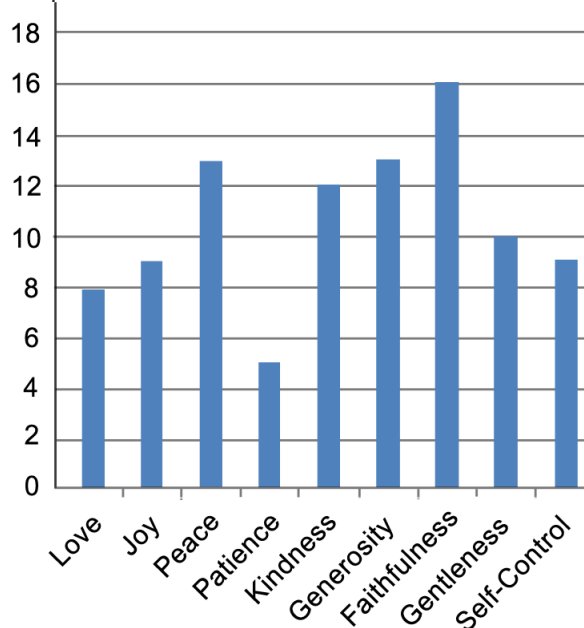


Figure 2. Number of Appraisals with an Identified Fruit Characteristic

performance appraisals which had at least one item reflecting the associated characteristic: Love (8), Joy (9), Peace (13), Patience (5), Kindness (12), Goodness (13), Faithfulness (16), Gentleness (10), and Self-control (9). These data are portrayed in Figure 2.

Discussion

None of the performance appraisal instruments that we looked at took a "head on" approach to discussing attitudes in general. Yet in examining the instruments we determined that they tended indirectly to measure many of these nine attributes of the fruit of the Spirit. Faithfulness was the one characteristic that was most frequently measured (see Figure 1). This is perhaps not surprising since faithfulness reflects the extent to which people are thorough in the performance of their responsibilities. Certainly if nothing else, performance

appraisals should reflect this attribute! But some of the more interesting findings come from what was absent from our content analysis.

Four of the characteristics we examined were relatively infrequently found on our performance appraisal instruments: love, joy, self-control and patience. We do not find it surprising that patience was the least represented – found on less than a third of our performance appraisals, and the only reflecting a total of eight times in those appraisals in which it was mentioned. Patience simply does not seem to fit in this fast-paced, do it yesterday, globally-connected business world, and it certainly does not appear to be valued if performance appraisals are any indicator of what is valued in organizations. And yet, it is not difficult to identify a lack of patience with a whole range of business problems today, from product failures to ethical failures. Perhaps this is a fruit of the Spirit characteristic that should be getting more attention.

That love, joy and self-control are relatively under-represented is also not very surprising. None of these terms are usually associated with business except in a negative context. Yet Alderson and McDonnell argue that relationships are really a bottom-line issue and central to any business success.¹⁸ Joy is important for a creative and thriving workplace.¹⁹ And many of the major business failures of the past decade point directly to a lack of self-control by their leaders. Both the attitudes that are frequently of concern to businesses according to our preliminary analysis, and those that are not, suggest the value of the application of the fruit of the Spirit to a workplace context.

Valid in the Workplace, Even for Non-Christians?

Too many Christians see a separation between their spiritual lives and their everyday lives, believing this passage in Galatians fits only on the spiritual side of life. What does this have to do with the workplace? Clearly that is a false dichotomy. In fact, Stuart Dugan argues that when we separate our lives in terms of a sacred-secular division, this not only negatively affects our workplaces, but it also undermines our spiritual growth. We lose what we learn intellectually but do not put into practice. And since much of our waking life is spent in the workplace, this must be the place where we put important spiritual teaching into practice. Not doing so causes spiritual atrophy.

