



Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



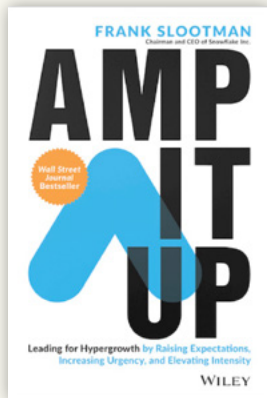
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# Amp It Up

Leading for Hypergrowth by Raising Expectations, Increasing Urgency, and Elevating Intensity

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After graduating from college, Frank Sloatman landed in America with \$100 to his name, then worked his way up from making ends meet to becoming CEO of Data Domain. He then led ServiceNow to rapid expansion followed by transforming his current company, Snowflake. In his book **Amp It Up**, Sloatman argues that many issues faced by organizations can be solved from within, and he suggests five key elements that all companies should purpose to do when they aim to “amp it up” in their organizations: “raise your standards, align your people, sharpen your focus, pick up the pace, and transform your strategy” (p. 6). Sloatman believes that moving with urgency and intensity will result in big rewards.

## Key Quote

“Leadership changes can yield immediate impact long before you can carry out more structural changes in talent, organization, and strategy” (p. 5) — **Frank Sloatman**

## Key Points

**My Journey from Teenage Toilet Cleaner to Serial CEO.** Choose wisely where you start your career. Understand that experience is invaluable and teaches you to fix what can be fixed sooner rather than later.

**Make Your Organization Mission Driven.** “A clear and compelling sense of mission has been one of the essential keys to our consistent growth and success” (p. 35). Once your mission is set, work on four things: “focus, urgency, execution, and strategy” (p. 41).

**Declare War on Your Competitors and on Incrementalism.** Have a “visceral sense of contest” and resist erring on the side of caution (pp. 46, 48).

**Put Execution Ahead of Strategy.** “Strategy can’t really be mastered until you know how to execute well” – and execution is a “teachable competency” (p. 56).

**Hire Drivers, Not Passengers, and Get the Wrong People Off the Bus.** “Maintain an active recruiting posture,” making sure the people at your company are motivated contributors and not just “passengers” (p. 70).

**Build a Strong Culture.** Culture and mission should be in sync. Whatever your stated values, they need to be practically lived out in the day-to-day with consequences attached for violating them.

**Teach Everyone to Go Direct and Build Mutual Trust.** Encourage and live out open communication between teams and departments. To build trust, “be trustworthy” as a leader (p. 88).

**Put Analysis Before Solutions.** Companies need to prioritize the diagnosis before launching solutions. “Slow down and critically examine situations and problems before settling on an explanation, never mind a solution” (p. 96).

**Align Incentives for Customer Success.** The whole company should feel responsible for customer satisfaction and success. “Customer grievances are best solved by establishing proper ownership, reducing internal complexity, and removing bureaucratic intermediaries” (p. 101).

**Ramp Up Sales.** Adjust your sales process to where your product line is – adjusting your sales approach as you upgrade your product. Identify who on your team is responsible for closing deals, but remember that sales will not pay off until “you’ve figured out your product, your demand and lead generation systems, and the kinds of selling motions that will convert prospects to customers” (p. 111).

**Grow Fast or Die Slow.** “When evaluating a young company, growth matters even more than profit margin or cost structure” (p. 113). Set your growth targets ambitiously.

**Stay Scrappy as You Scale Up.** No matter how large you become, “hang on to your early-stage dynamism” focusing always “on the core drivers of the company’s success” (pp. 127, 128).

**Materialize Your Opportunities – the Data Domain Growth Story.** Data Domain, a start-up, experienced success for a variety of reasons including attacking “weakness, not strength” betting “on the correct enabling technologies,” and nimbly transforming strategies as needed (pp. 134, 139, 140). A lesson learned was to be sure to assess the issues of “scope, expansion, and runway” from the very first day on the job (p. 142).

**Open the Aperture – the ServiceNow Expansion Story.** Look for openings to expand beyond a “narrow niche” of customers and functions. Avoid “the strategic dilemma of running out of markets” (p. 150).

**Swing for the Fences – the Snowflake Growth Story.** “You need to think well ahead of the current dynamic in your market.” Do not “take comfort in the status quo” (p. 152).



*After studying and speaking with over 200 leaders from middle school history teachers to executives of Fortune 500 companies, Wiseman discovered five key characteristics of Multipliers. They are Talent Magnets, Liberators, Challengers, Debate Makers, and Investors.*



**Amp Up Your Career.** In terms of your career, “education matters,” “experience matters more,” “aptitude matters most,” and “personality tips the scales” (pp. 160-163).

**Just for CEOs – Dealing With Founders and Boards.** When you take over as CEO after a founder, “tread lightly” and remember that your success will be the thing that makes your case (pp. 173-175). Carefully build relationships with your board, but lead them, as well (pp. 177-180).

