

QUEST FOR YOUR BEST:

A Road Map to Excellence in Challenging Times

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Good enough isn't good enough anymore. Advances in technology today have raised the bar on what's possible. In order to stay competitive, organizations are focused on being their "best" more than ever before. The best in customer service; the best in quality; the best in teamwork; the best in professional skills. Why?

During the past two decades, we've learned the price of short-range planning, the down side of the quick-buck, and the dangers of deception. Fortunately we've responded to the wake-up call by recognizing the need for change and to pay attention to what needs fixing - broken or not.

What does it mean to be "The Best?"

The best means to excel above all others. It means to be the most productive, the most effective, and offering the most value to the greater good. Can you imagine an organization with every individual working at their best—a force of people who excel above all others, with the ability to produce the greatest value to the most number of people? Can you imagine an entire nation of people working at being their best? An entire world?

Do you dare to believe that *you* could be and have the best in life?

What would it take?

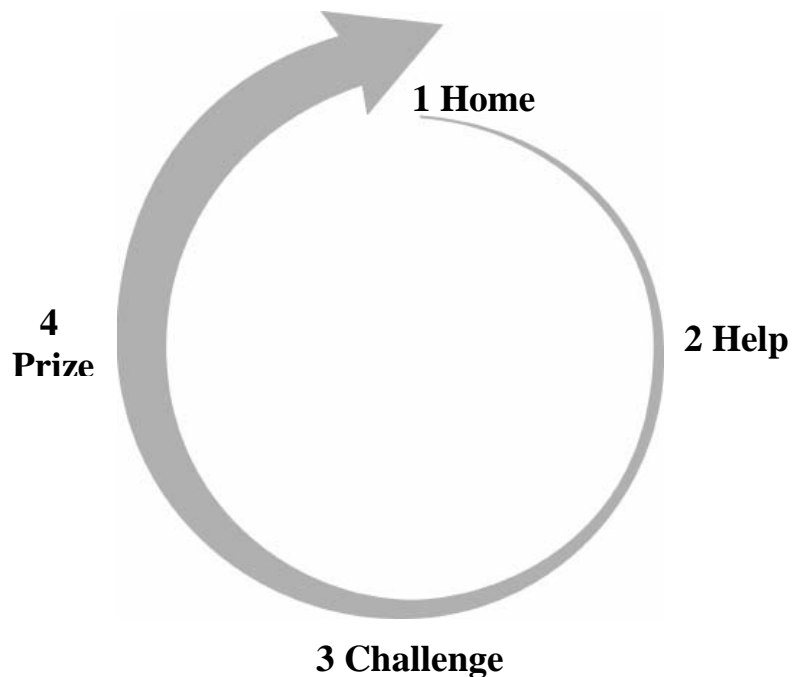
There is a map that will take us there. If life is journey, then we need a map with which to find our way. Some say there are many roads. I believe it is one road, traveled in an infinite number of ways. Some people experience extraordinary journeys that provide all the riches life has to offer, while others are left wondering what they even are.

A journey, extraordinary or simple, becomes a *quest* when we specifically *look* for something, as in searching for the meaning of life, adventures, a sense of purpose, or something tangible like new territories, or in the business world – increased profits. To "quest for your best" then, simply means going on a journey that allows you to seek excellence for the purpose of

providing the greatest value to others. Our country was founded on a simple principle: that we all have a vested interest in helping others get what they want. The more we help others, the better *our* own lives will be.

The journey we take on the road to excellence forms an ever-expanding four-stage spiral. We begin stage one of the journey from a place I call “Home.” Home is our comfort zone, a place of security. Literally and figuratively, it’s a place of rest to recharge our batteries and sooth our weary bodies. But Home also provides a time and place for asking questions to assess our current situation. Who am I? What do I want? Where am I going? How can I create successful outcomes? These are just a few of the questions we might ask while in our comfort zone. Questions help to form a vision of what’s possible. The clearer our vision, the more likely we are to achieve that result. The more dissatisfied we become over our situation, the more likely we are to leave the comfort zone. In fact, people leave Home for one of two reasons: 1) to gain something new, or 2) to recover something that’s been lost, and we do it willingly or unwillingly. Getting drafted by the army—unwillingly. Enlisting in the arming—willingly. Getting married? It depends!

Four Stages for Achieving Your Best



If we decide to leave our comfort zone in search of a change for the better, we move clockwise along the rim of our spiral to the second stage of the journey called “Help.” Ideally we are not

alone in our quest. Help comes in the form of training, role models, mentors, coaches, brochures, tools, or any other “helping” resource. This is the critical stage that’s often either bypassed or discounted. The more help we gain, the more fully we’re prepared for the next critical stage of the journey.