Some might argue that these nine characteristics represent what should flow from a person whose life is controlled by the Holy Spirit, and hence we would not expect to see them in a person who is not a Christian. These characteristics should flow from the leading of the Spirit, and not be a guide for practice for those who

are not indwelt with God's spirit. There is some truth in this statement in the context of the passage. But we would argue that every person is an image bearer of God, as the Scripture clearly teaches. As such, the characteristics reflected in the fruit of the Spirit would represent a right model for behavior for all people. Such living is clearly not possible without the empowerment of the Spirit, but such fruit represents God's intent for each person made in his image. Though attempting to live this way is not the path to salvation, living this way does resonate deeply with every human being and we believe these characteristics can create a very positive discussion for any person in the workplace. This would seem to reflect Paul's teaching in Romans 2:15 where he argues that the word of God is written on the hearts of every person. In talking with people in the secular workplace, we have found a resonance with the goodness of these characteristics and a place of discussion; these are not recognized as merely "religious" things.

Conclusions and Applications

The results of this study show that the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit are present in many performance appraisals. This would seem to indicate an interest in such values and attitudes in the workplace. These attitudes and values have been linked to productivity levels, employee happiness and overall positive organizational outcomes.

It would not be difficult to implement this work in an organization. We would recommend that no attempt would be made to make these measures quantitative, at least at the beginning. In a performance review, simply ask the person to identify how he or she believes they have portrayed these characteristics, and prepare for a discussion about them. Encourage an employee to plan to illustrate their own demonstration of these attitudes, both in where they did these things well and where they may have missed the mark. Gaining an opportunity to have this discussion is a first step toward a more rigorous scoring that could come later.

The relative lack of some fruit of the Spirit characteristics such as patience, joy, love and self-control calls for reflection on what personnel characteristics are being measured and rewarded in organizations. We would like to find more businesses which hire, promote and develop employees with values and attitudes of love, joy, self-control and patience and see how they differ from those which do not.

In addition, we would suggest two other areas for further research. One is to create instruments that better measure these attitudes directly, and compare scores on such measures with overall job or organizational performance ratings. If found to be valid, such

an instrument might prove effective in the selection process. Secondly, using the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit might provide promise in focusing the discussion on either selection or appraisal. Discussions of these nine characteristics could be useful in the developmental process, and could be used in employee orientation, training, performance appraisal or 360 review

feedback.

Knowing that these attitudes and values are important to managers and human resource departments indicates that there is a market and need for more objective measures to be created, and also for development methods aimed at improving such attitudes and values in the workplace.

Notes

³Karen Linkletter and Joseph Maciariello, *Introduction to The Drucker Difference*, edited by Craig Pearce, Joseph Maciariello & Hideki Yamawaki (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2010), p. 2.

⁴Wayne Alderson and Nancy Alderson McDonnell, *Theory R Management* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1994).

⁵Cf. David Batstone's *Saving the Corporate Soul-- & (Who Knows?) Maybe Your Own* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

⁶Mihali Csikszentmihalyi, *Good Business: Leadership, Flow, and the Making of Meaning* (New York, NY: Viking, 2003).

⁷Bertil Torekull and Ingvar Kamprad, *Leading by Design: The IKEA Story* (New York, NY: HarperBusiness, 1999), p. 10.

⁸Dennis Bakke, *Joy at Work* (Seattle, WA: Pear Press, 2005) p. 85.

⁹Peter Frost, *Toxic Emotions at Work and What You Can Do About Them* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2007), p. 12.

¹⁰Jonathan Wellum, Public address at the Work Research Foundation, 2006.

¹¹Dan Strumpf, "Toyota Hopes to Spend More Time Developing Vehicles, Less Time Recalling Them," in the *Christian Science Monitor* (Associated Press, July 7, 2010).

¹²William Baker and Michael O'Malley *Leading with Kindness: How Good People Consistently Get Superior Results* (AMACOM, 2008), p. 23.

¹³Max De Pree, *Leadership is an Art* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1989), p. 136.

¹⁴Melissa Raffoni, "Three Keys to Effective Execution," *Harvard Business Review Blog Network*, February 26, 2006, <http://blogs.hbr.org/hmu/2008/02/three-keys-to-effective-execut.html> (accessed July 8, 2013).

¹⁵Larry Bossidy, Ram Charan and Charles Burck, *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, (New York, NY: Crown Business, 2009) p. 20.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap--and Others Don't* (New York, NY: Harper-Business, 2001) p. 20.

¹⁸Alderson & McDonnell, 1994.

¹⁹Bakke, 2005.

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