



Commanding Excellence: Inspiring Purpose, Passion, and Ingenuity through Leadership that Matters

Gary Morton

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Truly engaging people is not about commanding them to do something; it is about getting them to command themselves to do it. West Point distinguished graduate Gary Morton knows how to deliver exceptional results while doing just that. As a platoon leader and tank commander in Army Task Force 4-68 and, later, as a young vice president at medical device manufacturer Stryker, Morton learned under two legendary leaders who, despite different styles, followed nearly the same steps to achieve results most considered unattainable.

In only a year, Task Force 4-68's commander, Lt. Colonel Alfred L. Dibella, turned one of the Army's poorest performing units into the most lethal, combat-ready task force in the US Army. In simulated-combat missions at the grueling National Training Center, Dibella's task force defeated the constantly triumphant OPFOR in every battle. This feat has never been repeated. Generals and commanders at every level sought to understand how this unit did the impossible.

When John W. Brown became CEO of Stryker, it was a boutique medical device firm with a few innovative products and \$17 million in sales. Under Brown's extraordinary leadership it evolved into a \$4 billion market leader feared by competitors and highly regarded by healthcare professionals. Stryker accomplished this remarkable run by securing 20-percent earnings growth every quarter, every year—for twenty-eight years. Again, this is a feat experts believed unachievable.

By explaining the ingredients of these two leaders' secret sauce, Morton lays the foundation for current and future leaders to ensure their own teams excellence.

Commanding Excellence: Inspiring Purpose, Passion, and Ingenuity through Leadership that Matters Details

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Author : Gary Morton

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From Reader Review Commanding Excellence: Inspiring Purpose, Passion, and Ingenuity through Leadership that Matters for online ebook

John says

Commanding Excellence book review by John O'Brien, MD

First-time author Gary Morton was involved in/played key roles in 2 “impossible” experiences:

- His military unit (Task Force 4-68 Armor, commanded by LTC Fred Dibella) going a perfect 9-0 during “force-on-force” battles versus the incredibly advantaged “Opposing Forces”/OPFOR at the National Training Center, an accomplishment never done before or since
- His corporate medical device manufacturing company (Stryker Medical, led by CEO John Brown) achieving 20% growth every quarter, every year for 28 years, exceeding the performance of even Microsoft and Berkshire Hathaway

I feel that I can verify how amazingly these units performed due to my background as a former Infantry Officer who has since become an Army physician. The National Training Center endeavors to give units an experience worse than what they will likely ever experience in combat, with the expectation that your unit will learn “through their defeats”. Stryker has taken the medical device world by storm, with various products now preferred in all areas of most American hospitals.

In this book, not only was Mr. Morton a key player in the success of the 2 “impossibly triumphant” organizations, but he was also able to distill the common factors that led to these outcomes.

How were these organizations able to perform at such an unprecedented level? What were the common factors created by the leaders of these organizations?

Gary developed a new framework to encapsulate the reasons for these organizations’ success:

1. Absolute Clarity of Purpose
2. Empowered Obsession
3. Unleashed Creativity

Absolute Clarity of Purpose: Both LTC Dibella and John Brown made their goals crystal clear: “9-0 at NTC” and “20% growth”. The key to their success was the simplicity of the goal AND the fanatical focus of everyone throughout the organization. Every action that was congruent with the goal was supported, every person in each organization knew the goal and knew how to prioritize all actions that moved toward the goal. This clarity was essential in removing much of the “office politics” that many companies struggle to overcome.

Empowered Obsession: Gary’s summary needs no adjustment: “Most respected leaders work determinedly toward accomplishing key objectives, and demonstrate serious effort in the process. Dibella and Brown did this at an entirely different level... They displayed an obsession that few could ever attempt to match. BUT it was not only their personal fervor that led to such extraordinary results; it was their ability to spread a similar passion throughout their organizations. By empowering individuals and entrusting them with authority and autonomy, they spread the obsession into every level. For the many captivated by the process, we felt deep personal ownership of the goal and knew our actions were absolutely essential to attaining it.”

Unleashing Creativity: Achieving extreme levels of performance required relentless innovation in multiple parts of the organization simultaneously. Three consistent elements were needed:

- a. Through personal involvement, leaders created environments of direct, honest, open communication that elevated ideas on the basis of the idea's merits. Challenging the status quo was not only permitted but encouraged.
- b. Champions of ideas could find resources for experimentation. These organizations' did not have a "magic pool" of assets; time, money and other resources were precious commodities. For an idea to obtain these resources, it had to have champions, weeding out lukewarm commitments. High accountability was expected of champions, but there was also high tolerance for failure. Both leaders exhibited considerable understanding for mistakes of the MIND, but little for mistakes of the HEART.
- c. Pervasive organizational mindset: the organization's members at ALL levels worked to constantly improve; many of the most important innovations arose out of relentless energy poured into making systems, processes or products just a little better every day.

Gary shares fascinating stories to illustrate his points, and I enjoyed learning how ingenuity overcame every obstacle on each organization's path to the top.

