

An Excerpt From

Who Kidnapped Excellence
What Stops Us from Giving and Being Our Best

by Harry Paul, John Britt, & Ed Jent
Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

FOREWORD BY KEN BLANCHARD

Who
Kidnapped
Excellence?

What Stops Us
from Giving and Being
Our **Best**

HARRY PAUL

Bestselling coauthor of *Fish!* and *Revved!*

JOHN BRITT

Bestselling coauthor of *Who Killed Change?*

and **ED JENT**

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Excellence?

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HARRY PAUL

JOHN BRITT

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San Francisco

a BK Business book

Who Kidnapped Excellence?

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To Jack Paul

My father, he lived life with zest.

—HARRY PAUL

To Freda C. Embry,

My second mother

—JOHN BRITT

To Patricia Jent

My beautiful wife,

who is not only a great encourager

but a source of inspiration.

You are the best!

—ED JENT

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Foreword

I'm a Raving Fan of John Britt and Harry Paul. I was one of the coauthors with John of *Who Killed Change?* and wrote the foreword to *FISH!*, which Harry coauthored. They are two of the most creative people I know.

As you read *Who Kidnapped Excellence?*, you soon find out that John, Harry, and Ed Jent exemplify the concept that one plus one is a lot greater than two. Their creativity will immediately come alive for you in this parable in which Gorman-Scott Inc.'s team of Passion, Competency, Flexibility, Communication, and Ownership must battle Average's team of N. Different, N. Ept, N. Flexibility, Miss Communiotion, and Poser to win back their Excellence. You will see why the same battle must be fought not only at your workplace but also at home with your family.

Read *Who Kidnapped Excellence?* Share it with everybody at work and at home, enjoy the story, and be ready to practice what you learn about yourself and how you can continually bring excellence into your life and the organizations to which you belong.

Ed Jent, who has a background in ministry of education, joins John and Harry and adds a distinct flavor to this book. Thanks, John, Harry, and Ed. You're the best.

Ken Blanchard

Coauthor, *The One Minute Manager*[®] and
Fit at Last: Look and Feel Better Once and for All

Introduction



Who Kidnapped Excellence? What Stops Us From Giving and Being Our Best is written for YOU! Whether you are a frontline employee, supervisor, manager, CEO, mother, father, or spouse, this book has a personal message for you. It is intended for people to use both in their organizational roles and in their personal lives.

In *Who Kidnapped Excellence?*, Excellence gets kidnapped at Gorman-Scott Inc. and is replaced by Average, who is a makeup artist. Interestingly, months go by before Leadership recognizes the change. A ransom note left on the conference room table is the impetus that sets Leadership in motion to get their Excellence back. Leadership enlists Excellence's team (Passion, Competency, Flexibility, Communication, and Ownership) in the quest.

But Average is not easily thwarted. He assembles his own team (N. Different, N. Competency, N. Flexibility, Miss Communication, and Poser), who dig in their heels and use all their cunning powers of deception to keep Excellence from returning and to keep Performance falling.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Excellence	Average
Passion	N. Different
Competency	N. Ept
Flexibility	N. Flexibility
Communication	Miss Communication
Ownership	Poser

As this organizational good-versus-evil confrontation unfolds, Dave, the long-standing deliveryman for Gorman-Scott Inc., comes face-to-face with Average in his personal life. The stories of Dave and the organization intertwine in their common challenges: first, they need to fully recognize the presence of Average, and then they need to return Excellence to her rightful place.

In the “Resources” section, Dave offers practical advice to help others gain and maintain excellence in their personal lives and their work. The last section, “People and Companies Who ‘Get It,’” offers insight into people and companies who demonstrate excellence.

Note to the Reader

Most companies talk about excellence on a routine basis. Yet we do so without a common definition. How do we define excellence? When we began this book, we initially identified many qualities of excellence. However, over the course of two and a half years, we whittled the number down to five. This was no easy task. As we examined these

qualities, we realized that many of the traits were actually a subset of one of the five core qualities.

Now we believe we have identified those core qualities/elements of excellence. Additionally, we believe that in this book we have created a common language that more accurately defines and explains the concept of excellence. We do not assert that these are the only aspects of excellence, but we do contend that if one can attend to these five core elements consistently, one has, in earnest, begun the journey toward excellence.

