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Chairman and CEO of Snowflake Inc.

AMP UP

Leading for Hypergrowth **by Raising Expectations,
Increasing Urgency, and Elevating Intensity**

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Praise for *Amp It Up*

“In my 30+ year experience as a venture investor I have never seen anyone rival Frank's operating know-how. With Frank, it all starts and ends with hardcore and focused execution. ‘Get comfortable with being uncomfortable’, ‘hope is not a strategy’, and ‘the best way to build a brand is to get more customers’ are some of the mantras by which Frank has taught us to live. There is no doubt that he has made many of us better board members, as we assist other CEOs along their journeys.”

—**Doug Leone**,
Partner, Sequoia Capital

“Frank Sloatman is one of the best performing CEOs there is. This book is essential reading for every leader who aspires to motivate teams, inspire excellence, and deliver beyond expectations.”

—**Bill McDermott**,
President and CEO, ServiceNow

“*Amp It Up* is a terrific read for leaders and future leaders, whether they are at a start-up, an SMB, or a big company. As a CEO, Frank exudes total clarity on what to do, and equally as important what not to do... so if you are looking for a must-read about leadership, being focused on your mission, and executing at the highest levels, this is the book!”

—**Joe Tucci**,
former Chairman and CEO, EMC

“Over the past 15 years, I've had a front-row seat to watch Frank Sloatman's operational excellence on display at Data Domain, ServiceNow, and Snowflake. What makes Frank the best technology CEO on the planet: he sets and then beats unreasonably high expectations; he is a high-integrity people leader; he makes the strategy clear to all; and he is a fearless leader willing to do whatever it takes to win. *Amp It Up* is a must-read book for anyone looking to take their team and organization to the next level.”

—**Mike Speiser**,
Managing Director, Sutter Hill Ventures

“Frank worked for me as Data Domain became EMC and – wow! – what an

incredible leader. He built an intensity around clear business priorities and the customer value proposition and drove it through the organization daily. *Amp It Up* tells that story and how it can be recreated in other organizations.”

—**Pat Gelsinger,**
CEO, Intel

“Frank Sloodman brings his experience of delivering success into plain sight for all of us to learn and be inspired by: simplify the value proposition, focus on the customer, take away distraction and confusion, relentlessly drive execution with excellence, faster... *Amp It Up* is a recipe we can all apply.”

—**Frans van Houten,**
CEO of Royal Philips

FRANK SLOOTMAN

AMP IT UP

**Leading for Hypergrowth by Raising
Expectations, Increasing Urgency, and Elevating
Intensity**

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To the Man (and Woman) in the Arena:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

—Theodore Roosevelt, 1910

PART I

Amping Up

1

Introduction: The Power of Amping Up

Amp It Up

A few years ago I wrote a popular LinkedIn article, “Amp It Up,” whose main premise was that organizations have considerable room to improve their performance *without* making expensive changes to their talent, structure, or fundamental business model. My basic advice was to keep playing your game but amp things up dramatically. Raise your standards, pick up the pace, sharpen your focus, and align your people. You don't need to bring in reams of consultants to examine everything that is going on. What you need on day one is to ratchet up expectations, energy, urgency, and intensity.

That article triggered thousands of likes, shares, and comments. It also led to a flood of incoming requests for sit-downs and speaking engagements. While I love speaking to other leaders, especially entrepreneurs, and while I speak at conferences and business schools from time to time, I couldn't possibly accommodate everyone who wanted to learn more about my Amp It Up philosophy. I believe it's incumbent on leaders to share our experience with others, but doing so in small groups (let alone one-on-one) isn't efficient or scalable, especially when you have a consuming day job. That's why I'm writing this book: to summarize my convictions, observations, and beliefs about how to lead a mission-driven, high-performance company.

The concepts, strategies, and tactics you will find here were developed over my entire career but especially at the three very different companies where I served as CEO: Data Domain from 2003 to 2010, ServiceNow from 2011 to 2017, and Snowflake from 2019 to the present. At various times I've also been a venture capitalist, a board member, and a corporate executive, but no experience in business compares to being CEO. I love being fully accountable for a company's leadership, strategy, culture, and execution in an ultra-competitive marketplace.

