

Essential Lessons from Peter Drucker

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Peter F. Drucker, the Father of Modern Management, was welcomed into his heavenly home on November 11, 2005, just a few days shy of his 96th birthday. According to Bob Buford, his last days were consumed with repeating the Lord's Prayer in German.¹

Christian Management Association honored Drucker with its highest honor, the Christian Management Award, in 1990. CMA honored Bob Buford with the same award in 2005. I must mention Drucker and Buford in the same breath because it was Buford and his Leadership Network² that brought much of Drucker's wisdom and management insight to the leading Christian leaders and pastors of our day.

Certainly one of my top-10 life experiences was sitting at the feet of Peter Drucker for four days in Estes Park, Colorado, with 30 other Christian leaders in August of 1986. Buford invited us. Drucker enthralled us. Several years later, I was privileged to be part of a reunion gathering with Drucker in Claremont, California. This remarkable management guru was a gift from God to both business and ministry leaders.

I've dedicated one of the 20 management buckets to Peter Drucker. There are just three balls in this bucket, but you'll discover Druckerisms (his pithy management one-liners, such as, "Most of what we call management consists of making it difficult for people to get their work done" ³) throughout each discipline of leadership and management. His seminal book, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* runs 839 pages. (The phrase "prolific management writer" doesn't do him justice.)

So what are the balls in the Drucker Bucket? Think of the driving range at your golf course. Picture hundreds and hundreds of balls all over the range and buckets and buckets of balls lined up for both the pros and the hackers. Just like your community driving range, Drucker had something for all of us – the weekend duffer *and* Tiger Woods.

He was a category of one.

BALL #1: LEAD From Your Strengths

Peter Drucker launched a movement to minimize weaknesses.

In my last few years at Christian Management Association, I passed along a Robert Mankoff cartoon from the *New Yorker* magazine to my board chair. In the drawing, a corporate board is meeting and the chairman tells the CEO, “Actually, we all think you’re doing a pretty good job. We just feel it would be more fun to have a celebrity for C.E.O.”

Drucker said, “Effective leadership is not about being liked; leadership is defined by results, not attributes.”⁴ It sounds simple, but it’s radical. Lead from your strengths, not your weaknesses. Figure out who you are, what you enjoy doing, what you’re good at, and then build a team around you to fill in the cracks. Focus on results and lead from your strengths.

Don’t allow anyone else’s leadership theory or strengths to be prescriptive for your unique style. Strong-willed but misinformed managers, board members and colleagues will force you into their mold. They’ll tell you, “This is what a leader looks like. This is how leaders lead.” Don’t buy it. Lead from your own unique strengths. Don’t take your own unique leadership eye off the ball.

“Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action.”⁵

– Peter Drucker

Drucker’s lead-from-your-strengths movement has many disciples. Bill Hybels, the senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church and chairman of the Willow Creek Association, participated in that 1986 summit with Peter Drucker and the impact it had on him was far-reaching. In 2002, he wrote *Courageous Leadership*, which described 10 different leadership styles.⁶ The list includes motivational, visionary, directional, strategic, managing, shepherding, team-building, entrepreneurial, reengineering and bridge-building leaders. Hone your own style (Hybels lists 10 – pick one) and lead from your strengths.

Ken Blanchard has written a full shelf of excellent leadership books (search “Ken Blanchard” at Amazon.com for the list). He has preached “lead from your strengths” tirelessly for years. Increasingly, Blanchard’s message is faith-based, including a more recent book he co-authored with Phil Hodges called *Lead Like Jesus: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time*.⁷

The movement became a groundswell in this decade when the Gallup research on strengths was popularized in the book, *Now, Discover Your Strengths*⁸ and the latest update, *Strengths Finder 2.0*⁹ (see the Team Bucket).

Max Lucado's *Cure for the Common Life: Living in Your Sweet Spot* challenges people to find their "S.T.O.R.Y." (Lucado's acronym for Strengths, Topic, Optimal conditions, Relationships and "Yes!" moments).¹⁰ He popularizes the decades of research conducted by People Management International (PMI) with SIMA[®], their proprietary discovery process that assesses the core strengths and natural motivation of individuals. (SIMA[®] is the acronym for System for Identifying Motivated Abilities. For more information, visit their website at PeopleManagement.org.)

We can thank Drucker for his early insight. It has freed up millions to lead from their strengths.

BALL #2: PRACTICE the Art of Management

Exercise your management muscles with a daily dose of Drucker.

Peter Drucker preached that you must practice, practice and practice the art of management. He said it was like any other discipline. World-class musicians hone their gifts up to eight hours a day. Athletes practice, practice and practice. Professional golfers finish 18 holes and head to the driving range. Tiger Woods has a coach.