Storytelling can be an entertaining and powerful way of presenting new information or reinforcing what has been learned. Therefore, we chose to personify as characters the qualities of Excellence and Average, along with their respective teams, using narrative to tell the story about the elusive yet attainable quality of excellence. We believe that this creates a unique and interesting format to best explain how to restore excellence and remove the barriers that stop us from giving and getting our best. However, this style of narration presents a challenge for the reader in differentiating the personified traits that represent Excellence from the ways in which the words are used in normal, everyday conversation. To help with this, we have capitalized the *personified* traits (Excellence, Average, etc.) and used lowercase for the normal, everyday usage of the words (excellence, average, etc.).

Too often, both at home and at work, our perception of excellence is unknowingly compromised by the insidious creep of circumstance, rationalization, and duplicity that resets the yardstick by which we measure our perfor-

mance. We become inured to our circumstances and environment and fail to recognize that average has displaced excellence. *Who Kidnapped Excellence?* will cause you to look in the mirror and truthfully evaluate yourself. Once you have come face-to-face with your own reality, you can then draw from Dave's journal and the other lessons in this book to make practical changes in your life.

1

Excellence Kidnapped

as Dave drove to his first delivery of the day, a sense of foreboding came over him when he saw in the distance a flashing red-and-blue glow cutting through the morning fog. When he got closer, he could see police cars sitting askew in front of Gorman-Scott Inc., their driver's-side doors still open. He got out of his delivery van and rushed toward the front doors to talk with Darnell, the corporate assistant, and see what was going on.

A policeman suddenly stepped out of the morning mist into Dave's path and said sharply, "Just a minute. Who are you, and where do you think you are going?"

"What's happened?" Dave asked, both concerned and excited. "Is everyone all right?"

"I'll ask the questions here," the policemen replied. Dave noticed another policeman putting up the yellow "Do Not Cross" crime tape so familiar from television crime

shows. Eyeing Dave suspiciously, the first policeman asked again, more loudly this time, “So, who are you?”

“My name is Dave. I’m a deliveryman. I’ve been delivering packages here for years.”

“I noticed you were limping. Is it from a recent injury?” the policeman asked.

“No!” Dave replied in surprise. “It’s an old injury.”

What he didn’t tell the policemen was that his limp was the result of his high-tech titanium prosthetic. He had lost his right leg below the knee in a roadside bombing during his Gulf War tour. Dave didn’t like to talk about his injury, and he didn’t allow it to slow him down. A former marine, he had gained a reputation as an outstanding deliveryman employed by one of the world’s largest package-delivery services.

Frustrated, Dave said, “Look, I have friends in there. I just want to make sure—” He was interrupted by a voice calling to them. Looking up, he saw Darnell in the front entrance, waving to him.

“Officer,” she yelled, “let him in! He’s OK. I’ll be responsible for him.”

Still looking at Dave suspiciously, the officer finally stepped aside.

As Dave and Darnell walked together toward the administrative office, he asked, “What’s happened? Are you all right?”

“I’m fine,” she replied. Then, glancing around as if frightened to be overheard, she whispered, “Our Excellence has been kidnapped.”

“Excellence was kidnapped? What are you talking about?” Dave asked, confused.

“The ransom note was on the administrative conference room table. Found it myself this morning.”

“Ransom note?” Dave was so focused on Darnell that he didn’t notice a man and woman standing near the administrative office, and he walked right into them. “I am so sorry,” he said.

“No problem,” the man replied.

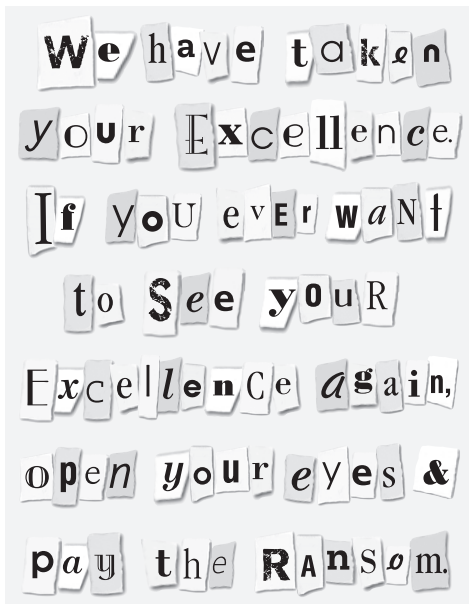
As he resumed walking with Darnell, Dave said, “They seem concerned.”

Looking back, she said, “Oh, that’s Jared and Jenna.”

“So you were telling me about the ransom note.”

