# Focus

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## Lessons From Bill & Dave

The recent leadership turmoil at HP – a company I've long admired – led me to peruse Michael S. Malone's excellent book *Bill & Dave* for lessons from HP's founders.  It's been more than 3 years since I first read *Bill & Dave*, but the leadership lessons from Bill Hewlett and David Packard are timeless. Seven of my favorites follow.

- Don't punish employees for having initiative, even if it doesn't fit standard procedures.

- Prepare early for succession, because the need for such a plan may come sooner than you think.

- A frustrated employee is a greater threat than a merely unhappy one.

- Regularly survey employees to make sure that understanding, not just information, is being conveyed up and down through the organization.

- The biggest competitive advantage is to do the right thing at the worst times.

- A company focused solely on profits ultimately betrays both itself and society.

- A company's culture is not a suicide pact.  There are times when senior executives must intervene, violating their own rules of engagement, to keep the company

- Bill and Dave were extraordinary men: entrepreneurs, visionaries, leaders in the private and public sectors, and ultimately philanthropists.  They believed in people,

and said, "A great manager never leaves anyone behind."  However, they also knew that appropriate corporate structures were necessary, and that structures and policies (but not fundamental values) needed to change from time to time.

Not everyone can achieve their greatness, but we all can achieve *more* by studying their examples.  It is not mere hyperbole that Michael Malone subtitled his book on them, "How Hewlett and Packard Built the World's Greatest Company."

Sadly, HP's recent leaders (Carly Fiorina, Mark Hurd, and Leo Apotheker – who lasted just 11 months) have disappointed.  Some people *are* irreplaceable.

*Tom Wagner*

Tom Wagner helps leaders by:

- Being a sounding board to help them think through important issues

- Identifying and developing high-potential employees

- Finding the root cause of important problems

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