

TALES FROM THE TOP

Ten Crucial Questions from the World's #1 Executive Coach

GRAHAM ALEXANDER



NELSON BUSINESS
A Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers
Since 1798

www.thomasnelson.com

INTRODUCTION

WHAT WILL I GET OUT OF THIS BOOK?

The way you see yourself shapes your life. How you define life determines your destiny. Your perspective will influence how you invest your time, spend your money, use your talents and value your relationships. We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.—ANAIS NIN

Leaders are operating under a microscope, with every move called into question. In the course of more than twenty-five years spent coaching roughly thirty thousand of the world's top CEOs, senior executives, and high-performing teams in more than two hundred companies, I've never seen a more intense, pressure-filled time.

Clearly, leaders are looking for answers.

I learned early on that asking the right questions is the best way to help people find the right answers. The C-suite executives I work with don't need or want an extreme makeover. Indeed, most are already successful, but like top athletes they recognize that they can always improve their game.

This book is packed with the key insights, battlefield lessons, and wisdom I've gleaned from my unique position as confidant and

INTRODUCTION

coach to leaders of some of the world's best-known companies. I know what their problems are, and I'm hired to help solve them.

I encourage you to think of this book as a mirror. It's meant to be used as a launching pad to get you rocketing forward into the stratosphere of the best of the best.

In these pages, I'll share with you the lessons learned by others and the common pitfalls that I have seen over and over again in the world's boardrooms and executive suites. I'll also provide many practices and specifics that you can easily implement in your work and personal life.

You may have known the answers to many of the questions I pose in this book at one time in your career. What I often find in my one-on-one sessions, however, is that the certainty of those answers has been lost amidst the frenetic pace of everyday work life.

The average CEO of a large corporation makes \$2.5 million annually. You cannot afford to have many wrong answers at that level. I can promise you the investment you make in the self-examination that this book will spark will be well worth your time. Indeed, my clients typically report a 20 to 40 percent savings of their time, and they credit our work with yielding at least ten times their initial investment in coaching. You should be able to read this book in the course of a plane ride. I promise you that it will be time well spent.

1

WHAT'S LIFE ALL ABOUT FOR YOU?

“I have never discussed this with anyone else.” I cannot count the number of times that sentence has come out of the mouths of CEOs and managing directors running multimillion-dollar companies. Thus, I have spent many thousands of hours listening to the dreams, doubts, fears, strengths, weaknesses, difficulties, dilemmas, and stresses of life at the top.

The key to self-development and operating at your peak is openness and honesty. The pent up yearning for a confidant that I've encountered in the executive suite leads me to believe that leaders rarely let their guards down—even with themselves.

To get the most out of this book, you'll have to work hard to complete the exercises and give serious thought to the questions I ask. Most importantly, you must strive to be completely honest in your answers—at the very least with yourself.

MILLION-DOLLAR QUESTION:

What are you hiding?

Oftentimes I've found that people have areas of their lives that they simply choose to ignore—because they think the situations are hopeless or they are in denial or they are just plain too busy. Sometimes

TALES FROM THE TOP

we aren't even aware of the real issues we should be addressing in our lives. All of us have difficulty seeing ourselves clearly. In many cases, your blind spot is the critical block between the life you have and the one to which you aspire.

What are you avoiding looking at? What are you afraid to share? The sooner you get that topic on the table, the better.

Here is a sampling of the common issues leaders whom I have coached are grappling with and have been hesitant or fearful to address:

- Feeling the job is all-consuming and the rest of life is on hold—or worse
- Having concerns about life outside of work (common areas of concern are relationship with family, lack of fitness, and love life)
- Experiencing insecurity and doubts about how they are viewed by others
- Sorting out interpersonal difficulties on a team
- Wanting to do something in the business but shackled by commitments to shareholder value
- Having time pressure of a two- to three-year opportunity to “make it”
- Being overly concerned about dealing with the media (feeling they ultimately can't win)
- Figuring out what is the best use of their time. Where do they

WHAT'S LIFE ALL ABOUT FOR YOU?

add the most value? Feeling they get “sucked into” lots of activities

- Wanting to change the company culture, which isn't high performing, but not knowing how
- Worrying that they are not using technology effectively (they grew up in a non-technological age)
- Worrying about their relationship with their boss, the chairman of the board, or the board of directors
- Understanding how they come across one-on-one or working in a group; how they compare to others in similar positions
- Dealing with underperforming team members—especially if the poor performer is someone the leader has known a long time
- Lacking people skills and concern about how it's affecting their leadership
- Understanding a new management style
- Deciding next career move or what to do after retirement
- At the deepest level, it's a question of meaning: life is going past in a blur, and they are completely exhausted and not that happy. *Is it worth it?*

All of these are important topics that require examination. However, they often go unaddressed for months or years, or they are never addressed at all—at dire cost to both business and personal lives.