“Yeah, a ransom note,” she said. As they reached her desk, Darnell opened the top drawer, unfolded a piece of paper, and handed it to Dave. “I made a copy,” she said. “The police have the original.”

Dave took the paper and read:



We have taken
your Excellence.
If you ever want
to see your
Excellence again,
open your eyes &
pay the Ransom.

Dave turned the paper over, expecting to see more, but it was blank. There was nothing else to explain what the message could mean.

Just then, a man entered the administrative office suite wearing a wrinkled, tan overcoat, looking as if he hadn't slept or shaved in days, and smelling of cigar smoke. He flashed a badge and stated curtly, "I'm Agent McNally. I need to interview Leadership."

McNally was short and stocky but exuded an authoritative, no-nonsense attitude.

"Yes, sir," Darnell replied. "Would you like to use the conference room? I'll call Leadership in right away." McNally nodded. She pointed to a door on their right and said, "This way to the conference room, sir."

He left the room, and before Darnell could follow him, Dave tapped her lightly on the shoulder.

"You mind if I sit down for a few minutes?" he asked quietly. "Leg's aching a bit," he added, rubbing his knee.

"Not at all," she replied. "Make yourself at home."

Dave sat down in the comfortable chair behind the desk in Darnell's cubicle. He slipped off his prosthesis and massaged his leg. Sighing deeply, he tried to relax his shoulders and neck. He was confused about what was happening at Gorman-Scott Inc., where he had made deliveries for years, but he felt relieved that no one he knew seemed in danger at present. As for Excellence, Dave couldn't place her and wasn't sure if he had ever met her.

After a few minutes, he heard the sounds of people entering the adjacent room and chairs being pulled out as

Leadership, Agent McNally, and Darnell took their seats around the conference table.

“McNally’s the name,” the agent began in a deep voice, “Agent John McNally.”

As Dave heard Darnell and Leadership finish the introductions, he soon realized that he was in what could be an awkward position. He didn’t want to stand up and leave, because he feared that the sound going through the open door of the conference room would interrupt the conversation that had just started. And as he sat there, he became very interested in what was being said. Part of him knew he should just risk it and get up and go, but he found himself staying in spite of his intention to leave, hoping that part of the ensuing mystery would be solved. Who was this Excellence, and why had she been kidnapped?

In the conference room, McNally asked, “How long has Excellence worked here?”

“Must be four—no five—years,” Darnell answered. “I was at the first meeting Leadership had with Excellence. She came with glowing recommendations and an impressive résumé.”

McNally asked, “So when did you become aware that your Excellence was missing?”

Leadership said, “We found the ransom note this morning. Hadn’t realized that she was missing.”

Darnell cleared her throat and said hesitantly, “I took the liberty of copying it. The officer who first arrived has the original, but here is the copy. I was careful not to leave any fingerprints or touch the original.”

There was a long, pregnant pause; Dave wondered if the agent was looking at Darnell, possibly with suspicion, and he felt anxious for his friend.

Then he heard McNally slowly read the ransom note aloud: “‘We have taken your Excellence. If you ever want to see your Excellence again, open your eyes and pay the ransom.’ How do you think the kidnappers got access to her? Do you know what ‘open your eyes’ is referring to?”

Darnell answered, “No, I don’t understand it at all. I found the note around 7:30 this morning. I came into this room to make sure it was ready for an eight a.m. meeting, and it was right there on the table.”

“Has anyone contacted you, giving you further information, threatening you, or asking for money to return your Excellence?” McNally inquired.

“No,” Leadership and Darnell replied in unison.

“Soooo,” McNally said, “can you describe this Excellence? Does she have any distinguishing characteristics? Can you give me any information that will help me to recognize her?”

Darnell and Leadership looked at each other. Darnell turned to McNally and stated, “You know, she’s the best.”

He stared blankly at her, and before he could put together a response, Leadership stated, “We think it would be best if we told you about her team. Excellence spends a lot of time with them.”

“Team?”

“Our Excellence has a very close-knit, important team of five,” Leadership replied in a tone that seemed to suggest that McNally should already have this information.

“There’s Passion, Competency, Flexibility, Communication, and Ownership.”

Suddenly, the conference room phone jangled loudly. Darnell jumped, and her hand flew to her mouth to stifle a scream. She pulled herself together quickly and picked up the phone. “Gorman-Scott Inc.—this is Darnell,” she said. She listened quietly for a moment. Then she handed the phone to Leadership.

