

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

75% of CEOs believe that they belong in the Top-25%.*

80% of CEOs are not great leaders.**

61% of executives do not have a clear understanding of the scope of their jobs.***

With these mind-boggling findings in mind and my own experiences, I offer my observations and advice to aspiring and present CEOs with the objective of inspiring you to find your own way to a long and successful CEO career.

My book is a Two in One book:

Book One is a practical and non-academic business book. I explain that the principles of Management are simple and easy to understand. I also explain that Leadership is extraordinarily complex and not for everyone.

In Book Two I offer my experiences about how to build a long and meaningful CEO career: how to get the CEO job, grow with it, stay relevant, avoid the traps and how to plan a rewarding post-CEO career.

MY BACKGROUND

I have lived it.

I began my working life as a mechanic apprentice in a beige-coloured boiler suit repairing tractors and agricultural machines at the age of 17. Cleaning the toilets of the workshop was part of the job during the first year. I got my first CEO job at 29 in Brazil. I have been shaped by my Scandinavian upbringings, people that I have met and places that I have been to. I have lived and worked in five countries, travelled more than 4,000 days away from home doing business in more than thirty countries, been CEO of a global company with 250,000 dedicated employees, been responsible for more than 100 acquisitions been a board member of more than 25 companies and chairman of more than 10 of them. I have been an Executive in Residence at a prestigious business school in Switzerland. And for over 25 years, I have attended a well-known gathering in the Alps, where I have observed some of the world's top business leaders, many of them brilliant and I have seen quite a few brought down by their own blind spots. I have not met anybody who did not know something that I did not know. I have been married for over 55 years; I am a father of three children and a grandfather of eight grandchildren. These and many other experiences have left their mark. They have kept me curious, taught me lessons, sparked reflections, and shaped opinions. I have observed what works, and what does not. I have had and seen successes and failures; and I have seen brilliant leaders at all levels fall from grace. And I have taken notes.

This book is my way of sharing my personal lessons learnt and observations with you. You will find what I have come to value through observations, hard-earned lessons, research, and opinions shaped by decades of boardroom and operational experience. There is some direct advice embedded, though often subtle. I prefer to suggest rather than instruct. You will notice repetitions as I have formulated all chapters as stand-alone chapters.

The single most important thing that I have learnt over the course of 55 years in leadership roles is that it is incredible what people can achieve if they are given the opportunity. If I should choose my own motto, it would be: “Whatever business you are in, it is all about people.”

And I have tried to live my professional life by the very meaningful Mark Twain quote “*Continuous improvement is better than postponed perfection.*”

HOW TO READ THE BOOK

Look for nuggets.

My book is a guide. A companion. A collection of real-life insights, tested by time and sharpened by reality. The two books are written for aspiring CEOs, current CEOs, and CEOs in their final job who want to pursue a rewarding post-CEO career. The book is not a textbook. Nor an engineer’s detailed manual, though I began as an engineer and remain fond of toolboxes. You will therefore find many tools, some universal and some specialized. Use what fits. Disregard what does not.

I encourage you to read slowly. This is not a book for speed-reading. It is for thoughtful reading and reflection. And ideally, re-reading. Make notes. Let a sentence sit with you before you turn the page. Some of the most valuable insights, what I call **nuggets**, are not loudly announced. They may come in a story, an offhand comment, a single phrase that hits home or from one of my many lists.

Some nuggets are about running the company, making decisions, inspiring teams, shaping strategy. Others are about your career, navigating transitions, stepping back with grace, reinventing yourself when the CEO title is gone. I have scattered these lessons throughout the book, just as life tends to scatter its own.

Start by reading **Book One** if you want to understand the CEO role deeply. Then turn to **Book Two** for the parts that speak to your situation, where you are, where you are going, and how to find your way to make it.

On the page 18 you will find a **guide that will help you identify the chapters that may be the most relevant for you in your present situation.**

Keep a hard copy by your side. A Kindle on the go. Make your own notes. Draw your own conclusions and plans. The best answers are the ones you discover yourself.

A NOTE OF HOPE

You will find no management-by-hope philosophy here. But I do make one exception.

It is my sincere **hope** that *The Job of the CEO* and the accompanying *CEO Career Guide*, will inspire and support you; and that it will help you find your own way to a long, successful, and meaningful CEO and post-CEO career.

Finally, I want to mention that I have made selective use of AI to help me with research, editing, and proofreading, always under my careful direction; and that my friend, Clare MacCarthy ex-correspondent of the FT and The Economist in Copenhagen has given me some good advice. Clare was a critical journalist during my final CEO job and co-author of my book, Denmark Limited.

Waldemar Schmidt

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