



The Pursuit of WOW!

Every Person's Guide to Topsy-Turvy Times

by Tom Peters

Copyright © 1994 by Excel/A California Partnership. Used by arrangement with Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., N.Y.
368 pages

Focus

Leadership & Mgt.

Strategy
Sales & Marketing
Corporate Finance
Human Resources
Technology & Production
Small Business
Economics & Politics
Industries & Regions
Career Development
Personal Finance
Concepts & Trends

Take-Aways

- Stand out from the growing crowd of look-alikes by pursuing Wow!
- How do you attain Wow? Just decide to be the greatest and start acting accordingly.
- Honor your errors. Big goofs can be expected – they're the only way to leap forward.
- Of all the key ideas behind business transformation, empowerment is most important.
- Promote relationships through recognition and personal touch.
- Encourage the people in your company to think of themselves as entrepreneurs.
- Embrace diversity. It creates opportunity.
- Where possible, use word of mouth to promote your products or services.
- If you want to stand out, pay attention to good design – in everything.
- Treat your innovators like stars.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
9	8	9	9

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this Abstract you will learn: 1) How to motivate your workforce, advance your career and shape your organization to respond to change; 2) How and why to empower your employees; and 3) How to make your company stand out in the competitive global marketplace.

Recommendation

Even when he's not at his best, and he isn't here, Tom Peters stands head-and-shoulders above other management gurus, particularly if you like your messages delivered straightforwardly with a good dose of exclamation points. Peters is all about simplicity and excitement, both in his language and in his message. His basic mantra never changes: the workplace is becoming ever more competitive, so you need to make yourself and your company stand out. Do this by viewing your work as a series of critical projects and injecting limitless enthusiasm into each one. In delivering his consistent message, Peters tosses out scores of common-sense lines that are so true that you just have to jot them down. You'll find quite a few such keepers in this book, but you won't find much of an overriding theme. Instead, Peters presents a string of 210 useful, fun, pithy observations that flow together loosely, all to imbue you with a dose of Pow! Now! Wow! If you want to get going, *getAbstract.com* recommends this motivational booster.

Abstract

Pursue the "Wow!"

What is "Wow!"? "Wow!" is excitement that makes you and your company stand out from the crowd. It's enthusiasm, excellence and success. Here's how to pursue the "Wow!" for your organization. First, you have to get up and get going.

From loosing weight to giving up those cigarettes at last, just get moving and get it accomplished. The basic principle is to muster your determination to do whatever it takes, and to start now. Decide to be the greatest, and then start acting accordingly. In a nanosecond, make that decision to attain the "Wow!" and then work passionately toward that goal to make it happen. Along the way, you may experience errors, but that's part of the process, since the only way to advance is to play a new game and risk doing something wrong. In fact, respect the mistakes you make and learn from them. Anticipate making some very large errors, because that is the sole means of moving forward in big jumps. Just learn as you go.

A big snafu can turn into a big gain. For example, the Bon Marche store in Seattle incorrectly advertised a compact disc (CD) player for \$99, instead of the accurate price of \$179, discounted from \$199. But the store kept its word, sold the CD player at the advertised price and even took an additional 4,000 orders at that price. Though it sold the units below cost and lost about \$200,000, it gained a feature story in *The New York Times* that more than paid for its loss. And, it built a reputation for trustworthiness and value.

Business Transformation

Businesses today must become familiar with a half dozen key concepts that are sparking corporate transformation. In order of importance, they are:

"The first 99% of getting from here to there is the determination to do it and not to compromise, no matter what sort of roadblocks those around you...erect."

"One-minute excellence."

“I’m repeatedly struck by the parade of ‘new’ cars that look like every other car, by how many newly opened French restaurants or just launched PCs or software packages fail to zap you... And I’m also struck by how timid most people are in fending off staleness.”

“Retail also allows – not requires – continuous reinvention. Actors and actresses will tell you that every audience is different. So is every day in the classroom, restaurant or surgical suite.”

“Retail, in the classroom or showroom, is performance art.”

“People take technology for granted these days. What they want are warm, friendly products – something to seduce them.”

