OBSTACLES WELCOME

turn adversity to advantage in business and life

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A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK
ONE

Ninety Miles to Advantage

The Journey Begins

"Only the boy can go." Those stark words, from the mouth of the Cuban official that day at the Havana Airport, changed my life forever. It was the morning of Monday, July 1, 1962, and I was only ten years old.

My family was waiting to board a flight to Miami—my dad, Rafael; my mother, Andrea; my little sister, Barbara; and me. After months on a waiting list, we had been approved to leave Cuba and go to the United States. We had said good-byes to our relatives. The time to leave was getting short. Then a man in uniform appeared and spoke to my father. I sensed there was something wrong.

He said there were irregularities with our family’s departure documents, except for mine. Suddenly my parents had a wrenching decision to make. Either we all would stay in Cuba until the
ONE

Ninety Miles to Advantage

The de la Vega family at a beach house. In the summer we would take vacations at the beach. In this picture, my mother is holding my sister, Barbara, while I enjoy an ice cream cone and show off my physique. That's my father in the background.
The freedom we had known was gone, replaced by intimidation and confiscation of property. Food distribution was taken over by the government, so my father’s business was gone. Every family was given a **libreta**, or ration book, for food which became increasingly scarce. At school—including former private schools now run by the government—the staff would challenge us to pray to God for ice cream or small change. When no ice cream or money materialized, we were told to pray to Fidel for the same. At that point, the miracle of ice cream or small change would appear very quickly.

Most troubling of all were the fear and distrust that pervaded everyday life. Although no one in my close family was imprisoned, thousands of our countrymen had been locked up—and it could happen to anyone at the slightest provocation, or just a suspicion. In the community, you didn’t know who among your neighbors might be watching and listening on behalf of the government. Sometimes our family had extra food through my dad’s old business connections—and my mother would cook it in the middle of the night when no neighbors were awake. At school, we were told to report to our teacher if we ever heard an adult, including our parents, criticize the government. The strategy was simple—undermine loyalty to anyone and anything other than Castro and the regime.

Families like mine who had a young son had an extra worry. Boys nearing draft age (fifteen) would not be allowed to leave Cuba. There were also constant rumors swirling that Cuban boys...

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My journey began during the Cuban Revolution. Fidel Castro overthrew the government of Fulgencio Batista on January 1, 1959, and installed a socialist regime, dramatically changing the political, social, and economic fabric of the country. Located ninety miles from the United States, directly south of Key West Florida, Cuba has a population of 11 million people.

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*The de la Vega family in the late 1950s. My father, Rafael; my mother, Andrea; and my sister, Barbara. (In coordinated shirt, pants, and shoes, I appear to be on my best behavior.)*
The freedom we had known was gone, replaced by intimidation and confiscation of property. Food distribution was taken over by the government, so my father's business was gone. Every family was given a libreta, or ration book, for food which became increasingly scarce. At school—including former private schools now run by the government—the staff would challenge us to pray to God for ice cream or small change. When no ice cream or money materialized, we were told to pray to Fidel for the same. At that point, the miracle of ice cream or small change would appear very quickly. Most troubling of all were the fear and distrust that pervaded everyday life. Although no one in my close family was imprisoned, thousands of our countrymen had been locked up—and it could happen to anyone at the slightest provocation, or just a suspicion. In the community, you didn’t know who among your neighbors might be watching and listening on behalf of the government. Sometimes our family had extra food through my dad’s old business connections—and my mother would cook it in the middle of the night when no neighbors were awake. At school, we were told to report to our teacher if we ever heard an adult, including our parents, criticize the government. The strategy was simple—undermine loyalty to anyone and anything other than Castro and the regime. Families like mine who had a young son had an extra worry. Boys nearing draft age (fifteen) would not be allowed to leave Cuba. There were also constant rumors swirling that Cuban boys were going to be sent off to Moscow to be educated. More than any other danger, the fear of losing their children—soul as well as body—motivated families like mine to try to get out. Applying to leave the country was a dangerous thing, however. You marked yourself as a gusano— a “worm.” Almost immediately, militia would show up at your house and inventory all your possessions. They made it clear they would be back at the time of your departure, and every item must still be in the house. You had to leave all your possessions behind. My wife, Maria, has even more vivid memories of these times than I do. Her family also were gusanos. Her father had been an accountant, and her mother had been a teacher at St. George’s School in Havana. When the government took control of the school, her mother quit rather than wear fatigues and teach curriculum that was little more than propaganda. The family continued to attend Mass in spite of the government’s open hostility to religion, and Maria remembers being in church one day when armed militia burst in, yelling and demanding that everyone get out. The priest continued with the ritual. No one moved. The militia left. In January 1963, her family received a telegram that on the following day, they could sail on a Red Cross ship. Maria remembers the militia coming for the second inventory. Her mother, Berta, had a beautiful sweater, which a female militia member obviously planned to claim for herself. She told Maria’s mother, At the Halloween party at St. George’s School in Havana, Maria dressed as a cat (far right). The Castro government took control of the school, forcing the faculty to wear fatigues and teach propaganda. Berta, Maria’s mother, resigned her teaching position.
Here is Maria at home in Cuba. On the bed is her favorite doll, a Mariquita Pérez doll made in Spain. It was one of the few possessions Maria had with her when preparing to board the Shirley Lykes in Havana Harbor. When a guard suggested tearing the doll’s head off to look for contraband, Maria’s tears moved him to return the doll unharmed.
“I did not have nice things like this before Fidel.” Then she told her to hand over the sweater. Just before boarding the Shirley Lykes with other thankful gusanos, Maria’s family had to pass one last checkpoint. The militia riffled through the few possessions the family was allowed to take. Maria was carrying her beloved doll, a Mariquita Pérez doll with dark hair and shining eyes like Maria’s own. A guard demanded to examine it. Turning the doll over in his hands, he told his companion that the head should be torn off to make sure nothing valuable was stashed inside. Maria began to cry. The guard looked down at her and returned her doll undamaged—a rare humane act in the tension and hostility of those times.