Things can go bad very quickly in an organization when the leadership team is weak or gets distracted. Human nature being what it is, many people will slow their output to a glacial pace and adopt “good enough” as their standard. Without focused leadership, millions of conflicting priorities compete with each other. Then the best people in the organization get frustrated and start to leave, as talent

and energy go untapped and dormant. At this point you're on the path to catastrophic decline—unless you amp things up immediately.

Leadership changes can yield immediate impact long before you can carry out more structural changes in talent, organization, and strategy. You can engulf your organization with energy, step up the tempo, and start executing the basic blocking and tackling with a lot more focus and higher expectations. It will feel like busting a log jam. All of a sudden, everything is moving and shaking.

This phenomenon is not limited to business. We often see sports teams go from losing to winning from one season to the next without dramatic changes in roster. When Vince Lombardi took over as head coach of the Green Bay Packers in 1959, the team had just come off a 1–10 season, not to mention 11 losing seasons in row. The next year, the Packers improved to 7–5, their first winning season in many years. Then they started winning one division championship after another. Leadership really matters. It's no coincidence that to this day, winners of the Super Bowl receive a trophy named for Lombardi.

My goal for this book is to provide not merely tactical advice but also context and ways of thinking about situations. You can try these ideas on for size and see if they fit. I'm not on a mission to convince the world to agree with me. If you choose not to amp it up, that's up to you. But I believe the chapters ahead will help you stiffen your spine and fight the good fight—not just if you're a CEO but if you're a leader at any level, whether at a start-up, a big company, or a nonprofit.

I also believe that you can only get these insights from a fellow traveler. No offense to my VC friends, but they often think that their investments give them the right to lecture entrepreneurs at board meetings, even though many VCs have never been in the combat seat themselves. Having seen things done is not the same as doing them.

The media have praised the results that my three companies have delivered over the past two decades, as we ramped up to three successful IPOs and generated hundreds of billions of dollars in market value. It's hard to argue with results. But outsiders have also questioned, if not criticized, the ways in which we achieved those results. So let's start with an overview of the five key steps in the Amp It Up process: raise your standards, align your people, sharpen your focus, pick up the pace, and transform your strategy.

Raise Your Standards

The late Steve Jobs was only inspired by “insanely great” things. He set a high bar for seemingly everything, and anything that didn't meet his standards was summarily rejected. Try applying “insanely great” as a standard on a daily basis and see how far you get. People lower their standards in an effort to move things along and get things off their desks. Don't do it. Fight that impulse every step of the way. It doesn't take much more mental energy to raise standards. Don't let malaise set in. Bust it up. Raising the bar is energizing by itself.

Instead of telling people what I think of a proposal, a product, a feature, whatever, I ask them instead what they think. Were they thrilled with it? Absolutely love it? Most of the time I would hear, “It's okay,” or “It's not bad.” They would surmise from my facial expression that this wasn't the answer I was looking for. Come back when *you* are bursting with excitement about whatever you are proposing to the rest of us.

We should all be thrilled with what we're doing. So channel your inner Steve Jobs. Aim for insanely great. It's much more energizing!

Align Your People and Culture

Alignment becomes a more important concept as a business grows and there are many moving parts. The question is, are we all pulling on the same oar? Are we all driving in the same direction?

When I joined Snowflake, the company was being run as what I would call a pseudo-SaaS company with a subscription model. But it's basically a utility company for cloud computing with a consumption model. As with your local electric company, you pay only for what you use. Yet, like a SaaS company, our sales force was completely focused on bookings, or sales contract value, even though Snowflake did not recognize a single revenue dollar on bookings. Only actual consumption causes revenue to be recognized. Consumption drove bookings only indirectly; as customers ran out of capacity, they would reorder. This lack of alignment was everywhere: reps only marginally cared about consumption, and many customers were oversold on bookings, which led to smaller renewals, or what we call down-sells, in future periods. The cost of commissions was out of whack with revenues because there was no direct relationship between sales compensation and revenues.

It took a few quarters to transition the company to consumption. Consumption became our middle name. We now looked at everything through the lens of consumption. We got better alignment.