1. Empowerment – Give individuals at all levels of your organization more responsibility and power, especially those on the front lines. Focus on “the folks who actually do the work.” The supercharged corporation will rise or fall based on how much faith the people in charge have in the individuals they hire to teach, nurse, clean or build.
2. Virtual organizations – You don’t have to own all of the resources you want to use. Buy access to them when you need them.
3. Curious organizations – Innovation is imperative. Take chances. Hire daring, edgy people, even if they make you anxious. Try new inventions and ventures. Try again when those fail.
4. Leveraged knowledge – Gather and share information. Get the facts, but also try to understand the “psychology and sociology” that affect your firm and your customers.
5. Reengineering – Deflating your hierarchies is not as important as reexamining the way your company carries out its processes. Take advantage of any links among departments that might make your company’s efforts more linear and efficient. Avoid the paper chase that is usually part of reengineering.
6. Total Quality Management – The key word here is ‘quality.’ Your products should work without fail.

You and Your Employees

Recognition is a good way to promote better relationships with your employees. For example, don’t just phone someone to give a compliment. Sending a handwritten thank you note makes them feel that they have earned more of your personal regard. Other techniques for recognizing good work include giving awards or holding ceremonies to acknowledge achievements or celebrate the positive conclusion of a project.

Give praise and credit to everyone who earns it. When you are generous continually, you create an aura of altruism, which inspires people to behave in a more positive and supportive way. Generating this atmosphere is like collecting obligations that you can call in when you need support. Gather “small wins” and use them later. They build favors people will owe you. George Bush once campaigned around the United States to help numerous Republican candidates, even those running for low-status local positions. When the Republican primaries and the presidential election campaign came to those candidates’ states and hometowns, he called in his chips, and won the nomination and election.

Encourage the people in your company, whatever their background, to think of themselves as entrepreneurs. Treat them well. A little TLC goes a long way. Employees who are treated with respect are more likely to treat customers the same way. They will perform more professionally. Just smile. It will boost everyone’s spirits.

Be super-attentive to your employees. People often feel overlooked or ignored. They love it when you do little things to make them feel good, such as promptly returning their phone calls. This kind of attention helps people feel empowered and motivated. But don’t just do things for people. Let them do great things for themselves by removing impediments from their work, so they have the support to do their jobs well. Show your employees and peers that you are sincerely committed to mutual goals.

In business, you are on stage. Manage yourself the way you want to be perceived. What people perceive is what’s real to them. That’s why dressing for success works. There is a look and smell of power – cultivate your appearance to increase the power you project, and you’ll increase the power you have.

“...It’s the little stuff that torpedoes the big stuff. As one software pioneer put it: ‘How does a major project get to be a year late? One day at a time.’”

“In the age of e-mail, supercomputer power on the desktop, the Internet and the raucous global village, attentiveness – a token of human kindness – is the greatest gift we can give someone.”

“Your power is almost directly proportional to the thickness of your Rolodex, and the time you spend maintaining it. Put bluntly, the most potent people I’ve known have been the best networkers.”

“Diversity creates one and only one thing: opportunity.”

Practice your interviewing skills. If you have a number of people to interview – for instance, to track down a problem within the company – save your most critical interviews for last, and conduct them after you have a general idea of what’s happening.

Encouraging Your Unique Employees

Recognize each person’s uniqueness. The age of mass production is fading fast. Increasingly, companies should value individual knowledge, imagination, curiosity and talent. In today’s environment, your employees view your company as another tool for promoting their personal growth. Companies that take advantage of this instead of resisting it will have more motivated, loyal employees and fewer turnovers. Encourage employees by organizing their work into projects. Foster each person’s desire to create a special niche or career. Let employees select their career paths within the company.

To encourage initiative and productivity, cut down on the number of rules you issue. Avoid giving out lists of “don’ts” in your manual. Instead, give out “do” manuals. Keep rules and procedures as short as possible, so employees step up and take on more responsibility. Trust that their common sense will help them make good decisions. Most will welcome an opportunity to show initiative. Do not tell them how to deal with customers. Instead, instruct them to treat every customer as a unique human being. Encourage front-line employees to develop their own ways of relating to customers.

Keep your employees and customers well informed. People want information about problems. Keeping them in the dark will only antagonize them, whatever the news. When you are dealing with an issue or controversy, even telling people that you don’t have fresh news or that you don’t have useful information is better than not saying anything.

