Preface

M OST BOOKS, it seems, flow essentially from the individual experiences of their authors. In that respect, this book is no different. Indeed, I have deliberately stressed these experiences in an attempt to make the text more personal and thereby more readable. At the same time, not paying attention to what others are saying surely opens the door to a variety of misadventures—going down roads that have been shown to be of little value. For this reason, I spend considerable time here looking at what other observers of the high-tech scene have concluded. My final reckoning seems to me to be a type of synthesis of the two—my own experiences and observations and those reported by others.

With respect to the book's specific content—which is the often difficult journey from individual contributor, to manager, to leader—I began as a research engineer and later migrated to various management

positions, including serving as president of two systems and software engineering companies. The journey was both highly enjoyable as well as stressful for me. I learned a considerable number of my lessons about management, as well as leadership, from what is known as "OJT"—on-the-job training. That means that one makes just about all the mistakes possible, and I probably did exactly that. Perhaps this book, as your own personal primer, can help you to avoid potential errors and move you forward more surely and rapidly, whatever path you choose.

One of the central themes of this book involves change—both personal and corporate. This is a simple word, and even a simple notion, but its achievement is quite elusive. Here again, I've tried to share in these pages what I've learned about change, at both the personal and the corporate levels. Part of the need for change will be coming at all of us from new and stronger forces as they gather and gain strength in the twenty-first century. To try to understand what this might mean, I've attempted to rely on what the professional futurists are telling us. But even these results are subject to change as we go down the road, and flexibility in the face of external changes will stand us in good stead as we proceed.

I have reached these various conclusions through my many years of experience in engineering positions. I spent 30 years (1959–1989) in industry, starting as a research engineer, and I ended up becoming president of two high-tech companies and a board member of three. In 1989, I accepted a position as Distinguished Research Professor and Professor of Engineering Management in the School of Engineering and Applied Science at the George Washington University. I've been fortunate enough to have at least two careers, one in industry and the other in academia. Working in industry gave me hands-on experience as to how high-tech businesses function; my time in the academic world afforded me the opportunity to think more about what had happened, what seemed to be happening, and what was likely to be coming down the road in the days ahead.

Over a 20-year period, I held a variety of manager positions. As president of two systems and software engineering companies, I certainly tried to lead the charge. I will say that there were lots of folks in

the room with me as we developed our strategic plans at retreats well away from our offices around the country. During a little over a year I lived on both coasts, spending a week in Los Angeles at the headquarters of a company I ran, and a week in Rockville, Maryland, at the parent company and field office of the subsidiary. At the same time, I got a chance to write my first serious book, mostly while I was flying between Los Angeles and Washington, DC.

During my tenure in industry, I like to say "I was sold twice," and I also was involved in the two purchases of other companies that become subsidiaries. Experiencing the merger issue from both directions taught me a lot about what to do and what not to do on both sides. Being acquired can be a humbling experience. You may recall that Ross Perot did the same by selling his EDS to General Motors and then tried to humble GM. Yet another case of trying to "teach the elephant to dance." All of that appeared not to work, but he walked away with the consolation prize of $700 million. Don't expect that kind of treatment from your bosses as you become more and more of a troublemaker. It's not likely to happen, perhaps ever again.

Did I have the training to succeed in the world of building high-tech enterprises? Since almost all of what I learned was in the context of OJT (on-the-job training), I'd have to answer no to that question. My bachelor's, master's, and doctorate were all in engineering, with not a single business course in any of the curricula. I attended several short courses that addressed management issues and migrated through a variety of management and executive jobs relying mainly on three things:

1. A lot of self-directed reading (which I hope this book might be for you);

2. Paying attention, as best I could, to what was going on in front of me;

3. My natural tendencies to respond to the various challenges many kinds of customers presented to me.

I like to think that I mostly grew into the jobs I found myself in and never thought a lot about the formality of building a career.

The bottom line is that each of us, by and large, takes the journey that feels most comfortable in the sense that it's closest to who we are. Although there are exceptions, we're apt to proceed with a step-by-step approach, whether planned in advance or not. I've designed this book to help with that kind of approach, rather than one that claims there are only a couple of easy steps into management and leadership positions. I've tried to highlight what I consider to be a central fact in moving toward such positions—that it will take a fair amount of personal change, which can be most difficult and challenging. Along the pathways, we're buffeted by lots of both internal and external forces. I try to touch upon the nature of these forces in the various chapters that follow.

Acknowledgments

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