

# Surrounded by **Geniuses**

## PREFACE

Greetings and welcome to Surrounded by Geniuses, a book about the real potential that each of us, and the companies and organizations we work in, have to accomplish new and brilliant things...even if we haven't ever done them before.

To set the stage, let me start with a couple of essential questions—asking questions is at the heart of this book and what it takes to unlock new ideas and deliver greater value to customers.

- **First**—How many times have you arrived at work, exchanged greetings with your colleagues, had a conversation at the coffee pot or water cooler, attended a meeting or two and then sat down at your desk overcome by the incredible feeling that you were **surrounded by geniuses**? If you're like most people the answer is “never.” In fact, when asked in a large group, this simple question causes most people in companies and organizations to laugh hysterically.

- **Second**—How many times have you left work, climbed into your car or boarded a bus or train, then looked around and been struck with an awesome sense that you were **surrounded by a world of geniuses and brilliant ideas**? If you're like most people and companies caught up in the pressures and routines of day-to-day life the answer is also “never.” In fact, as you head out for the journey home you're more likely to see a world filled with aggressive drivers, total (or partial) idiots and mindless advertisements than sources of great inspiration.

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Yet as funny as these two questions might sound, they are at the heart of what it takes for companies and organizations of all kinds to innovate, grow and succeed in difficult times. In a world that constantly rewards new and better ideas, we must all find ways to consistently deliver greater value to the customers and stakeholders we choose to serve. And we can only do this by unlocking the everyday genius in ourselves, our co-workers and partners and the places we call home for the majority of our waking hours. It sounds like a very tall order. But it's hardly impossible. In fact, our work with leading organizations in many industries over the past 20 years has shown that all of us have the ability—under the right circumstances—to make a real difference in small and large ways. Not by doing business as usual or by sitting around a conference table brainstorming until a breakthrough occurs or our brains explode. But by working together to tackle the world around us head on and seeing it as a place already filled with brilliant ideas, unlimited sources of inspiration and endless possibilities that can be used to transform our companies, organizations, the lives of our customers and even ourselves.

This straightforward notion is the heart of this book. And the implications are staggering. It suggests that the world we all share is very different than the one we shared even ten years ago, and the one that most business thinking is still based on. In today's world not only is the inspiration to do remarkable things everywhere, but all of us have access to essentially the same knowledge, every company has a real chance to win even if it wasn't winning before, every employee has the ability to make a real difference even if they haven't done so before, and the most curious and curiously creative people and organizations will likely be the ones that survive. Welcome to a world in which we are all literally and figuratively *surrounded by geniuses!*

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So the challenge we all face is very different than we might have imagined. And the reason for optimism should be much greater. With the possible exception of those relatively rare fields in which a high level of specialized technical expertise is an essential part of the equation, most companies and organizations will sink or swim based on their

ability to reinvent the experience they deliver to their customers. And the insight and inspiration to do that are all around us. So stop laughing and round up the geniuses you work with. It's time to get off our bottoms and head out on a journey—or ten journeys—to the future of customer and business success...

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