**Conclusion – Great Leaders Have Great Outcomes.** Make the most of your unique skills, experience, and the insights you have received from others “to become a truer, more honed, more effective version of who you already are” (pp. 181-182).

### Key Concepts:

#### SET THE TONE

Having a leader who establishes a mission, is direct about its goals, and puts a purpose to the vision will likely see buy-in from their employees and growth in their company.

“Being on a mission unlocks the X factor: an intangible that can dramatically elevate performance as people set out to achieve greatness – together. It makes your working life not just more productive but also more fun” (pp. 35-36).

In formulating a truly great mission, make sure the mission is big (“but not impossible”), “clear,” and “not about money” (pp. 36-39).

The first step of a leader within an organization is to create and establish the mission. Next, everyone involved must embrace and carry out the goals & objectives. Companies and leaders should be aware of the possible setbacks of creating mediocre standards. Getting comfortable can cause a lack of growth, performance, and success.

“Try applying ‘insanely great’ as a standard on a daily basis and see how far you get.” There is a tendency for people to “lower their standards in an effort to move things along and get things off their desk. Don’t do it” (p. 6).

Create a sense of alignment between the people and the culture, resulting in a well-rounded team. “Are we all pulling on the same oar? Are we all driving in the same direction?” (pp. 6-7).

Eliminating management by objective (MBO) will help discourage employees from becoming attached to projects or developing an “every man for himself” attitude (p. 7).

Developing and trying to grow a company with no sense of urgency will result in a lack of alignment and create opportunities for competitors to win. “Apply pressure. Be impatient. Patience may be a virtue, but in business it can signal a lack of leadership” (p. 10).

#### HANDLING COMPETITION

It is the responsibility of leaders to understand the competitiveness of business and reiterate that message to the rest of the employees. “It’s no exaggeration to say that business is war” (p. 45). The bottom line is that business is a competitive game; there will be losers and winners. The losers will no longer be in business, while the winners will (p. 46).



*Make the most of your unique skills, experience, and the insights you have received from others to become a truer, more honed, more effective version of who you already are.”*



It should concern leaders and management when they begin to lose their top performers. “A talent drain is the best evidence that a company is in serious trouble and is losing its will to fight” (p. 48).

There are ways companies can defeat themselves, and one of them is by making advancements or positive changes only on a small, incremental scale. Companies can become scared to make big, bold decisions and instead they err on the side of caution. But making small leaps or only “inching forward” can create an even more significant risk than pushing the limits and being bold with decision-making (p. 49).

Leaders of organizations are encouraged to evaluate their growth models and ask themselves if their business can “start amping up” (p. 49). Amping up the growth model and taking bolder and bigger leaps in the right direction will drive organizations farther apart from their competitors.

It is the responsibility of leaders to effectively communicate with employees about the competitive nature of business. The employee’s paycheck is not safe if the success and growth of the company are not safe. Winning and competing against other companies takes the entire organization, not just the leaders.

Changing the incremental mindset will lead to quicker growth opportunities (p. 53).

## STRATEGY IS IMPORTANT, BUT IS NOTHING WITHOUT EXECUTION

Mastering how to execute a strategy is much more complex than building the strategy itself. While both are essential to growth and success, a good strategy without proper execution will always fail (p. 55).


“If you don’t know how to execute, every strategy will fail, even the most promising ones” (p. 55). Slotman adds, “As one of my former bosses observed: ‘No strategy is better than its execution’” (p. 55).

Exploring different strategic approaches and understanding why some are more valuable than others is a promising start to a good plan (pp. 58-59). To formulate and maintain an effective strategy, leaders must embrace “brutal honesty” about the changes that need to be made after comprehensive due diligence and challenging discussions (p. 59).

Being honest also means admitting when you may have been wrong about a particular strategy or approach. Leaders must be careful about becoming attached to a strategy. The approach will most likely need to be changed in one way or another, sooner or later. Better to change it sooner (p. 60).

At times, it may be difficult to distinguish what is going wrong – the strategy or the execution. “Eliminate execution as a potential factor first, and then move on to evaluating the strategy” (p. 61).

Slotman believes that hiring consultants is unnecessary and could be a waste of money. “Develop confidence in your own authority, not somebody else’s” (p. 61).



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## Nine Takeaways for Developing Strategy

- 1) "Attack weakness, not strength."
- 2) "Either create a cost advantage or neutralize someone else's."
- 3) "It's much easier to attack an existing market than create a new one."
- 4) "Early adopters buy differently than later adopters."
- 5) "Stay close to home in the early going."
- 6) "Build the whole product or solve the whole problem as fast as you can."
- 7) "Bet on the correct enabling technologies."
- 8) "Architecture is everything."
- 9) "Prepare to transform your strategy sooner than you expect" (pp. 133-142).

## ANALYSIS BEFORE SOLUTIONS

Leaders should take a deep look at the problems causing the need for solutions. They should be "diagnosis centric" rather than "jumping to conclusions" and focusing on solutions first (p. 93, 98).