Where possible, use word of mouth to promote your services. Try giving away products for free. If people like them, they will talk about them and promote your brand.

Deliberately Design to Please the Market

To make your product or service more distinctive, pay attention to good design. It matters, even for everyday items, such as Rubbermaid bowls and Pentel pens. With good design, you can make almost any product or service a star, even in the world’s most competitive marketplaces. Always keep your design simple. Consider everything your company issues with design in mind. Design is the primary way to make your product, service or catalogue distinctive.

Good design, like innovation, is vital in keeping a product from becoming a commodity. When that happens, the product’s value goes down and people buy it at the lowest price they can find. Consumers are willing to pay more for good design, because it makes your product distinctive. Packaging also helps increase your product’s perceived value.

For instance, a company that sold \$500 laser components had been using ordinary plastic bags to package its high-tech product. When the company repackaged the components in an attractive vacuum-sealed container with a gold label, more parts sold at higher prices, because the component’s perceived value increased. You can make any product or service special – even parking cars. One company created a “Passion for Parking” newsletter that kept customers informed and interested.

Work Like a Rock Star

Find ways to make your employees stand out. De-Mar, a plumbing company, turned its workers into Service Advisers. It required its employees to conform to a grooming code

“The difference between great and average or lousy in any job is, mostly, having the imagination and zeal to recreate yourself daily.”

“You CAN get away with all sorts of crap when things are going well – resist the temptation, because it’ll come back to haunt you (or worse) when things go sour (as they will).”

and to take Dale Carnegie courses. De-Mar trained its employees in a juiced-up, revival meeting environment to get them excited about their work.

Unfortunately, many companies split employees into two tracks: one for future managers and one for individual contributors, and they don’t sufficiently reward either set for being innovative. Often, inventor types are pushed out of the corporate mainstream. That discourages innovation. Instead, treat your innovators like sports heroes, because they bring increased value to your company.

Planning can only go so far. In today’s rapidly changing environment, greet disruptions with bold strategies. Use inconsistencies or surprises to create “Wow!” ideas. Surprise can motivate employees and delight customers.

New Boss on the Planet: The Coming Influence of Asia

To compete over the long range as a company owner or manager, make yourself knowledgeable about the global economic environment. Asia is particularly crucial. As it makes more use of its size, population, strength and money, Asia will exert its will over the financial well-being of the rest of the globe. To learn more about the growing influence of Asia first hand, consider taking a trip to one of the nations that is a key player in the Asian economy, most notably Thailand, Japan, China or Malaysia. India is also gaining in economic strength. Asia is the enticing, resource rich, nearly new frontier of this century. Your company’s future will be shaped by how it responds to the challenges Asia presents.

Trade and foreign investment in all of these countries is growing rapidly. At the same time, an increasing number of companies in Asia and elsewhere are adapting and using U.S. mechanisms and techniques. They are deploying these approaches at a relatively low expense to make goods that resemble U.S. products, and to sell them at lower prices. They are catching up, and their employees are taking more jobs away from U.S. workers, through either outsourcing or competition. To withstand this onslaught, companies in the United States must compete even more strongly and must not respond with fear. Though the decline of U.S. commerce is a distinct possibility, it doesn’t have to happen.

In responding to this growing global competitiveness, business owners and managers must recognize the differences among people and adapt our products, services and ways of relating accordingly. For example, U.S. society tends to be oriented toward achievement and planning for the future, while other societies – such as some Hispanic and Asian cultures – may put a higher priority on family and personal history. Embrace diversity. Regard it as an opportunity that will bring increased creativity into your organization. Help your employees become more sensitive about how they use language, make jokes and otherwise relate to people from different cultures. Build awareness of cultural diversity in your organization. Encourage sensitivity and communication by holding a diversity training session as a forum where employees can discuss their experiences and perspectives.

About The Author

Tom Peters is a management consultant whose books include *In Search of Excellence* (with Robert H. Waterman, Jr.), *A Passion for Excellence* (with Nancy Austin), *Thriving on Chaos*, *Liberation Management* and *The Tom Peters Seminar*. He is the founder and chief executive of the Tom Peters Group in Palo Alto, California.