I recently completed a review for Greg McKeown's top-selling book *Essentialism, the Disciplined Pursuit of Less*. The book outlines a minimalist approach to tasks and obligations by focusing on truly important goals in learning to turn down opportunities that do not directly contribute to meeting those goals. If you liked that book, Gary's book provides 2 of the best examples of Essentialism that I have ever seen.

Can we replicate this environment? You would need the unwavering support of "higher HQ leaders" in the military or the Company's Board of Directors, and the passionate dedicated leadership of leaders at all levels...if you can get this level of commitment, *Commanding Excellence* provides an amazing blueprint for creating an unparalleled organizational culture necessary for unlimited success!

Gary Morton says

"*Commanding Excellence* accurately portrays an insider's view from someone who knows all the agony, pain, and triumph from living through the gyrations of a Stryker experience. It intimately relates how to be competitive and how to win."

--John W. Brown, former chairman, president, and CEO Stryker Corporation

"When I look back on those magical, almost mythical days, I obviously do so through my own personal memory reticle as does Gary Morton and every other man who served in that special combat unit. But what Gary does so beautifully in this book is combine all our reticles into one giant aperture, then analyze the reminiscences, and, finally, distill them down into a handful of precious categories. No one else I know has both the boots-on-the-ground expertise and the intellectual and literary skills to do that. Then he does the same thing with John Brown's Stryker."

Col(Ret) Alfred L. Dibella Jr., former commander of undefeated Task Force 4-68

"*Commanding Excellence* highlights three simple proven concepts that are critical to success of a unit in combat or a business in the marketplace. Gary Morton has captured them perfectly. If you want success as a leader in a complex environment read *Commanding Excellence* and follow it!"

--General Bryan "Doug" Brown, US Army, Retired; former commander of US Special Operations Command (SOCOM)

"I've had the good fortune to experience the leadership impact of John Brown firsthand. Without question, Gary captures John's wisdom, clear direction, and unrelenting focus on results. Anyone who wants to understand the fundamentals of successful leadership needs to read this thought-provoking comparison of two inspiring leaders."

--Jim "Coach" Heath, former President, Stryker Instruments

"A compelling read. Based on his personal experience, Gary Morton has analyzed two remarkable organizations and two equally remarkable leaders and served up a timeless story of leadership and how to accomplish that which is seemingly out of reach. If you are a leader or want to be one, this is Leadership 101 and 102."

--General Scott Wallace, US Army, Retired; former commander of US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and, in 2003, V Corps, which comprised the main axis of advance from Kuwait to Baghdad

"Convincing a team to believe in a vision takes sponsorship, commitment, and strong leadership. Commanding Excellence demonstrates how to create a culture that everyone commits to from the boardroom to the battlefield. A must-read for anyone who works in a goal-oriented environment."

--Dave Jones, former Sr Vice President for Holiday Inn, created and launched Homewood Suites and Embassy Suites, President and CEO of the Hospitality division for Gaylord Entertainment

"Gary Morton hits the target in showing how two men took disparate, ordinary entities and lifted them to world-class excellence. Commanding Excellence is a primer on leadership. You'll see how these extraordinary men with vision, professionalism, charisma, intelligence, and integrity established operating environments that made their men and women buy into the established goals, take them as their own, and truly set the standards for their fields. Their personal dedication and drive coupled with their unquestioned respect for those who worked with and for them led to a tremendous force multiplier for one tank battalion and a medical manufacturing company. Teamwork is what made it all work, and Gary Morton, who saw it firsthand in both outfits, is the perfect one to tell the story of attained excellence. Read this outstanding story, and see how truly superb outfits can be formed and operate."

--Lieutenant General Tom Griffin, US Army, Retired; former commander of Berlin Brigade and 3rd Armored Division

"Gary Morton delivers innovative leadership lessons with entertaining insider stories that I wish I had access to when I started Ensign. If you want to win, read Commanding Excellence and see the power of human energy and creativity focused on a common goal."

--Josh Manion, founder and CEO of Ensign and FIDE chess International Master

"Morton witnessed firsthand and has clearly described two examples of extraordinarily effective leadership in two entirely different types of organizations. The author captured specific examples of and portrayed keen insight into effective leaders solving common organizational problems and achieving unique results. The serious student of leadership will complete this entertaining and informative narrative with a handful of practical ideas and would gain even more with repeated study."

--Major General Richard E. Davis, US Army, Retired

"Many books have been penned about leadership. Commanding Excellence stands out as the best in its approach to define leadership skills and techniques. Morton parallels his experiences as a member of an extraordinary military unit as well as a successful company. His experiences as a team member gave him

extraordinary examples of successful leaders. This book is a must-read and highly recommended for those seeking excellence in both personal and team leadership."

--Lanny R. Copeland, MD, former President of the American Academy of Family Physicians and Chief Medical Officer for LifePoint Health

"Commanding Excellence reveals the secret sauce to building an organizational passion that wholeheartedly supports those closest to the customer in a business or those on the front lines in a military unit. Such alignment drives astounding success. If you want to deliver exceptional results at any level in an organization, pick up and read this powerful book!"

