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# The Adventure of Leadership

An  
Unorthodox  
Business Guide

**HAP KLOPP**

with Brian Tarcy

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## THE ADVENTURE OF LEADERSHIP

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To businesses that are fun,  
To adventures not yet begun.



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To all of you I say a heartfelt thanks.

—HK



# PREFACE



I am in love with the extraordinary. The company I founded, The North Face of Berkeley, California, epitomized this passion. I started the company in 1968, two years after receiving my MBA from Stanford. From the beginning The North Face—a maker of quality outdoor equipment for mountaineers, backpackers, skiers, and professional adventurers—came to represent my vision. For 20 years I disobeyed business conventions of passionless management by immersing myself in my work and, more important, in the lives and dreams of my coworkers. I told them of my

dream, of my vision to be the best. And then I asked for their help.

Together we grew. We brought more people in, and we shared the vision further.

The North Face was named after the north side of any mountain, such as Eiger Mountain or the Matterhorn in Switzerland—the side exposed to the harshest elements of nature. It is considered the greatest challenge for any climber. The name was appropriate—since we knew what we wanted wouldn't be easy.

But we knew one other thing—if we pulled together, we could climb the north face of business, and it would be a hell of a lot of fun to do it.

Mine was a fascinating business. Because we made the best equipment in the world, I was constantly approached by professional adventurers who needed to be outfitted. These began as business relationships. But, as all successful relationships do, they evolved into much more. Through friendships with these people as well as my business relationships, I watched as vision became reality and risk became reward. I was moved by their energy. Always they helped sharpen my focus.

I brought these lessons into my business, and I shared them with my employees. For years my evangelical crusade was focused on my own company and periodically speaking from podiums. Recently I sold my company and tried to observe the world of business from a different perspective, that of a consultant. The perspective has changed, but my view hasn't.

I see an ever-growing crisis—a critical lack of passionate leadership. It seems everyone knows how to manage. Few know how to lead. There is such a fear of risk and a lack of joy in the working lives of most Americans that it seems

impossible to expect anything but more of the same—interminable mediocrity.

That's why I felt compelled to write this book. *The Adventures of Leadership* begins at the peak of your spiritual backbone, where a single, raw nerve ending glows with the essence of life. I have written this book with precisely that part of you in mind. I want to touch the part of you that dreams of extraordinary things.

By sharing my experiences and some of the insights I've been able to glean from personal adventures both in and out of business, I hope to offer not merely ways of helping your bottom line but also ways to improve your total outlook. Certainly the intellectual cross training I have had from the variety of activities I have done and the weird and wonderful assortment of adventuring and business friends I have collected have given me some insights into what it takes to succeed against the odds in any pioneering adventure: business, sport, education, or personal.

My hope is that this book will be a real catalyst for dynamic change. It is a call to action for the disenchanteds who are being stifled by corporate America and to those who are mistakenly intimidated from speaking out by an illogical reverence for managers and corporate shibboleths. I offer you my experience, my knowledge, and my instincts. I offer you my heart.



# 1

## SWIMMING IN EMBALMING FLUID:

The Living Death of Bad Business

In 1966, I walked irreverent and happy into the middle of corporate America. I didn't stay long.

I had just received my MBA from Stanford University. This was back when an MBA was actually something useful. I thought the culture of a major corporation might be beneficial, but as I began to interview around, I quickly learned that irreverence and happiness were not exactly typical or approved corporate qualities.

I didn't really know what I wanted, but I sure knew what I didn't want, and unfortunately that was all I could

find. Blandness. Fear of risk. Fear of change. Everywhere I looked—and I interviewed at about six or seven major corporations—I found a status quo that wanted me to file away my brain for a good dozen years before they'd ask my opinion.

I still laugh when I think about my interview with Proctor & Gamble. It was a laborious process of interviewing—one hour each with eight different people. Finally I sat down with the director of personnel. The first thing he asked was whether I wanted to be known as Kenneth, my real name, or Hap, a name I'd had since childhood. "Hap," I said. "That's what all my friends call me."

He looked at me for a moment, kind of tugged at his tie. Rubbed his chin. And with a deep authority in his voice that made me know he was making a serious, corporate-type decision, he said, "I think you'd be better off as Kenneth."

I bit my tongue and waited.

Then came his second question. "So, Kenneth, what's your vision of the future? If we were to hire you, what role would you play in the company in, say, five years?"

I looked at him. He was this sad little humanoid with a Mommy's-boy face and just enough authority to give him a bully's demeanor. I could imagine him in grade school getting thrown against his locker, pleading for his life and offering his lunch money for ransom. This moment, I assumed, was his revenge. "In five years," I said, "if I were to be here, and I underscore the word *if*, I would expect to be president. I guess that means passing you in five minutes, and that doesn't seem like any big deal to me."

Reverence to titled authority, as you can see, has never been one of my strong points. I believe respect must be earned, and I also believe the primary person you should