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ADMIRER

**21 WAYS TO
DOUBLE YOUR VALUE**

**MARK C. THOMPSON
BONITA S. THOMPSON**

Foreword by Marshall Goldsmith & Frances Hesselbein

Contents

Foreword by Frances Hesselbein and Marshall Goldsmith	vii
Acknowledgments	xi

SECTION I

What You Want

Chapter 1: Are You Valued?	3
Chapter 2: How to Become an MVP	9
Chapter 3: Create Your Portfolio of Priorities	15
Chapter 4: Define What Success Means	21
Chapter 5: The Law of Distraction	29
Chapter 6: The Passion Trap	37

SECTION II

What They Want

Chapter 7: Everyone Sees Value Differently	47
Chapter 8: The Power of Praise	53
Chapter 9: Finding Common Ground	59

SECTION III

What to Do—A D M I R E

Chapter 10: ACTION	69
TOOL #1: Don't Wait to Be Asked	70
TOOL #2: Take Action to Create Value	75
TOOL #3: Guilt Is Good	85
TOOL #4: The Right Tool for the Job	91

Chapter 11:	DEVELOP	97
	TOOL #5: Start Where You Are	98
	TOOL #6: Invest in Yourself	101
	TOOL #7: Live What You Are For	106
	TOOL #8: Be Misunderstood	111
Chapter 12:	MEASURE	115
	TOOL #9: Reinvent Your Goals	116
	TOOL #10: Find Your Goal Buddy	123
	TOOL #11: Feed Forward, Not Backward	129
Chapter 13:	INNOVATE	135
	TOOL #12: Help Them Invent It	136
	TOOL #13: What's It Worth to Them?	142
	TOOL #14: Know What Your MVP Values	147
Chapter 14:	RECRUIT	153
	TOOL #15: Hire Your Weakness	154
	TOOL #16: Stop Networking	160
	TOOL #17: Get Someone Else Ready	165
	TOOL #18: Don't Play the Blame Game	172
Chapter 15:	EXCITE	177
	TOOL #19: Be Different	178
	TOOL #20: Get Heard	184
	TOOL #21: What's Your Story?	191
<hr/>		
Epilogue		199
Appendix: Research for <i>Admired</i>		203
About the Authors		220

2

How to Become an MVP

We've all felt undervalued at some point in our lives and we'd love to have our boss, customers, and family appreciate us for the many things we do for them. To be more valued, respected, and admired, you must know what the important people in your professional and personal life—your Most Valuable People or MVPs—value most. Do you know what your MVPs care about? Are you sure you're giving them exactly what *they* value, not just what *you* value? It has to be both.

First, Give Value

The most admired people are those who focus on giving more value than they expect from others in every interaction. Reciprocity is the first step to being more valued. It would be fabulous if your MVPs value what you care about as much as you do, but it's rarely that simple.

Are you giving your MVPs exactly what *they* value, not just what *you* value? It has to be both.



Whether you're running a household or managing a multinational corporation, you may feel you're already generous with the MVPs in your life. You've always had the best of intentions and, after all this time, you deserve their applause for all that you do for them. But it can't be all about you until it's *also* about them. Some call this *Servant Leadership*. Being valued by others is about finding the intersection

between what you can and want to contribute and what your MVPs need. As with the oxygen mask that drops from the ceiling of an airplane in distress, we must take care of our own needs before we can help others. Everyone, including your MVPs, has their own agenda. Not only is it essential to be clear about your needs and goals, if you want to serve your MVPs better and be more admired in return, you must help them achieve what is important to them at work and in life.

Do You Feel Valued?

Somewhat. Perhaps not as much as you should. With the help of our friends at Stanford and Northwestern Universities, we asked more than 1,000 Americans

in a national survey to rate how valued they feel, with 1 being the least valued and 7, the most. Our respondents gave their boss or customers a 4—they felt moderately valued by these MVPs. Good, but not great.

They thought their families appreciated them a bit more. The respondents gave them a rating of 5 on average; and many said their families valued them a 6 out of 7. That's pretty darn good.

Do You Know What Your MVPs Value?