One of my first pictures in the United States. Soon after I arrived in the United States, I had my picture taken at school. I remember the shirt I wore that day. It was my favorite and a prized possession at the time.
I was very lucky to have had a great second set of parents. Arnaldo and Ada Baez, who took me in while I waited for the rest of my family to flee Cuba, treated me as one of their own. The Baez children, Arnie and William, became like my own brothers. Pictured are Ada and Arnaldo with their son Arnie.
Obstacles Welcome

The track of Hurricane Andrew (courtesy of NOAA). The storm struck South Florida on August 24, 1992, with winds in excess of 155 miles per hour, devastating everything in its path.
The south end of South Florida was totally devastated. I had never seen damage of this nature before. Trees and power lines were down, roofs were gone, and complete subdivisions were demolished.
Opportunities in Disguise

At the end of 1999, BellSouth had approximately 30,000 broadband access lines in service. My team was charged with increasing the number of broadband subscribers to 200,000 by the end of 2000 and to 600,000 by the end of 2001. The headline above from the BellSouth Connections publication on January 2002 says it all. Mission accomplished!
Demonstration in Caracas, October 2002
obstacles welcome

situation that called immediately for a new vision. This was about bringing stability to existing operations, to give us a fighting chance for the future.

Once a degree of stability was attained, I brought our country general managers together for a planning and strategy session, a “summit meeting” of sorts. (I strongly believe in giving strategic planning responsibility to the people who will be accountable for executing the strategy.) This meeting got off to a rocky start as it became clear these GMs were used to being very independent. But we worked through it. By the end of the meeting, we had a collaborative vision, a set of strategies, and key initiatives for reaching the vision. It was hard work—but fully worth the effort.

When the meeting ended, every GM literally signed the document that outlined our plan—and we went forward in unity. The net result from all this? Stellar, as shown in the chart below:

- BellSouth Latin America Net Income ($M)
- Chart showing net income from 2000 to 2003 with fluctuations.

decisions on my company, my colleagues, and the communities we serve—validate the courage and foresight of my parents and all the Cuban refugees who did what they did.

Every Journey Through Adversity Needs a Compass

Putting yourself in a position to have opportunities doesn’t require going through a political revolution that turns your world upside down. It does require that you guide yourself by the four key elements required for personal or professional achievement:

1. plan for success
2. take risks
3. recognize opportunities
4. overcome obstacles

These elements should guide you like a compass through your life.
Julia Diaz Gomez, my abuela (grandmother), was a mother of seven, a schoolteacher, and a poet. She loved to read poetry by José Martí, a poet and hero from the war of independence from Spain. Her advice to stay in school and get a degree made a huge difference in my future.