--Paul Speigelman, author of New York Times bestseller Patients Come Second, 2010 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year, founder and CEO of BerylHealth

Tracy says

Awesome book - highly recommend it!

Kristen says

Not your typical book on leadership. I wish it focused more on the leaders themselves rather than the history of the two organizations.

Kathleen says

This book is a solid good read for those in leadership positions and those who wish to perform in more of a leadership role regardless of their current capacity. Gary Morton's book addresses the specifics of what made two particular leaders so useful to their charges. I have less than zero interest in anything having to do with warfare, but could still read his examples to garner the effects of this methodology. He tells of a very limited agenda which was applied to all aspects of the companies. In other words, these men chose what was important and had their people strive for it. They chose a few goal statements and carried them out. The way they went about this encouraged innovation and enthusiasm. If you have interest in achieving excellence in some aspect of your life, perhaps this book has some ideas in it for you.

(I received this book in a goodreads giveaway.)

Christina says

Short version:

Highly recommend. Will be purchasing more copies in the future to give to colleagues in the business of health care. "Hybrid historical business book"

Long version:

I was attracted to this book because I work as a frontline clinician in a hospital environment, with some administrative work trying to achieve the impossible: driving superior patient experience. I had viewed a presentation at a conference a couple of years ago about patient centered design at Stryker.

Commanding Excellence promised to tell two stories. The book would give me a deeper understanding of medical device manufacturing company Stryker and Mr Morton's prior experience in Army Task force 4-68. At the same time, I was hoping for some encouragement and practical tools (to elevate my group's performance In my own unrelated business).

I thought it would be a business book - like "Good to Great" for example. It would be more accurate to describe it as a hybrid - a "historical business book." It goes into detail about the history of Stryker over the years.

Reading the first several chapters inspired me to ask myself "What can I do to provide more clarity of purpose to my team? To provide a playbook to help my team?" Much could be gained from simply reading the first half of the book.

The latter half of the book took some effort to finish. There were a few times when I thought illustrations might help me better understand what Mr. Morton was talking about. I have no military background. I do not work in manufacturing. I was seeking to appreciate these worlds, but there were some things lost in translation.

I am grateful to Mr Morton for enlightening me in his work.

I received an Advanced Reader's Copy in exchange for an honest review. This motivated me to finish reading as soon as possible, but did not impact my rating of the work.

Kim Caudill says

Quit half way through. Would not recommend

Alex says

Very interesting in read about the lessons of how changes in team structure, hammering home expectations, and reprioritizing day to day priorities enabled a team to go 9-0 against Opfor in an Army war games exercise - lessons applicable for a team leader of any sort. But the lessons outlined by the author later in civilian life at Stryker seemed less clear and less applicable.

Ian yarington says

Wow! What a good book! Military books of all kinds, be it command and leadership like this, or be it strategy or history, I'm almost always intrigued. What drives men of war and men that lead them is almost

always relevant in real life as well. Some of the themes of the book are clear military themes, like focusing on purpose etc... but the way Morton lays it out in the book is very fun to read.

Sharon says

I won this book as part of a Goodreads Giveaway. I enjoyed both the military and business narratives. The key lessons learned/observed were solid advice. However, the method for learning the advice is really via the stories and not actionable tips. The detail in the stories was somewhat hard to follow (if you don't have background with the Army or Stryker). I really enjoyed the Gallop strength-finder discussion but it was just part of the detail in various of the stories, so it was hard to pull out advice. My frame for reading this was a leadership advice book, but I would have enjoyed it more if I instead thought of it as a memoir.

Kwang Wei Long says

The ideas presented in the book are honestly not revolutionary but they make a good theme.

1. Absolute Clarity of Purpose.
2. Empowered Obsession.
3. Unleashing Creativity.

The experience sharing is thorough but the book lacks an action plan.

The author is basically recounting and dissecting his experience in these exceptional organization but it does not differentiate with how many million companies out there who are adopting similar ideas but fail to make the cut.

It's a good to read if you are free book but nothing ground shaking or deep insights that i can gather for my own use beyond these ideas.

PS: Author final request at the end of the book is a little shameless.

Sherrie Pilkington says

I won this book in a Goodreads Giveaway

Commanding Excellence is a book on leadership told through the author's experiences in the military and working for Stryker. What's great about this book is that it really clarifies the importance of simplicity of purpose, getting everyone on board with that purpose, and building creativity around the purpose. Since it's told through examples, and not statistics, it's very easy to relate it to situations you might experience in your own work. There isn't anything ground breaking in this book, the way it's presented is refreshing and pleasant to read. All in all, I'd recommend this to anyone looking to be a more effective manager.

Karri Wright says

I received a free copy of this book through the Goodreads Giveaways. I really wanted to enjoy this book and learn from it, but I really struggled with it. I think the military references were just not my cup of tea. I do think the insights shared are good, it was just really a difficult read for me personally. I believe others would enjoy it, however, particularly those with any type of military background.

Ms. Reader says

I received this book from Goodreads First Reads in exchange for an honest review...

A good, solid read. Interesting and unique, well-thought out and well-written. Strongly recommended.
