



The Arc Of Ambition: Defining The Paths To Achievement

James Champy , Nitin Nohria

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In business—or in any endeavor—ambition is the spirit of onward and upward, of striving for something worth achieving. It is the driving force behind all great experiments and risk-takings, triumphs and failures. For authors Jim Champy and Nitin Nohria, it is also the instinctive quality that makes the difference between mere management and leadership. Drawing from original interviews with contemporary figures from many walks of life—including business, politics, science, and the arts—Champy and Nohria take readers on a journey of discovery, pinpointing the defining moments, or turning points, in the evolution of leaders, as they wrestle with critical decisions and ethical dilemmas. In the process, they reveal some underlying truths about leadership, such as the ability to hold onto a dream and make it come true, know when it's time to change the business or see it die, and recognize when it's time to hand over the reins. Representing fundamentally new thinking from two of today's greatest business minds, *The Arc of Ambition* is certain to challenge and enlighten aspiring leaders everywhere.

The Arc Of Ambition: Defining The Paths To Achievement Details

Date : Published January 6th 2000 by Basic Books

ISBN : 9780738201030

Author : James Champy , Nitin Nohria

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : Leadership, Business, Nonfiction

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Sean says

Lame book on leadership. Draws brief examples from dozens of leaders throughout history but doesn't create a compelling or convincing narrative. Many examples seem to be taken out of context or don't really prove the point the authors are trying to make. The points themselves are light fluff. Strangely, they included 20 pages of "sources", a veritable library of books you're better off reading as they do not condense anything very well.

Ivan Martinez says

Es un libro fabuloso. Sin duda James Champú y Nitin Nohria te inspiran ha tener más ambición y lograr tus objetivos.

Sin duda uno de mis libros favoritos.

Jennifer Sertl says

When you approach your return shot in tennis the position of the ball-rise, peak, or fall-is a critical aspect of the strength and accuracy of your return. I couldn't help but use this analogy in the Arc of Ambition by James Champy and Nitin Nohria

Many perceive business to be a process that generates results, namely money or talent. Ambition is believed to be a process that generates success, namely a legacy, money or recognition. This process has three and distinct stages. The first stage is referred to as the rise of ambition which is the initial dream of an individual and the drive and tenacity that he or she must exert in pursuit of that dream. The second stage is the apex of ambition where individuals seek to build an organization bigger than themselves. Finally there is the decline of ambition, the time when every achiever must cope with leaving the situation and either beginning a new endeavor or setting different life goals.

Champy and Nohria acknowledge that there are dangers to ambition and that when it is a "self-centered" force pursuing greed and power alone is dangerous and destructive for both the individual and the humanity in general. They know that this type of ambition exists. Their book was written primarily to foster a positive framework around ambition and to celebrate its potential when it is used positively to allow an individual to reach professional and personal goals as well as to drive the progress of humankind-be it in art, dance, science or business. We as a culture would remain static if were not for the great achievements of motivated individuals.

These authors utilize a vast array of individuals both historical and contemporary to demonstrate the common values and character traits that these "ambition models" demonstrated. Over the course of 10 Chapters, we are introduced to a cross-section of individuals who have made great strides in personal and human progress. Historically, we relive lessons of Peter the Great, the Wright brothers, and the philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie. Martin Luther King Jr. is acknowledged for the personal risk he took to reform the meaning of the American dream. We are reminded of the courageous and magnanimous Nelson Mandela and all that he has done and continues to do in South Africa. Of the modern economy we are exposed to Dhirubhai Ambani, a much respected entrepreneur from India. Michael Dell and William Gross are brought in as providing the template for modern technical ambition. Out of thirty-nine detailed accounts of ambitious

individuals, there were only three detailed stories about ambitious women: Margaret Thatcher, Judy George, and e-Bay's Margaret C. Whitman. You do the math. I was disappointed that there were no historical models of ambitious women. The voices of Mary Wollstonecraft and Susan B. Anthony apparently were not ambitious enough to make the radar of these authors.

Another point that I believe was missed in this story was the fact that the models utilized had national or international acclaim. There was no call for individuals to acknowledge any of the many fascinating and ambitious people in our own neighborhoods. Just like the millionaire next door, you may be living next to a remarkable and ambitious individual that in small steps or in a quiet manner may be reaching remarkable personal and professional gains. They do, however, hit on the most important point which is that each individual is capable of seizing their ambition, "we believe that by gathering your strengths and knowing your potential, you will be able to determine your own destiny."

Are people only born ambitious or not? Or, can the qualities and traits that define an ambitious person be acquired with time and attention. This team seems to believe the later-that there are distinct aspects of ambition that can be learned, practiced, and ultimately developed. I want to leave you with the eight ways to elevate your ambition:

1. Achieve excellence in whatever you do.
 2. Create great value.
 3. Empower the individuals who work with you.
 4. Improve the human condition.
 5. Create fun and pleasure.
 6. Invent the future.
 7. Use profits for public good.
 8. Improve the environment.
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Tiffany says

“Without ambition, no conquests are made, no lands discovered, no businesses created. Ambition is the root of all achievement.” – Anonymous

“It takes a strong character and a lot of willpower to hold onto a dream under adverse circumstances.” – Anonymous

Sometimes I can't stop thinking, what drives some people to accomplish great things, to fulfill aspirations beyond anyone's expectations and to make a lasting impression upon everyone around them? Or, what encourages a family of immigrants like mine to pursue an American Dream? I believe that ambition is the key ingredient behind every dream that transforms a simple idea into something great.