Me with my wife, Maria, and our sons, David and Mark, at Christmas. We are seated in front of a friend’s fireplace, in Naperville, Illinois.
opportunities in disguise

meant moving my wife, Maria, and our young sons, David and Mark, away from our extended families in South Florida, and leaving a community that was comfortable and safe. A native-born person probably would not have even hesitated. But for us, the Cuban community of South Florida was a haven of comfort, security, familiar culture, and love.

When I told my mother, she thought I was joking. Realizing I was serious, she had strong objections—"You mean to tell me you are moving your family with your two young sons to Chicago, that cold place up north?" She said this in Spanish, with Cuban vehemence that does not translate to the printed page.

Concerning relocating, I have been lucky all my adult life to have tremendous support from Maria and our sons. From a personal standpoint, it worked out well. I remember the first snow

This is one of my favorite memories from the time we spent in Chicago, seeing my boys, David and Mark, playing in the snow.
Learn to Unlearn and Relearn

Step-by-Step
Create a Compelling Vision of the Future

Cingular Strategic Imperatives

Build The Best Network

Create Unmatched Distribution

Provide Great Customer Service

Deliver Compelling Products & Services
Create a Compelling Vision of the Future

There is a wonderful story about three bricklayers working on the same construction project. When asked what he is doing, the first one responds, “I am making a living.” The second says, “I am helping build a church.” And the third says, “I am serving God.”

Of the three, guess whose work was truly inspired? Even routine work can become inspiring when it is seen as part of a big picture that adds meaning to life. What gets a group of colleagues excited? A compelling vision. A shared vision. Even the most mundane job will become motivating if you get the people you lead (and yourself) to see it as an integral part of a compelling vision. I truly believe this, and my experience bears it out. The merger of Cingular and AT&T Wireless in 2005 shows the power of inspiring people to reach for a vision. Let me tell you what we did.

Celebrating the completion of the rebranding to Cingular Wireless. This picture was taken on November 14, 2004, around midnight. It was the final step in completing the merger-integration plans before launching the new company ahead of the holiday season on November 15, 2004.

Cingular Wireless post-merger results. Operating income before depreciation and amortization (OBIDA) margin shown on the bottom left-hand chart.
During my first week as a Southern Bell engineer, right out of college, my integrity was challenged. This was the 1970s, and public telephones were still a big part of our business. Management trainees like me were assigned a certain number of pay phones to monitor as part of our job. This involved checking to see they had Yellow Pages, making sure the booth was clean, and testing the phone to confirm that it worked. The test involved placing a call.

The first pay phone I tested gave me a surprise. When I put my coin in, the change inside the phone came gushing out. It was like hitting three bananas on a Las Vegas slot machine. This was my first week on the job, and I could have used the money since I hadn't yet received a paycheck. But I turned in the cache of coins to my district manager and told him what had happened. That was the last I thought of it.

A couple of days later, he came over to me and said, "Son, did you know those coins were marked?" I had no idea what he meant.
The Only Way to Win

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Emphasizing the pyramid up front gets everyone on the same page about how the organization will operate. The time I spent with BellSouth Latin America drove home the importance of doing this. We were a U.S.-owned business operating in multiple international markets. The culture was different, as was the language. So I always had a “values conversation” with my direct reports, and their direct reports, and went over the Pyramid of Principles. Otherwise, given the different systems of government and local traditions, our people could have carried out orders in a way that would be okay locally but inconsistent with U.S. laws.

As a leader using the principles of the pyramid, it’s important to remember that you set the tone (the tone at the top) by how you behave and what you communicate. People sometimes interpret small things as big signals when they are nothing of the sort.

Life’s a Journey—Prepare for the Trip

Many years ago, I met a bright woman who had been an executive assistant. While there were important responsibilities in her job, this woman clearly had managerial potential. She recognized this fact, as did some of us who knew her. I encouraged her to prepare for a bigger job by going back to school. First she got her bachelor’s degree. Then she went on to get an MBA.

Even so, nothing really changed for her. She was ready for bigger responsibilities, but unfortunately she continued to be viewed in her old role. Realizing this was not going to change, she found a very good job with a different company that welcomed her for her credentials, rather than penalizing her based on the past. Her old company was the loser for failing to see her potential as clearly as she did.

Who’s in Control?

A few people on this earth just seem destined to enjoy success. Things appear to work out for them naturally, with very little effort. These people are extremely rare, and the odds of being one of them are too small to take seriously.