What do hassled managers do? After the nine-to-five battle (more often 7:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M.), they overeat, drink or distract their joyless days with mind-numbing entertainment. On the other hand, great managers stay at it—always digging for fresh insights and solutions. Drucker writes, "We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change. And the most pressing task is to teach people how to learn."¹¹

There are several suggested ways to master the management buckets in the introduction to this book. To practice and execute the art of management, you must commit time and thought. Create your own disciplined process for mastering the 20 management bucket competencies. Your plan might involve 20 days, 20 weeks, 20 months or 20 years. Make a plan. Just do it!

Read The Daily Drucker Daily

I know, I know . . . your office is piled high with good stuff to read. Stacks of *The Wall Street Journal* taunt you, “You management farce! How dare you pretend to mentor your team. You don’t even take time to mentor yourself. Your sorry leadership façade is fueled only by the fumes of last year’s trendy management gimmicks. Get real, you big fake!”

Guilt never inspires. Self-reproach and self-doubt are crippling. But there are hundreds of best practices for staying on top of the art of management. Your first step is to buy this book for every team member: *The Daily Drucker: 366 Days of Insight and Motivation for Getting the Right Things Done*.¹²

Similar to a one-year Bible in format, *The Daily Drucker* delivers a poignant and practical one-page management insight for every day of the year. Excerpted from the vast Drucker library of wisdom and pithy points, topics cover the Drucker waterfront: time management, results, innovation and much more.

Here are five ways to leverage this book and bless your team members as they practice, practice, practice the art of management:

1. *Stand and read.* When your team gathers for their five-minute check-in meeting, ask a team member to read the daily dose from Drucker.
2. *Boot and read.* Don’t waste the two minutes watching your computer boot up. While emails from Nigerian hucksters fill up your inbox, read *The Daily Drucker*. Create a disciplined habit away from your desk, such as sitting in your guest chair while you read, reflect and pray. Ask the Lord to help you connect the day’s management insight with a current management challenge or a perplexing people problem.

I’m not suggesting, of course, that Peter Drucker replace Saint Peter, Saint Paul or Jesus. But I *am* suggesting that great managers are disciplined, lifelong learners. You probably agree, but unless you build the core value of lifelong learning into your calendar, you’re a phony.

3. *Email and read.* Assign one team member per week to select a Drucker quote from the daily reading and email it to every team member. This “Daily Dose of Drucker” will at least benefit that week’s researcher. Teachers learn more than students.
4. *Post and read.* Delegate this idea to the top Drucker zealot on your team. Ask her to post a weekly Drucker quotation on the bulletin board every week. I like this one:

People who *don't* take risks
generally make about two big mistakes a year.
People who *do* take risks
generally make about two big mistakes a year.¹³

5. *Brown Bag and Read.* Once a month, invite your team to the “Drucker Deli” for lunch. Order deli sandwiches (or bring your own) and meet at a nearby scenic spot. (During my CMA years in San Clemente, California, our team sometimes enjoyed carry-out on the T Street bluff, watching dozens of surfers get axed in the Pacific.) The admission price for the “Drucker Deli” is cheap. Bring your underlined copy of *The Daily Drucker* and share your favorite insight from the last 30 days of readings. (Of course, it goes without saying that once a month you should also host a Bucket Breakfast or Bucket Brunch or Bucket Buffet or . . . okay, I’ll stop . . . and have your team members share their favorite insights from *Mastering the Management Buckets*.)

BALL #3: READ or Re-Read One Drucker Book Each Year

The father of modern management knows best.

My good friend and mentor, George Duff, reads Peter Drucker’s *The Effective Executive* once a year.¹⁴ (To survive 27 years as president of the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, you have to be an effective executive.) George is a Drucker zealot. If you have not yet read or listened to any of Drucker’s books, *The Effective Executive* is an excellent beginning point. If you lead a church or

nonprofit organization, be sure to read *Managing the Nonprofit Organization: Principles and Practices*.¹⁵

One of my treasured books, autographed for me by Peter Drucker, is a novel, *The Temptation to Do Good*, published in 1984. It's a great title and a quick read for busy leaders and managers who need a change of pace from the growing pile of must-read books. In this work of fiction, Drucker introduces us to Father Heinz Zimmerman, president of a Catholic university. He faces all the leadership challenges common to nonprofit CEOs: budgets, donors, staff conflicts, board members, ethical issues and more. Throw in student and faculty expectations and you'll appreciate your current organization more – no matter how complex it is!

In just 152 pages, Drucker addresses the subtle “temptation to do good” syndrome that gets many religious leaders into trouble. You'll enjoy the story and Drucker's memorable insights.