Allocate time to focus on problems and correctly identify them before offering a solution. Leaders can be too quick to solve problems without knowing the entirety of the issue. "But if we are wrong in understanding the problem, our solutions won't work" (p. 94).

Groupthink and confirmation bias should be avoided when it comes to "jumping to solutions." These approaches diminish "new, creative, unexpected ways of thinking" (p. 95). Setting aside bias and letting go of past experiences can be helpful tactics when focusing on identifying the problem (p. 96).

Once the problem or issue is broken down and understood to its core, one can begin to analyze how to solve the issue correctly (pp. 96-97).


## THE PROBLEM WITH THE CUSTOMER SUCCESS DEPARTMENT

The customer should be the focal point of every employee and every department. Naming one department "customer success" gives all other employees the notion that the customer is not their responsibility (p. 100).


With no customer success department, "everyone's incentives are aligned." The customer remains at the heart of the business and is the responsibility of every employee and department (pp. 101-102).

## HOW TO BECOME BIG AND CONTINUE TO GROW

The importance of growth is necessary to understand before trying to become prominent in the business world. "Studies have found that when evaluating a young company, growth matters even more than profit margin or cost structure. Increases in growth drove twice as much valuation increase than equivalent improvements in profitability" (p. 113).



*Leaders should take a deep look at the problems causing the need for solutions. They should be "diagnosis centric" rather than "jumping to conclusions" and focusing on solutions first*



Leaders must let go of fear to build a “growth model that stretches your goals” (p. 116). Sloatman presses leaders to set big but achievable goals within a growth model and then strive to meet them. Conservative and careful goals will not challenge the business to grow. “Goals are powerful: they change behavior” (p.117).

Once a company gains growth, it can become harder to continue to expand that growth even more. However, “unlike the law of gravity, there’s no law that momentum naturally has to slow as your revenues climb higher and higher” (p. 119).

After growing big once (“striking gold”), refer to your culture, mission, and purpose. Look deep at the core of your business and examine the areas that still have room for expansion and growth (pp.37, 120). “You can expand your capacity to sell while at the same time increasing your addressable market” (p. 120).

Avoid being reluctant to change. Old habits are likely not going to work in a world of constant evolution (p. 128).

Leaders who can maintain their scrappy and competitive attitudes while incorporating discipline and structure are likely to succeed in higher executive roles (p. 128). Combining the two can result in a large company growing even bigger.

## CHOOSE DRIVERS, NOT PASSENGERS

New hires are an enormous part of an organization’s growth, success, and lack of success.

Sloatman breaks down the hiring process to its core – you should aim to choose “drivers, not passengers” (p. 65).

The author describes passengers as followers who are, in simple terms, just along for the ride. “Passengers are people who don’t mind simply being carried along by the company’s momentum, offering little or no input, seemingly not caring much about the direction chosen by management” (p. 65). The passengers must be eliminated from the equation. The wrong people contribute to undesirable results.


Drivers are leaders. They thrive off contributing and being more than just a number in a company. They want to make a difference. “They exude energy, urgency, ambition, even boldness. Faced with a challenge, they usually say, ‘Why not’ rather than ‘That’s impossible’” (p. 66).

“Ultimately, leaders are only as good as the people they surround themselves with. Once you get good at both hiring and firing, you are well on your way to great results and a thriving career” (p. 72).


## BE YOU

We all are “products” in the professional world. How your product looks is entirely up to you, and your product is shaped through your education, experiences, training, etc. (p. 159).

For leaders building an organization and for people seeking an organization, it is important to remember that while education matters, experience is more valuable. Aptitude and personality are essential, and communication skills are highly sought after. “Finding your own path, however long it takes, will unlock your personal power” (p. 182).



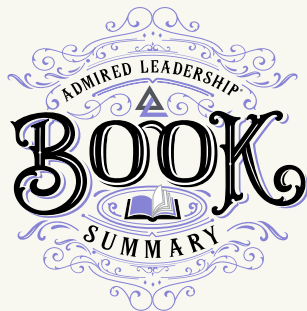
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Embracing the struggle and trusting the journey is half the battle. “As time unfolds, you will appreciate the hard times the most” (p. 168).

Trusting yourself and becoming a genuine, authentic, successful leader has to come from within. Leadership is unique; you have to find what works for you and your people. If you “amp it up,” the rest will fall into place (p. 182).

Slootman, Frank (2022). **Amp It Up: Leading for Hypergrowth by Raising Expectations, Increasing Urgency, and Elevating Intensity.** Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



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### **The Latest and Greatest Books for Leaders**

We work hard to stay abreast of the current writings on leadership, especially those books our clients are reading or have been recommended to read. As a benefit to our clients and to facilitate our own learning, the Admired Leadership team has long maintained a tradition of summarizing the newest books of interest to leaders. Better to read a summary for eight minutes before investing eight hours in the entire book.

After reading a good summary, we believe leaders are able to make better choices as to what to ignore, what to peruse and what to make the time to read closely.