For the other 99.99 percent of us, such as the MBA-earner just described, achieving the success we want doesn’t come so easy. It takes a lot of work in our personal life and on the job. The good news is, the effort pays off. Leadership can be learned. Success can be won. Each of us is in control of our own journey—deciding where we want to go, and how to get there. The following graphic, adapted from David A. Kolb’s Experiential Learning, shows how this happens as life experiences combine with education, work, and personal development to shape the capacity to lead.
The Success Cycle

1. **Assess the Situation**

As a ten-year-old boy separated from my parents and family, living in a strange place where I didn't know the language, had no money, and didn't like the food, there were plenty of negatives to dwell on. It would have been easy to feel helpless and victimized by forces beyond my control.

But was I helpless? Not at all. Even at a young age, I could see that the positives of my situation were just as powerful as the negatives. I was living in the greatest country on the planet, the United States of America. I had two wonderful surrogate parents, Ada and Arnaldo Baez, who treated me as if I were their own child. I also had the example of courage that my own parents had shown, first in being willing to leave Cuba, and then in sending me on alone. With all of these factors working for me, I became determined to succeed.

2. **Create the Vision**

The starting point of the success cycle is a frank and honest assessment of the situation. You need to have a clear understanding of where you are and what you need to do to move forward.

3. **Align the People**

Next, you need to align the people involved in your success cycle. This means getting everyone on the same page, understanding their roles and responsibilities, and ensuring that they are committed to your vision.

4. **Build the Plan**

Once you have aligned the people, you can start building your plan. This plan should be detailed and specific, with clear timelines and milestones.

5. **Execute, Monitor & Adjust**

Finally, it's time to execute your plan. This is where the hard work really begins. You need to stay focused and determined, and be willing to make adjustments along the way as needed.

By following these five stages of the success cycle, you can increase your odds of achieving your goals and becoming successful.
The Success Cycle

It's one thing to say you want to be successful. It is quite another to have a plan for assuring that you are successful. Without a plan, it is possible you could succeed. You could get lucky. Things might go your way by accident. But the odds are not in your favor.

Instead of leaving things to chance, I want to be in the driver’s seat on my life’s journey. If you want to do the same—and be successful at it—then you must follow the success cycle. This cycle has five stages.

Phase One—Assess the Situation

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The starting point of the success cycle is a frank and honest assessment.
transforming vision into results

done, you will be successful. And that is whether you are talking about business or your personal life.

Cingular Wireless Operating Plan Elements

VISION
To be the most highly regarded wireless company in the world, with driving focus on sales and service

IMPERATIVES
- Build the best network
- Create unmatched distribution
- Provide great customer service
- Deliver compelling products and services

STRATEGIES
- Growth Strategy
- Retention Strategy
- Distribution Strategy
- Network Strategy
- Integration Strategy
- Cost & Capital Efficiency Strategy
- People Strategy

KEY INITIATIVES
- Grow targeted segments
- Build world-class B2B capabilities
- Implement customer life cycle management
- Expand national retail and alternate channels
- Improve company-owned retail and agent performance
- Build the nation’s best network
- Improve end-to-end network reliability
- Execute merger integration plans
- Optimize call center operations
- Optimize organization for high performance

VALUES
Integrity  People  Performance  Teamwork  Customers
At Cingular, we used to have a rule that said if a customer called to complain about a legitimate charge on his or her bill, the customer service rep could reduce the charge by 50 percent. Of course, if we had made a mistake, we would give you a 100 percent refund. But these situations were different. Often they involved customers running up charges unaware. For example, they added text messaging to their accounts and they—or more likely their children—went way over the limit on the messages included in the plan, so they were being charged for each additional message.

When something like this happened, our old rule was: listen to the customer; explain what happened (“These are text message charges, and there were a lot of them, as you can see”); and then offer to reduce the charge by half if the customer was unaware of what was included in the plan. If there was a hundred-dollar charge, we would take fifty dollars off the bill.

The first one is • Rate of Penetration (R1). How many customers do you have out of the population you serve? The New York market might have ten million wireless customers in all. How many of them are yours?

The second metric is • Revenue Intensity (R2). We are looking at how much you are selling to the customers you already have. How much revenue are those customers generating? Are you selling them all the products you should?

Next is • Return on Operations (R3). How profitable are you? Are margins increasing?

And the last piece is • Reputation (R4), or customer loyalty. You’ve got a lot of customers; but are you retaining them?