Nope. Not really. When we asked our survey participants whether they knew what their boss or customers valued, they gave themselves a miserly score of 2 on a scale of 7. Even for their families, they rated themselves only a 3 when asked how well they knew what their loved ones valued. Yikes! In face-to-face seminars, we also found a similar disconnect between people's desire to be valued and their knowledge of what others desire. Our students were able to tell us instantly whether or not they were sufficiently valued by others. Rarely did anyone ever say they were overvalued. But when asked what their MVPs valued, we were surprised how often we got a blank stare.

Despite all the news on the importance of *knowing your customer*, very few people do it enough at work or in life. Reciprocity takes enormous effort. The irony is that even though it rarely crosses our minds to consider what our boss, clients, or family members really value, we're insulted when our MVPs don't value *us*!

There is a good reason for this. It's easy to imagine what *we think* others value in us. We know a lot about what we have to offer. We know what we were asked to do in our jobs, for example, but focus very little on how or whether the recipients of

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that work—our bosses, colleagues, and customers—value it. But in business and life, success is in knowing (and then doing) what the customer wants and needs, not what we think they should want and need.

What Are Your MVPs Looking For in a Leader?

One of the major reasons you may be undervalued as a leader is because there is a big difference between how you want to be admired as a person and what others are looking for in their leaders. In our national survey, we asked what traits participants admire in a leader, and then compared those traits with what they wanted to be admired for as a person. Turns out that they aren't the same thing.

The top six traits are similar for both questions. People said they both want to be admired for and want leaders who are:

- *Smart*
- *Hardworking*
- *Honest*
- *Caring*
- *Dependable*
- *Competent*

Put those traits on your checklist as the leadership behaviors that are always appreciated and admired. In 30 years of research on leadership, these traits are the most frequently cited. But the similarity ends there.

Apparently there is a big difference between what we want to be valued for and what we say we value in our leaders. In addition to the six universal traits listed above, people said they want their leaders also to be *visionary, inspiring, cause-driven/moral, determined, and courageous*. But when we asked people in our survey what they wanted to be admired for, the list was very different.

The top ten traits people want to be admired for also include being *creative/imaginative, supportive, loyal, fun-loving, and friendly*.

These are all good traits, and we found 27 in all. It's impossible for most of us to embody all of them at once, of course. So we took this inquiry another important step further than other research on the topic. We asked participants how engaged they are with work, how enjoyable it is, and how much of it is meaningful. There's tons of proof that people who love their work and think it matters actually do more, do it better, and are great to be around. For *only* those people who felt engaged in meaningful and enjoyable work, they said they want their leaders to be:

- *Supportive/Helpful*
- *Straightforward/Clear*
- *Hardworking/Ambitious*
- *Cooperative*
- *Honest*
- *Loyal*
- *Fun-loving/Friendly*
- *Family Focused*

Those are eight traits well worth aspiring to. What this means is that if you want to become more valued and admired for what you do for your MVPs, you need to focus on how you're exhibiting these key characteristics. How are you demonstrating to your customers, coworkers, and boss that you're *supportive*? Are you making sure that what you say and do is *straightforward and clear*? Think about how your actions and behaviors represent you for all eight traits.

In order to be admired as a leader you need to prioritize the eight hot-button traits that MVPs value most. We call these your *Portfolio of Priorities*, and we'll review these in the next chapter.



Find a Place to Call Home

If you want to feel more valued, then you need to find a community of people who share those values. What we mean by *home* is a place or ecosystem where people are actively involved in your profession, share your values, and where you can make yourself known and valuable.

If you want to fly, hang out with people who do that. We have a dear friend who could not rest until he became a fighter pilot. Pat became a *Top Gun* because he loved the discipline, duty, and outrageous action as an airman, and the sense of service and contribution it gave him. By pursuing that dream with excellence and passion, he is today admired by that tribe.

We have another pal, Daveed, whose first love is spine surgery, but like me (Mark), he also has a passion for producing Broadway shows. In addition to our other responsibilities, we can't expect to be successful with theater productions unless we invest time in building relationships locally in the New York theater community. If you want to participate in a field or endeavor where you want to be valued and make an admirable contribution, you have to show up and serve in ways that are valued in that business or in that neighborhood. That's how you eventually become an MVP. Make it your mission to find the right place where people gather who are engaged in your passion and where you can increase your chances to seize the right opportunities and meet the right influencers.

Epilogue

If you've ever had a child refuse to follow directions—no matter how influential you may have thought you are—you realized there is no such thing as control over other people. Whenever I think I'm "motivating" someone else, the truth is that they're choosing to be influenced based on their own beliefs, passions, past experiences, or fears even if they don't realize it. They're following their own urges based on how well I can connect with what they value, not what anyone else may believe is important, for better or for worse.