After listening to the caller for a few moments, Leadership stated, “Be right there,” and hung up. “Something’s come up,” Leadership said apologetically. “Sorry, but this needs to be taken care of now. Darnell, please brief Agent McNally on Excellence’s team.” Looking at the agent, he said, “Anything you need, McNally, just let me know.”

McNally shot Leadership a suspicious glance, wondering what could be more important than their Excellence being kidnapped. “Please don’t leave the building, Leadership,” he said firmly. “I may want to speak with you again.”

Leadership nodded and left the room. Rushing out of the administrative office, he didn’t even notice Dave sitting in Darnell’s chair.

Dave glanced around. Seeing no one, he surreptitiously moved the chair closer to the door. “In for a penny, in for a pound,” he said to himself.

“Well, Passion,” he heard Darnell begin, “she’s quite interesting.”

“How so?” asked McNally.

“She is always so positive. Her main job is to inspire our employees, to make sure they know how important

their jobs are and that they have a voice. Passion's role is to help our customers see that we are enthusiastic about our work, about what we produce, and that we . . . well, that we care!"

"Must be pretty energetic," McNally said.

"Oh, she is," Darnell said, nodding vigorously.

After a pause, she said, "Next is Competency, who is a key member of Excellence's team. She ensures that all of our employees are skilled in their work."

"Sounds like a full-time job," McNally offered.

"Yes, it absolutely is," Darnell agreed. "Because if our employees aren't skilled in their work, then the products and services we deliver won't meet the customers' expectations."

"Doesn't seem like rocket science," he said evenly.

Darnell stated, perhaps a bit defensively, "When most people talk about competency, they are referencing the technical skills of a particular job, but our Competency is also charged with helping our employees with the interpersonal skills so necessary to delivering great customer service."

"Got it," McNally said, writing in his notebook. "So, we have Passion and Competency. Check."

"Yes," Darnell said. "Next is Flexibility, and he is a key team member, too. Our business is constantly changing. We have new technology, new processes, new competitors, and a crazy economy. It's easy for us to become victims of our own success—to become stagnant and complacent. With so many changes, we can't get caught in the 'That's the way we've always done it' trap. We need policies, pro-

cedures, and standardization when it makes sense, but we must have Flexibility so that we are prepared to respond to unique customer situations when they occur. You see, Excellence ties all this together.”

“Remind me,” McNally said, “what is your position here?”

“Corporate assistant.”

“You seem to know a lot about this business for a corporate assistant.”

Darnell smiled and said, “I’ve been around a long time.”

“Leadership mentioned Communication,” McNally stated.

“Oh yes. She’s a key member of the team. She makes sure everyone understands clearly what’s expected of them, but that’s not all. She has taught us a very important principle: that we must listen to everyone, especially our customers. It’s amazing. We have learned that if we carefully listen to everyone—customers, employees, and others we deal with—then they can actually help us improve our business.”

“They need to give you a raise,” McNally stated, chuckling.

“That would be nice!” Darnell exclaimed. “I am in a position where I get to be closely involved with Leadership, management, and the line employees, so I have a unique opportunity to see things from several perspectives.”

She paused to think for a moment and then continued, “Ownership—he is Excellence’s other team member. He’s the best! He helps us work toward a culture in which

everyone takes 100 percent responsibility for their job. His role is to remind us of this. He helps us to see that sometimes we need to do things that are not necessarily in our job description but are the right course of action to take at the time. Ownership is supposed to be here, but he hasn't shown up yet."

"So, where is Excellence's team right now?" McNally asked. "Where are Passion, Competency, Flexibility, Communication, and Ownership?"

At that moment, the outer door to the conference room closed quietly. Surprised and a bit frustrated, Dave wondered if McNally had noticed that someone could be listening to the conversation. He rolled his chair closer but could hear only the low hum of voices.

He continued to sit there, lost in thought. Suddenly, he realized that his uneasiness sitting there outside the office was not just from the fear of being caught eavesdropping. This conversation about Passion, Competency, Flexibility, Communication, and Ownership had triggered something in his memory. He now knew that subconsciously he had begun questioning his own level of excellence at work and at home.

Dave was startled when the conference room door opened, and he watched Agent McNally close his notebook and walk out of the administrative suite, not even giving Dave a glance. Soon Darnell walked into the office and up to her desk.