Empowerment cuts both ways. A VP/GM may say, “I need $2 million more to do X.” And my answer might be, “Well, what are you going to do with that?”
Even people who have never heard of Peter Drucker, perhaps the most influential management thinker who ever lived, have heard his maxim: What gets measured gets done. And like just about everything Dr. Drucker said about accomplishing objectives, this one is absolutely right.

When most people first hear “what gets measured gets done,” they say, “I get it. If I know my boss is watching how much progress I am making toward something she has asked me to do, then for sure I am going to work on it.” And that is absolutely right. Measurements are milestones that help you understand whether you’re advancing toward your goals. But if you stop there in your interpretation of Dr. Drucker’s statement, you only get partial credit. The power of measurements is much bigger.

If you think about what we have talked about so far in this book, you will see how this all comes together. To achieve your vision, you need to utilize the right strategies and create the right initiatives. Then you need the right metrics—you need to measure the right things—to monitor your progress and stay on course. Graphically it looks like the triangle below.

When it comes to metrics, three things matter:

1. Choosing the right ones.
2. Tracking performance against those metrics.
3. Displaying progress so that (a) everyone knows how they are doing toward achieving the goals, and (b) it is easy to spot areas needing improvement.

Soon after I was assigned to a new operations job, I discovered we had an overloaded computer system that had reduced order processing to a crawl and was causing numerous delays. I learned the division had budgeted ten million dollars for an upgrade in the following year. This was fine, but we needed to address the problem right now. So I went to one of the most able and experienced people in the division and asked him to look into the problem and find an alternative. This excellent employee could not find a solution other than to spend the ten million dollars today—and that simply wasn’t in our budget.

Then I asked the folks at headquarters to take a look, and they came up with the same answer. The person they assigned went out of his way to tell me the situation was hopeless. “Ralph, you are new here, so let me give you some advice,” the person from headquarters said. “Everyone knows it is going to take ten million dollars to fix the problem. Just accept it.”

Spotting opportunities is absolutely the key. It provides the right frame of mind to spot opportunities during times of turmoil. By approaching challenges with the right “principles,” we create entirely new horizons that we otherwise might not explore. Focusing on the opportunities—places where you can not only solve the problem but also identify possibilities for growth in the process—is the key to making the impossible, possible. The graphic above shows you how I visualize the “pillars of success” and “principles” as a success framework for life.

Now, implicit in this discussion is the assumption that you have sufficient belief in your own abilities. This can be tough. Somewhere along the line you may have come to believe you weren’t good at...
Spotting Opportunities

THIRTEEN

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The Power of Sacrifice

Every great endeavor, whether personal or career, requires sacrifice. Perhaps it is easiest to understand this if you think about people who have turned a great vision into a reality. To me there is no better example of that than Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King had a bold vision: to eliminate racial injustice through nonviolent means. In order to achieve it, the people who accompanied him on his journey sacrificed and suffered a great deal. They were sprayed with fire hoses. They were beaten and incarcerated. Some were killed. But nothing could douse the desire for a better future that Dr. King instilled in his followers.

I see this as ultimate leadership: someone who inspires people to persevere even in the most extreme ordeals in order to fulfill a bold vision for a better future.

Think about it. Dr. King inspired people to march, sit in, and face the wrath of angry crowds, knowing they could be subjected to threats on their lives. Maybe you have to be a minority to understand how intimidating the situation was for his followers.

In business, for example, when you are taking on a difficult task like a complicated merger, there's an incredible amount of work involved. The people trying to make it happen might spend months in hotel rooms. If you are involved in the project, you may have to sacrifice personal time and leisure time. In some cases you might not see your family for several weeks.

Why do it? Opportunity! In the case of the AT&T Wireless and Cingular merger, we knew we were involved in something special. We would be creating the nation's number one wireless company, capable of serving customers at a higher level and bringing new communications capabilities to the market. We knew we would be part of a landmark transaction, the largest all-cash corporate merger ever in the United States. We sacrificed to be a player in an historic moment. No one forced anyone to participate. Sacrifice is a personal choice.