Yet, people have always had ambivalent feelings about ambition. Although we recognize that it is essential, we regard it as slightly dangerous. James Champy and Nitin Nohria, prior a professor of Business Administration and now a Dean at the Harvard Business School, have a good saying about the 'ambivalent feelings' in their book, "The Arc of Ambition: Defining the Leadership Journey":

“We see it as dangerous yet essential. We disapprove of those who abuse it, but we dismiss those who lack it. We see too little of it as a failing, too much of it as a sin. We sense that ambition is combustible, a form of energy that can bring us immortal glory but also destroy us forever, depending on how we use it. Simply put, ambition is what makes us go. Ambition is the spirit of success, of striving for something worth achieving.”

Authors also trace the arc of ambition, from rise to fall, as a series of stages:

Seeing what others don't. The arc begins when someone sees something others don't. A fresh insight of discovery springs forth. In an ambitious person, the urging of a dream is transformed by the mind's eye into a belief that something is possible. From this, there emerges a belief that hard work must and will make it happen.

Following a steadfast path. Success often comes after a series of setbacks. In the mind of an ambitious person, a dream becomes reality infinitely faster than the time it takes to read this sentence. In real life, success more often drives from a series of setbacks confronted and overcome. To achieve success, dreamers must learn to be stubborn. The road to success requires perseverance, optimism and an unquenchable hope that the moment of opportunity will come.

Seizing the moment. Dreamers become achievers when suddenly the moment they have been waiting for looms ahead and the dreamer responds with courage and chutzpah to seize the opportunity. To seize the moment, dreamers must be prepared. Hard work in preparation for that moment is what fixes the odds in dreamers' favor. Timing is crucial too when it comes to seizing opportunities. No one can seize the right opportunity at the wrong moment, nor will the opportunity hang around while dithering for the right moment. When daring is augmented by a shrewd sense of timing and a vision unseen by others, ambition flourishes.

Tempering ambition. At some point along the arc, as achievers near the apex, achievers run the danger of losing their balance. Achievers must master their own limitations, learning to be neither cowed nor seduced by heady opportunities. The key to successfully retaining achievers' balance is setting ambitious goals achievers execute well.

Inspiring with a greater purpose. To keep soaring along the rise of the arc, dreamers need to transform personal ambition into a broader purpose so that dreamers inspire others to join in and contribute to the effort. The need for meaning drives every human to create, to build, to pursue achievement. A worthy cause holds enormous appeal. The most satisfying purpose goes beyond making money and toward a quest for a higher good to an enriched life, as it galvanizes many people working together for a vital cause that gives all of them a sense of meaning.

Never violating values. When the point comes that achievers are tempted to cut corners to get further ahead, pause and consider the consequences. Compromise is bad for ambition. Achievers will inevitably face right versus wrong choices. The right decision may even be costly, the wrong one easy. But integrity is too precious to squander on short-term gains. When achievers violate moral or ethical values they say they believe in, they are headed for a slippery slope, sliding from bad to worse. There is no more certain way to hasten a fall down the arc.

Keeping control by giving it up. The only way to keep control is by giving some of it away. Clinging to power is a temptation that is hard to resist. Yet, sharing power is the only way to open an enterprise to its full growth potential. Replacing autocracy with partnership releases human potential. Achievers should remember that their power derives mainly from being able to inspire others. Achievers should not assume that no one else can match their own ambition, competence or vision. Fear chills minds and kills companies.

Changing or perishing. Change is inevitable. Knowing how and when to react to events is the secret to changing things for the better. Business is constantly changing whether we want it to or not. When achievers face tough competition, the answer is not to declare defeat, but to reorganize. Achievers must always be alert to the world outside their organizations' walls. Achievers must become adept at "sensing," meaning adept at spotting trends and seizing opportunities ahead of their competitors or dominance. Thus, achievers become neither a victim of change nor a victim of tradition.

Leaving gracefully. We all get old and die. Although few of us like to talk about it, we are not immortal. The

same goes for achievers' time as leaders. A graceful exit while at the peak of the arc of ambition is preferable to a quick slide down from the top.

I would say, "The Arc of Ambition" is a very good book for all those who dream of achieving greatness in any field.

Additional awesome books from Nitin Nohria:

Mayo, Anthony, Nitin Nohria, and Laura G. Singleton. Paths to Power: How Insiders and Outsiders Shaped American Business Leadership. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2006.

Mayo, Anthony, and Nitin Nohria. In Their Time: The Greatest Business Leaders of the 20th Century. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2005.

Manu says

I found this book like a compilation of short stories of few of the most successful leaders of our times in all walks of life from business, sports, spirituality to politics.

This book starts with talking about 3 phases in journey towards one's ambitions and what are the unique characteristics that drive people towards realizing those ambitions. These unique characteristics have been categorized into 10 different themes or chapters. To explain each of these themes in detail, short success stories of leaders have been beautifully written. These stories reinforce the skills that relate to the theme of each of these 10 chapters.

I found this book nothing more than a good collection of stories that could be used anywhere.

Ying Ying says

Ambition is the seed of achievement and should be nurtured and complemented with qualities such as perseverance, daring and timing. Among various stories mentioned in the book, the one from Andrew Carnegie "proved that an ambitious person with a transcendent purpose can vastly multiply his life's worth, while at the same time, winning some small measure of immortality."

I would recommend this book to all those who want to rekindle their ambition and begin their achievement path.