Where alignment matters further is in incentive compensation. We pay everybody the same way on our executive team, and we have a very select, focused set of metrics that we pay bonuses on. Our sales exec does not get paid on a commission plan if the rest of us aren't. Everybody knows what we are aiming for.

Another source of misalignment is management by objectives (MBO), which I have eliminated at every company I've joined in the last 20 years. MBO causes employees to act as if they are running their own show. Because they get compensated on their personal metrics, it's next to impossible to pull them off projects. They will start negotiating with you for relief. That's not alignment, that's every man for himself. If you need MBO to get people to do their job, you may have the wrong people, the wrong managers, or both.

Sharpen Your Focus

Organizations are often spread too thinly across too many priorities, and too many of them are ill defined. Things tend to get added to the pile over time, and before we know it, we have huge backlogs. We're spread a mile wide and an inch deep. The problems with pace and tempo are, of course, related to having too much going on at the same time. It feels like swimming in glue, moving like molasses.

Leaders can do two things that bring almost instant benefit. First, think about execution more sequentially than in parallel. Work on fewer things at the same time, and prioritize hard. Even if you're not sure about ranking priorities, do it anyway. The process alone will be enlightening. Figure out what matters most, what matters less, and what matters not at all. Otherwise your people will disagree about what's important. The questions you should ask constantly: What are we *not* going to do? What are the consequences of *not* doing something? Get in the habit of constantly prioritizing and reprioritizing.

Most people have a relatively easy time coming up with their top three priorities. Just ask them. As an exercise I often ask: if you can only do one thing for the rest of the year, and nothing else, what would it be and why? People struggle with this question because it is easy to be wrong, which is exactly the point. If we are wrong, resources are misallocated. That's concerning. But we avoid these pointed dialogs because it is easier to list five or ten priorities. The right ones may not even be buried in there somewhere.

“Priority” should ideally only be used as a singular word. The moment you have

many priorities, you actually have none.

At ServiceNow, I had such a “what is the one thing” conversation with our new chief product officer. Product organizations have a million things to do, and they really need to elevate their thinking to see the forest for the trees. This was not a quick or easy conversation, because it's easy to lose sight of the big picture when drowning in day-to-day obligations. I knew what I thought the answer should be, but would the CPO see it the same way? Did he even have a top priority?

What we arrived at was a singular focus on fashioning our rather industrial user experience to a consumer-grade service experience. This was not a short-term project; it would require a long-term shift in strategy, if not engineering culture, with sustained effort. It was important to the company's future yet also hard because it required changing our DNA. Our customers were IT people who had a high tolerance for these rather industrial, not very user-friendly experiences. The company had to forcibly move itself away from where it had come from. Having clarity is key, or people will just chip away at a problem, without significantly moving the needle. Intentions are often good, but they are then under-prioritized, under-resourced, and not fully crystalized.

Vagueness causes confusion, but clarity of thought and purpose is a huge advantage in business. Good leadership requires a never-ending process of boiling things down to their essentials. Spell out what you mean! If priorities are not clearly understood at the top, how distorted will they be down the line?

Pick Up the Pace

In a troubled organization there's no rush, no urgency. Why? People have to be there anyway, so what's the point in moving faster? If you have ever seen the inside of a California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), you know what that looks like. The staff doesn't start moving till 4:00 p.m. because quitting time is 4:30 p.m., and that backlog has to get cleared so everybody can depart on time. The rest of the day, who cares? They have to be there anyway.

Leaders set the pace. People sometimes ask to get back to me in a week, and I ask, why not tomorrow or the next day? Start compressing cycle times. We can move so much quicker if we just change the mindset. Once the cadence changes, everybody moves quicker, and new energy and urgency will be everywhere. Good performers crave a culture of energy.

It's not a one-time thing; it's not an email or a memo. It's using every encounter,

meeting, and opportunity to increase the pace of whatever is going on. Apply pressure. Be impatient. Patience may be a virtue, but in business it can signal a lack of leadership. Nobody wants to swim in glue or struggle to get things done. Some organizations slow things down by design. Change that—ASAP.