We knew that when the merger happened, the people who were involved in it would be part of a new company with a bigger opportunity. It was a chance for them to leave a mark on the history of the telecommunications industry.
Inclusion: It’s About Making Heads Count

Diverse Work Force

Inclusion of People From Target Segments

Making Heads Count

Success Connecting With Customers
Make the Journey About More than You

Passion To Help

Giving Back

Mentoring

Volunteering

Passion is a good starting point. Pick something you believe in deeply. The environment. Education. Fighting hunger. Finding a cure for a disease. There is no lack of important causes. Choose one that's important to you, get involved, and make a difference. Why not leave a legacy? When you look back on your life, one of the things you may be proudest of is what you did to help others.

I’m a great believer in leaving a legacy by mentoring people who will follow in your path. In our company we hold mentoring...
One international effort I was proud to sponsor was the BellSouth Proniño (Pro-Child) Initiative. I championed this effort while president of BellSouth’s wireless operations in eleven countries in Latin America in coordination with the BellSouth Foundation.

In Latin America, it is estimated that as many as twenty-one million children in the region are working instead of attending school. You see these children selling flowers in the streets, shining shoes, or taking care of their brothers and sisters so their parents can work. Since they do not get a proper education, their future is limited.

Proniño was a six-million-dollar, five-year program we funded to address the problem. It provided scholarships that covered tuition, books and supplies, uniforms, transportation, meals, tutoring, and family counseling. In some cases a small stipend was provided to families to help offset the economic loss of having the child attend school rather than working. This approach broke the vicious cycle of poverty and provided these children with the opportunity to reach their full potential. The program.

Obstacles welcome

Giving Back

Notice the elements in the graphic below. Giving back is at the center, complemented by having a passion to help, volunteering, and mentoring.

Passion is a good starting point. Pick something you believe in deeply. The environment. Education. Fighting hunger. Finding a cure for a disease. There is no lack of important causes. Choose one that’s important to you, get involved, and make a difference. Why not leave a legacy? When you look back on your life, one of the things you may be proudest of is what you did to help others.

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Become the Leader You Want to Be

Level 1: Experiential. This is the beginning of your leadership journey. You learn from every experience and begin to form the beliefs and values that you will carry with you throughout your career. The focus at this level is on self-development and individual accomplishment in the context of what the organization is trying to accomplish.

Experiential Level (Level 1) describes the initial learnings that are the foundation of a leader’s set of beliefs and values.*

Second, it is clear that all five steps build off the concepts we have mentioned previously in the book. Let's look at each level more closely.

Level 1: Experiential.

Level 4 - Empowering

Level 2 - Executing

Level 5 - Extraordinary

Level 1 - Experiential

* These core beliefs and values don’t change; they guide your day-to-day actions. But in advanced levels, you learn that sometimes you need to adapt to world changes by finding new ways to move toward your goal. While remaining true to your principles, you may have to unlearn old ways of doing things and find new ways to respond more effectively to a changing world.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Leadership Capabilities</th>
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| 1     | Experiential | Understands the organization's vision  
Learns from leadership experiences and adapts to new situations  
Develops beliefs set and principles  
Executes the organization's strategies, initiatives, and overall plan  
Works with teams to deliver results  
Develops self and provides coaching and feedback to others |
| 2     | Executing  | Develops plan to achieve vision  
Delegates responsibility to execute strategies, initiatives, and the overall plan  
Selects the right people and assigns accountability  
Monitors implementation of plans and removes roadblocks  
Creates a winning environment and relationships |
| 3     | Enabling   | Communicates vision and helps others understand it  
Enables others to execute strategies, initiatives, and the overall plan  
Overcomes resistance to change  
Develops people and creates development opportunities  
Delivers results and internalizes key measures  
Recognizes and rewards high performance |
| 4     | Empowering | Owns vision and helps others to own it  
Internalizes values and lives by them  
Empowers others to execute strategies, initiatives, and the overall plan  
Motivates people to achieve results  
Exceeds expectations defined by key measures and timetables  
Recognizes and rewards high performance |
| 5     | Extraordinary | Creates a compelling vision of the future  
Establishes values and lives by them  
Selects strategies and key initiatives and oversees the overall plan to achieve vision  
Establishes goals and priorities and focuses the organization  
Aligns and inspires people to achieve bold goals  
Establishes key measures and timetables and monitors results  
Creates a winning culture and then selects and develops leaders to sustain it |
To bring the fifth and ultimate level of the Leadership Capability Model to life, let's take a look at someone who was, indeed, an extraordinary leader in all ten of these areas. As I mentioned earlier, I regard Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as an exceptional example of leadership. Following is a list of the ten most important, high-impact behaviors of leadership, and an illustration of their use by Dr. King, one of the most compelling leaders of recent history.