I was bringing our daughter, Vanessa, home from school one afternoon and remember feeling frustrated because she was refusing to take a class we had signed her up for. She was 8 at the time, and has always been a cooperative child, sweet and generous beyond her years. But she had drawn the line this time and wouldn't budge. It was something we wanted her to do and we were certain that she'd love it. There is no one in the world more important to us than Vanessa. We only want "what's best for her" (based on our values and beliefs) in every aspect of her life.

Our little girl stood there resolute in the doorway, her golden hair spotlighted by the afternoon sun. She smiled, hands on hips, in her pink and white floral spring dress with knee socks, shaking her braided ponytail back and forth in disapproval. She wasn't angry; she was just clear about her position on the matter and convinced that dad was misguided.

In a vain attempt to persuade her, I kneeled so I could look straight into those killer baby blue eyes. "Honey, this is going to be really fun," I begged. "There is no doubt in my mind that you're going to like it."

Vanessa sighed like a parent who knew better. She put her hand on my shoulder reassuringly as if I were now the grade-schooler.

“You are the best daddy in the whole world!” She gave me a hug. “But you aren’t the boss of my *likes*,” she said, clarifying my role. “You’re the boss of taking care of me.”

You can’t be the boss of someone else’s likes—it’s pointless to demand to be valued or admired. It has to be earned.



My heart skipped a beat. This kid has always been a wise, old soul. She mentors me whenever I become arrogant enough to believe I’m in charge of *everything*. You can’t be the boss of someone else’s likes—it’s pointless to demand to be valued or admired. It has to be earned. With the best of intentions, we often attempt to control the passions of the most valued people in our lives and work.

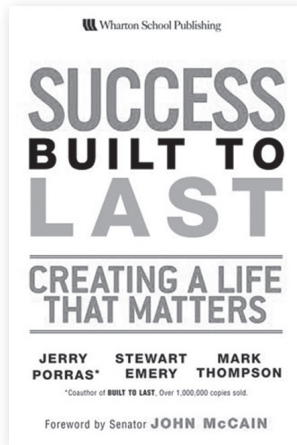
I’m not recommending lack of discipline or laissez-faire leadership. The best military commanders know that regular troops turn into heroes not because you gave orders, but because each soldier knew why the mission mattered and cherished that vision as their own. As parents, coworkers, or bosses, we’re accountable for many essential responsibilities, but we often confuse that authority with being in charge of everything. As leaders, our job is to inspire action and give guidance and tools to support the most valuable people in our work and our lives.

But we don’t control anyone else’s values. Our children are given to us on a short-term lease—and our best employees and closest friends are volunteers—they aren’t required to be loyal. The best people don’t have to stick with us to pursue their dreams.

Vanessa chose a path that day that took many of the best aspects of what we were recommending as parents and combined them with what she loved. She chose a different class that day from the one we preferred, but I learned a great deal about what she cared about so that we could support her (and guide her) more effectively as she grew up. I believe that our willingness as parents to listen to Vanessa and take her seriously throughout her young life is the reason she's still willing to listen to us as a teenager. That's what we need to learn about our MVPs: to take their dreams as seriously as we wish that they will take ours!

Starting back in grade school, Vanessa started to learn about how important it was to do something she deeply cared about. For that reason, she owned it, and recruited classmates to join her. Together they performed so brilliantly that she was admired, respected, and valued by her teachers and teammates (and parents!) for what matters most.

If you want to be admired for something meaningful—and double your value to the most valuable people—then turn up the oxygen in your life. Find a way to breathe air into the passions and values of your MVPs. When you appreciate what's valuable to you first, then seek sincerely to understand and connect with what drives the people who matter to you with depth and clarity, success is inevitable.



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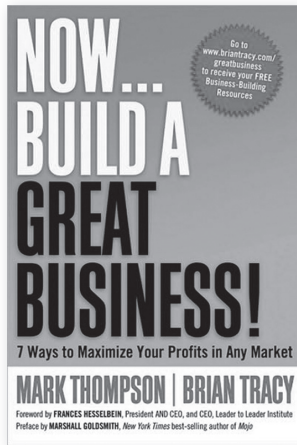
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