Continuing clockwise along the map, we enter the testing stage of the journey called the “Challenge.” This is the moment of truth—the ultimate test of our powers and skills. Some see challenges as opportunities, and that’s what they are if faced with positive expectancy. Expect that you will succeed and you’ll find your determination will pull you in that direction. The tools, training, empowering attitude, and other reinforcements gained in the Help stage will determine the outcome of our test.

Once we’ve confronted the challenge, we continue clockwise to the next stage called the “Prize.” This is where we collect the rewards of our hard effort. If we make the sale, realize our vision, achieve our goal, we celebrate. If we don’t, we evaluate. We get feedback and find the learning experiences that can take some of the pain out of the disappointment. There is always a gain if we look hard enough. Some of the best prizes in life are *surprises*—the ones you didn’t go looking for. Serendipity is the gift of finding valuable gifts—not sought for. You might have going looking for one result, but found one of even greater value.

Collecting the gains from our journey is energizing and it’s how we evolve to being our best. We cannot grow, learn, or improve, until we leave behind the old ways and test ourselves in the open. Once we’ve reached the Prize stage however, it’s important not to linger too long. We must bring our prizes back Home and share them with others. Everyone then benefits from the efforts of the seeker. The more we give away to others, the more we get back in return. The spiraling map truly demonstrates the old adage: “What goes around comes around.” *You will get everything you want, when you increase your contribution to others.*

The map we’ve followed will show you the way to your goals. Like any map, you will never feel lost. We are either in our comfort zone at Home, getting or giving Help, facing a Challenge, or collecting a Prize from the effort. The process takes us all to the places we seek-- fulfillment, achievement, meaning, and a sense of contribution to worthwhile causes.

The Quest for Your Best road map has evolved over the course of civilization. Its origins are rooted in mythology, for the map traces the classic heroic journey. Heroes are the ones who elevate us all to a better life. They are the ones who bring out the best in themselves and others. They give us a model by which to measure our own lives. We don't build monuments to worship the

exceptional life. We build them to remind us of what is possible in our own. They inspire us to realize new heights in our development.

In my work in personal and professional skill development, I've discovered that the process of leaving, getting help, facing a challenge, and reaping rewards, is the same process used in many other applications. It is the same process used in leadership development, problem solving, risk taking, change management, personal development, professional development, spiritual evolution, scientific methodology, the learning cycle, team building, customer service, and the sales cycle.

The language changes, but the process remains the same. There is always:

1. Home: a starting point and a time of assessment/vision
2. Help: a need for gaining or giving knowledge, training, skill development, and creating an action plan.
3. Challenge: the test of the plan and the skills—the moment of truth.
4. Prize: a time to evaluate, get feedback, and celebrate the outcomes of the journey

The process begins again when we return Home to a new, *evolved* starting place. Home will never look the same, for the traveler will have evolved to the next *best level*. S/he will be a wiser, improved version of their personal best. There will still be things to do, traffic to sit in, calls to make, and papers to push, but the person who follows the cycle of the map will feel more joyful and fulfilled. T.S. Eliot once wrote, *We must not cease from exploration and at the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we began and to know the place for the first time.*

When we follow the map, we become that heroic, extraordinary person who excels and rises above the normal and average person. These are the people who are worthy of attention and respect. This is the person who faces a challenge, willingly or unwillingly, and s/he does it either to gain something new or recover something that's been lost. This person draws from deep within their own natural resources in facing the challenge. Sometimes it comes at great personal sacrifice, but the challenge is faced because their community, loved ones, or very life depends upon it. There are no winners or losers in this. *Everyone benefits* from the simple act of facing the challenge. This is the person who brings back or produces what is the greatest value to others.

The paradox of the journey is that the *biggest* challenge is not out there in the world at large as we might think. The real journey we take is inside ourselves. The ultimate quest we take in life is the search for ourselves, our purpose, and meaning. When we have the courage to take risks by leaving what is known, getting help, and facing a challenge, our biggest prize is not the sale, not

the plaque, not the trip to Hawaii. The real prize is self-knowledge, wisdom, illumination, revelations, exhilaration, self-esteem, confidence and most of all—the truth.

This whole thing is about getting unstuck—never staying in any one stage too long, and feeling at Home in all stages of the journey. The map provides grounding in that process. We always know where we are, and what the next stage will be. The journey is about eliminating fear, setting ourselves free, and enjoying the riches of life through giving our best.

Everyday, we are invited to be our best. But sometimes we get tired, distracted, disillusioned, and maybe even cynical, but our best awaits. When we follow the map, our Prize will be a connection to humanity that we never knew existed, and it will elevate us so high that any previous version of ourselves will seem small. The simple fact is that everyday, each of us is given a chance to make a contribution, and by waking up to that potential and acting on it, together we connect and elevate the world to the best it can be.

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