1. Set the direction, create the vision
2. Establish values and lead by them
3. Select strategies and key initiatives
4. Build plans to achieve vision
5. Establish goals, priorities and focus
6. Establish key metrics to measure progress
7. Align and inspire people
8. Empower and enable people to achieve vision
9. Create winning culture
10. Select, recruit and develop other leaders
I’ve been blessed with many interesting jobs in my life. It can be confusing to try and keep track of them all, so I designed this career timeline to help the reader correlate key positions in my
career with my various Pivotal Points. Given all that has happened to me, and the number of opportunities I have had, I have broken down my career timeline into two phases. The first phase covers the first twenty years of my career, and the second phase covers what has happened since. The book covers the entire career timeline but focuses on the last dozen years (1997–2009).

Phase 1

**1974—Facility Engineer, Southern Bell.** Graduated with a bachelor of science in mechanical engineering (BSME) degree from Florida Atlantic University. I was hired right out of school by Southern Bell and placed in the Initial Management Development Program (IMDP) as a facility engineer in Plantation, Florida. The IMDP program was designed to develop high-potential college hires (proving my grandmother was right when she insisted that I continue on to college).

**1985–1990—Director/Division Manager, Bellcore TEC.** In 1985 I accepted a rotational assignment at the Bell Communications Research (Bellcore) Technical Education Center in Lisle, Illinois. At first I was responsible for the development of the transmission curriculum and the transmission laboratories at the center. Following this assignment I was promoted to be responsible for the switching curriculum and switching laboratories. During this time I was responsible for the development of the new multi-vendor switching labs. And while all this was going on, I earned my MBA from Northern Illinois University to help eliminate a “yes-but” (Yeah, Ralph is a good manager, but he doesn’t have an
advanced business degree) that might keep me from advancing further in the organization.

1992—Operations Manager, BellSouth. Responsible for network operations in North Dade County, Florida for BellSouth. The responsibilities included the engineering, installation, repair, and construction of the telecommunications network. This was one of the divisions that was impacted by Hurricane Andrew in 1992.

1994–1996—Vice President Consumer Services, BellSouth. Responsible for sales, service, repair, and collections of consumer services for the state of Florida for BellSouth. During this time, I completed the Darden Executive Program at the University of Virginia (1994). My time at Darden proved to be a great learning adventure and helped to further improve my educational background.

Phase 2
The next phase of my career has been filled with unique assignments that included starting a new business (broadband services), running wireless operations in eleven foreign countries (Latin America), integrating two companies as a result of the largest cash merger in U.S. history, and running AT&T Mobility, the wireless unit of AT&T. The career timeline for this phase is shown at the top of the next page.

1997—Vice President of Network Operations, BellSouth. In this position I was responsible for all network operations in the
states of Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. My job was to deliver more than $4 billion in revenues while leading more than fifteen thousand people.

**Ralph de la Vega - Career Timeline 1997-2007**

**1997** – Vice President, BellSouth Network Operations

**2000** – President, BellSouth Network Operations

**2004** – President & CEO, AT&T Mobility

**2007** – President, BellSouth Broadband & Internet Services

**Chief Operating Officer, Cingular Wireless**

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**2000—President of Broadband & Internet Service, BellSouth.**

In this position I was responsible for rolling out broadband services throughout BellSouth’s territory. It was basically like running a startup company. I was charged with the task of leading a cross-functional team responsible for all aspects of the new technology. We started with thirty thousand customers at the end of 1999 and grew the business to more than six hundred thousand customers by the end of 2001, making us the fastest-growing broadband provider in the United States.
2002—President, BellSouth Latin America. In this capacity I was responsible for the wireless operations serving more than eleven million customers in eleven countries in Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Venezuela, and Uruguay).

2004—Chief Operating Officer, Cingular Wireless. As the COO for Cingular wireless, I was responsible for sales, marketing, network operations, technology planning, and customer service. I was also responsible for the integration of Cingular Wireless and AT&T Wireless.

2007—President & Chief Executive Officer, AT&T Mobility. In this capacity I am responsible for the nationwide operations of AT&T Mobility, wireless unit of AT&T. AT&T Mobility generates over $49 billion in revenues (on an annual basis) with over 77 million customers and more than seventy thousand employees. In October 2008, I also assumed responsibility for AT&T’s consumer markets.