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How Great Organizations
Do Ordinary Things
In Extraordinary Ways!

DISCUSSION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION BY BILL TAYLOR

I've always believed that every successful venture—the launch of a product, the creation of a company, even writing a book—begins with a clear definition of success. My definition of success for *Simply Brilliant* is how well it contributes to your success, whether it helps you to think bigger, aim higher, or lead more effectively. This Discussion Guide is meant to crystallize some of the book's core themes, and to allow you and your colleagues to wrestle with its lessons.

- 1 One of Bill's central arguments is that the logic of competition has changed. The goal is no longer to be the best at what other people and companies in your field do, it's to be the only ones who do what you do. Do you agree? Why or why not?

- 2 Looking at your company, a project, or your own career, what are two or three of the most distinctive things you do, and how might you do even more of those things?

- 3 Management guru Jim Collins offers this litmus-test question of just how compelling and original you and your company are: "If you went out of business tomorrow, would anybody miss you and why?" With as much specificity as possible, how would you answer that question?

- 4 Can you explain, clearly and compellingly, why what you do matters and how you expect to win in a ferociously competitive environment?

- 5 Rosanne Haggerty, the celebrated social activist, warns that, “Too often, pride in your most recent idea becomes a barrier to seeing the next idea.” How do you disrupt your own ways of thinking?

- 6 Re-read the full case study on 1111 Lincoln Road, the one-of-a-kind parking garage and civic space in Miami Beach, and dissect how Robert Wennett “upended conventional thinking” in his field and challenged his prior experience. How can you apply his spirit of “provocative competence” to your work?

- 7 Bill called John W. Gardner’s speech on Personal Renewal “one of the most quietly influential speeches in the history of American business.” Read the speech in full (you’ll be glad you did) and discuss how you can apply Gardner’s insights to your career journey. How do you maintain your “zest” for learning? Link here: www.pbs.org/johngardner/sections/writings_speech_1.html

- 8 Garry Ridge, CEO of WD-40, is obsessed with learning new things, which is why he likes to ask his colleagues, “When’s the last time you did something for the first time?” Whether it applies to your professional life or your personal life, what’s your answer to Garry’s question?

- 9 In his book, Bill argues that “it’s just as important to be kind as clever.” What are one or two stories of heroic service or quiet kindness that you’ve found noteworthy or inspiring? What are some small things you and your colleagues can do to make a big impression on your customers—ways to connect emotionally and psychologically, not just economically?

- 10 Re-read the story about Brandon Cook and his grandmother, their encounter with Panera Bread, and the global outpouring of affection and emotion it inspired. What are the lessons you take away? Are you persuaded that small gestures of kindness and compassion can have big implications for your colleagues and customers?

- 11 Business theorist Mark White distinguishes between two kinds of organizations. There are those run by Roman Law ("Anything that is not expressly permitted is forbidden") and those run by Common Law ("Anything that is not expressly forbidden is permitted"). Which kind of organization do you lead or work for? Which kind of organization do you believe works better, and why?

- 12 It's the ultimate test of competition and culture: "Do you and your colleagues work as distinctively as you compete?" Read all of the 18 "ISMs" by which Quicken Loans works, and write five ISMs of your own that describe the culture and commitments that define life at your company or on your team. Link here: www.quickenloanscareers.com/about-us/culture

- 13 Legendary Internet entrepreneur Tony Hsieh likes to say that he values "collisions over convenience," and that "return on investment" is less important than "return on connectedness." What are the pros and cons of his approach to creativity?

- 14 Leadership scholar Edgar Schein argues that a spirit of “here-and-now humility” is required of leaders who want to achieve big things. Can you name a boss, a colleague, or someone who admire who exhibits “here-and-now humility” and explain why it has been crucial to his or her success?

- 15 Are you worried that the “winner-take-all” ethos that defines so much of business and society is eroding our capacity to sustain a commitment to innovation and change? Are there concrete steps you and your organization can take to share the benefits of success more widely?

- 16 Re-read the case study on the John Lewis Partnership, and its remarkable commitment to organizational democracy and employee representation. Are there small lessons you can learn about how to give your colleagues a greater voice and a more prominent seat at the table?