This chapter would be woefully incomplete without listing the legacy that Peter Drucker left: his books. Check (☑) the titles that align with your current management challenges and commit to reading a minimum of one Drucker book per year.

Books by Peter F. Drucker **The Father of Modern Management**

- The End of Economic Man* (1939)
- The Future of Industrial Man* (1942)
- Concept of the Corporation* (1946)
- The New Society* (1950)
- The Practice of Management* (1954)
- America's Next Twenty Years* (1957)
- Landmarks of Tomorrow* (1957)
- Managing for Results* (1964)
- The Effective Executive* (1966)
- The Age of Discontinuity* (1968)
- Technology, Management and Society* (1970)
- Men, Ideas and Politics* (1971)
- Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (1973)

- The Unseen Revolution* (reissued in 1996 under the title *The Pension Fund Revolution*) (1976)
- People and Performance: The Best of Peter Drucker on Management* (1977)
- An Introductory View of Management* (1977)
- Adventures of a Bystander* (autobiography) (1978)
- Song of the Brush: Japanese Painting from the Sanso Collection* (1979)
- Managing in Turbulent Times* (1980)
- Toward the Next Economics and Other Essays* (1981)
- The Changing World of the Executive* (1982)
- The Last of All Possible Worlds* (fiction) (1982)
- The Temptation to Do Good* (fiction) (1984)
- Innovation and Entrepreneurship* (1985)
- Frontiers of Management* (1986)
- The New Realities: in Government and Politics, in Economics and Business, in Society and World View* (1989)
- Managing the Nonprofit Organization: Principles and Practices* (1990)
- Managing for the Future* (1992)
- The Ecological Vision* (1993)
- Post-Capitalist Society* (1993)
- Managing in a Time of Great Change* (1995)
- Drucker on Asia: A Dialogue between Peter Drucker and Isao Nakauchi* (1997)
- Peter Drucker on the Profession of Management* (1998)
- Management Challenges for the 21st Century* (1999)
- The Essential Drucker* (2001)
- Managing in the Next Society* (2002)
- A Functioning Society* (2002)
- The Daily Drucker* (2004)
- The Effective Executive in Action* (2006)¹⁶

Summary: A To-Do List

- *Focus on your strengths, not your weaknesses.* In *The Effective Executive*, Drucker says that “strong people always have strong

weaknesses too. Where there are peaks, there are valleys. And no one is strong in many areas"¹⁷

- *Be a student of management.* To exercise your strengths, you must be a disciplined lifelong learner in the art of management. God has gifted you to lead. Steward that gift and practice, practice, practice.
- *Make time to read.* There is no relationship between the amount of time you spend watching TV golf and your competencies as a manager. There is a stunning relationship between reading books by Peter Drucker and your effectiveness as a manager. Your calendar reflects your convictions.

ENDNOTES

1. Bob Buford at www.bobbuford.com.
2. Leadership Network at www.leadnet.org.
3. "Peter F. Drucker Quotes" at BrainyQuote.com.
http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/p/peter_f_drucker.html (accessed November 2007).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).
7. Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007).
8. Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton, Ph.D., *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 2001).
9. Tom Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0* (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2007).
10. Max Lucado, *Cure for the Common Life: Living in Your Sweet Spot* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2006).
11. "Peter F. Drucker Quotes" at BrainyQuote.com.
12. Peter F. Drucker with Joseph A. Maciariello, *The Daily Drucker: 366 Days of Insight and Motivation for Getting the Right Things Done* (New York, NY: Harper Business, 2004).

13. "Peter F. Drucker Quotes" at BrainyQuote.com.
http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/p/peter_f_drucker.html (accessed November 2007).
14. Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1966).
15. Peter F. Drucker, *Managing the Nonprofit Organization: Principles and Practices* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990).
16. The above list was prepared by the Office of Marketing and Communications at Claremont Graduate University, 165 E. Tenth St., Claremont, CA 91711.
<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/3899.asp> (accessed November 2007). For more information on Peter Drucker, visit www.druckerarchives.net. Other resources are also available at Leader to Leader Institute (www.leadertoleader.org), founded in 1990 as the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management.
17. Drucker, *The Effective Executive*, p. 72.

About the Author:

John Pearson is president of the management consulting company John Pearson Associates, Inc. With 30 years of CEO experience, he served 25 years leading three associations, including Christian Management Association, Willow Creek Association and Christian Camp and Conference Association. In addition to consulting with both nonprofit and for-profit clients, he conducts frequent training workshops on his Management Buckets system and on nonprofit board governance. He is the coauthor of *Marketing Your Ministry: 10 Critical Principles* and publishes a weekly eNewsletter, *Your Weekly Staff Meeting*.

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