Dave jumped up out of the chair and said with his cheeks reddening, "I'm sorry, Darnell. I probably should have left a long time ago or at least moved away from the door. I have to admit I was interested and heard every-

thing until the door closed. It was really impressive the way you could tell him about Excellence's team and what they do here."

Darnell blushed and said reassuringly, "No worries. I know you won't talk about this to anyone else. You have been coming and going from here for a long time now. I'm sure you've probably overheard many of our secrets."

Relieved, Dave ventured, "So what happened after the door closed? Did he tell you what they are going to do to help you find Excellence?"

"I can tell you exactly what Agent McNally said." Mimicking the agent's low voice, she said, "Well, Darnell, I have been around *organizational crime* a long time, and I can tell you that you have a huge problem here. But it's not a police problem. It's a company problem and something your Leadership has to deal with."

"And?" Dave asked.

"And he left."

Incredulous, Dave said, "That's all he had to offer you?"

"That's it."

Dave shook his head and then looked at his watch. "I wish there was something I could do to help you, but I'd better get moving, too. I've got my own excellence to deliver," he said with a smile. "Hey, keep me informed, and let me know if there is any way I can help." He turned and went out the door.

As Dave drove away, he began to think deeply about the excellence, or the lack thereof, in his own life. Little

did he know how this company's experience would influence his own personal journey to excellence.

Excellence's Team

Passion

*Inspires everyone with energy, enthusiasm,
and caring.*

Passion's job is to create that zest inside us for life that causes us to smile even when circumstances are against us, to go that extra mile, and to see our life and work as an opportunity, not something we have to get through.

Competency

*Ensures everyone has all the skills needed
to do their best.*

Competency is important not just in the technical aspects of our work and lives but also in our relationships with one another.

Flexibility

*Helps us respond to unique situations
whenever they occur.*

The only thing that remains constant is that everything changes. Flexibility understands this and helps employees to deal with and manage these changes in a practical and professional manner.

Communication

Clearly communicates roles and expectations.

Perception is everything, and perception is created by Communication. Communication respects that there is a delicate balance between listening and talking.

Ownership

*Ensures everyone gives their best and takes
100 percent responsibility for their jobs.*

Ownership is a personal value that promotes the knowledge that we have power and influence when we accept our responsibilities. Even in the face of constraints and barriers, we have the choice to operate using our judgment.

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2

The Demand for the Return of Excellence

Leadership called an emergency meeting of Excellence's team. From their conversation as they waited for the meeting to start, it was evident that the team was in denial about Excellence's kidnapping.

"I thought I saw Excellence just last week," Competency said.

"So did I," Flexibility added without much enthusiasm.

Leadership called for silence and then addressed the team. "As much as we would like to believe that Excellence is still here with us, we obviously have a large problem.

Looking more closely at Passion, Leadership noticed that she didn't look at all like herself. Her normal vibrant color had faded—in fact, she was pale. Competency looked dazed, and Flexibility appeared stiff. Communication was silent. Ownership was missing.

After a long, awkward silence, Competency said, "I'm confused. What do they mean, 'If you ever want to see

your Excellence again'? Do they expect us to pay a ransom for something we already have?"

Passion said in a voice that seemed somehow disconnected, "This is probably just a hoax. If not, let's just throw some money at the problem, and everybody will get what they want." She added, "And who would do something like this?"

Flexibility slammed his fist down on the table, causing everyone in the room to jump, and blurted out, "We will never bend to their demands!"

Communication cleared her throat and leaned forward in her chair. The team looked eagerly at her, but then she sat back, saying nothing.

"Where is Ownership?" Leadership asked irritably. Everyone just looked at one another as if searching for an answer and then shrugged their shoulders.

Just then, Ownership entered the room and quietly took his chair across from Leadership.

"Where have you been?" demanded Leadership.

"At the hospital," Ownership replied with a hint of embarrassment.

"The hospital?" Passion inquired. "What happened?"

Looking down, Ownership said in a quiet voice, "It's Performance. He has fallen again."

At this, everyone fell silent. Leadership became very still. After a few moments, he stood up and began pacing the room, finally saying, "Performance has been falling routinely for the last several months." Leadership turned to Ownership and handed a copy of the ransom note to him.

Ownership read the note and then looked up at Leadership.

Leadership asked, “So, have you seen Excellence lately?”

Ownership looked down and didn’t answer.

Suddenly Leadership said loudly and emphatically, “We need to get our Excellence back! We need a plan to return her to our organization first thing in the morning. If you can’t give your best, then you don’t belong here. Do you understand?”

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