

EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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Bigger Faster Leadership

THE NUTSHELL

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Introduction

Business executives, pastors, and leaders of nonprofits all want their organizations to have greater size and speed. The history and effectiveness of the Panama Canal is a metaphor that gives us a fresh way to think about leading our organizations. Most issues that determine real success are always about systems and structures.

Chapter 1: How Do You Define the Need?

Leaders of organizations often tell me they're not happy with their size and speed, but they keep doing the same things repeatedly hoping the results will magically change the next time. Instead, they need to step back to analyze their systems and structures. If they improve these, size and speed almost inevitably follow.

Chapter 2: How Do You Handle Colossal Failure?

When the numbers turn down, when unexpected setbacks happen, or when conflict ravages an organization, some leaders immediately try to put the best face on it. But plenty of people know it's not the truth, so the leader begins to lose an organization's most valuable commodity which is the people's trust.

Chapter 3: Where Do You Find Fresh Passion and Purpose?

When we experience significant setbacks, we may wonder if the dream is dead. Recasting the new vision is usually more challenging than

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casting the original one. Disappointment is a harsh reality, but it doesn't help to focus on the past. A clear picture of the future helps people stay positive, and it soothes their recurring anxieties.

Chapter 4: How Do You Craft the Right Plan?

A big vision usually starts with the primary leader, like Roosevelt's bold commitment to succeed. A compelling vision, though, remains only an inspiring strategic concept until the leader involves competent people in the tactical planning to make it happen.

Chapter 5: What's in Your Suitcase?

When I pack for a trip, I look at the weather report at my destination. If I'm going to Chicago in January, I pack very differently than if I'm going to San Antonio in August. If I unpack your organizational suitcase, what will I find? Are you packed for where your organization has been since the nineteenth century, are you packed for today, or are you packed for your future?

Chapter 6: You Didn't Expect This, Did You?

In 1904 Roosevelt assigned Colonel William Gorgas to fumigate the Canal Zone. Every swamp had to be sprayed regularly to kill mosquitoes and their eggs and larvae. Leaders have mosquito problems too. In every organization, "mosquitoes" create fear and distrust, distract people from their tasks, and can wreck the whole endeavor.

Chapter 7: How Do You Handle Opposition?

Sooner or later, every grand, bold vision encounters significant opposition. When we're under the strain of resistance and ridicule, we often choose exactly the wrong solution. We need a better answer. We need to take time to step back, gain some perspective, and go deeper into our source of security and significance.

Chapter 8: How Can You Make Your Systems Hum?

Churches, businesses, and nonprofit organizations aren't the armed forces, but one of the principles we might learn from military culture is that turning a blind eye to incompetence or a bad attitude inevitably leads to disaster down the road. It's never a mystery who needs to be let go and replaced in any organization.

Chapter 9: How Can You Utilize People with Different Talents?

If we value diversity, we'll want people on our teams who have perspectives and backgrounds that are different from our own. Look for men and women whose eyes light up when you talk about the need and the vision, people who have confidence in God and in themselves and people who aren't afraid to ask hard questions and explore new ways of getting things done.

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Chapter 10: How Can You Produce Creative Tension?

When I talk to leaders after an important meeting, I ask, “How was your meeting?” Some of them respond by shaking their heads and saying, “Not too good. It was tense.” I want to shout, “That’s great!” The ability to embrace and use tension is one of the best tools in the leader’s toolbox to widen the canal to provide more size and speed for the organization.

Chapter 11: Does It Ever End?

The Panama Canal operated beautifully after it was opened, but it required constant maintenance. Some emerging leaders believe that if they can ever achieve their grand plans for growth, they can then hit the autopilot button and coast to ever-higher levels of size and speed. Wiser leaders know it doesn’t work that way.

Chapter 12: What’s the Next Big Dream?

In our organizations, our task is to bridge the divide between what is and what might be, to bring meaning to those to have lost hope, to bring value to people who want a better life, and to make human connections richer and more meaningful. Our work as leaders is no less than this, and our challenge is much like the one faced by those who looked at the jungles of Panama and wondered, “Can we really do this?” They answered, “Yes, we can.”