Transform Your Strategy

Much of this book is about execution, especially developing relentless execution on your core mission. But that doesn't mean that strategy doesn't play an exceedingly important role. Once you know how to execute, you will become a better strategist, and strategy can become a force multiplier to your efforts. Transforming your strategy will require you to “widen the aperture” of your thinking about the business model, to reach new and bigger markets. You will need to develop peripheral vision, like a quarterback on a football field.

Thinking about strategy taxes a different part of our brains. It's more abstract, fluid, dynamic, multidimensional. It requires connecting seemingly unrelated things. This can drive the nuts-and-bolts type of people crazy. It's like strapping on a different mindset.

While everybody else has their head down, you need to have your head up, to confront both the need and the opportunity for strategic transformation. Develop a healthy sense of paranoia about your business model because your competitors are surely trying to disrupt you. That's as certain as the sun rising tomorrow.

The Epic Battle

After retiring from ServiceNow in 2017, I had no intention of ever taking another CEO position. But people like me—and I'm guessing people like you—have a hard time leaving the arena. It's exciting to be back in the fray as CEO of Snowflake, helping such a promising company deliver on its potential. It is an epic battle featuring new platforms, new competitors, new business models, all forward leaning and extremely stimulating. It is hard to back away from the constant rush of new experiences and learnings.

Leadership is a lonely business. You live 24/7 with uncertainty, anxiety, and the fear of personal failure. You make countless decisions, and being wrong about any of them might let down your employees and investors. The stakes, both financial and human, are high. And what adds to the terror is that there is no manual, no how-to guide. Every problem has, at least to some extent, never

been seen before. In particular, early-stage enterprises often feel like they're shrouded in a fog of war.

My hope is that the chapters ahead will help you see through the fog, establish context, sort out your options, and amp up your organization on the road to success.

2

My Journey from Teenage Toilet Cleaner to Serial CEO

Before we continue, I should give you some background on how I developed and arrived at my “Amp It Up” approach to business. It has truly been a lifelong evolution across every job I've ever held. You'll hear more about my experiences in many of these roles in future chapters, but here is my overall journey.

A Childhood Grounded in Discipline

There is not much in my background that would foretell success as a Silicon Valley CEO. I grew up in a middle-class family in my native country of the Netherlands. I was the second of four siblings, half boys, half girls. We were never deprived of life's essentials, but there wasn't any money left over at the end of the month either.

My father was a veteran of two wars, and although he retired from active duty in the 1950s, there was a measure of discipline in our household. Walk straight, shoulders back, don't slouch. Proper meal etiquette: Nobody chowed down until everybody was properly seated, and somebody said, “*Eet Smakelijk*,” the Dutch language equivalent of “Bon Appetit.” Quick correction on improper use of silverware. Greet people with a firm handshake and look them in the eye. Never address elders by their first name. Don't let them catch you doing nothing, or they would find a chore for you to do. Play outside, never inside.

I had an episode in my early teens when my school grades were failing. My dad didn't say I needed to get better grades, merely that I had to work up to my potential. As long as I worked hard, he would accept the results. But he had to be fully convinced that I was in fact putting everything into it. That may appear to be a liberating way to have your parents think about failing grades. In reality, you become haunted by never doing enough, that you are failing to do as much as you are actually capable of.

In my teens, I held summer jobs that fueled my ambition. I harvested tulip bulbs at a farm in north Holland, walking the fields behind a tractor ten hours a day, in any weather. I also cleaned factory toilets one summer in the plant where my dad

worked. There were at least a thousand people working there, and I cycled through every bathroom facility between 9:00 and 5:00. I had a supervisor, who inspected my work, but he often got to bathrooms I had cleaned first thing in the morning many hours later, after hundreds of people had used them. When he criticized my work, I complained about it to my dad. His answer was stark: “Well, those are the kinds of people you will be working for if you don't get better grades.” I was 16.

This mentality of living up to your potential has kept up with me ever since. I am not so much focused day-to-day on outcomes; I am focused on maximizing the input side of the equation. Doing everything we can to the best of our abilities. It's like marathons or triathlons, which are 99% training and 1% racing. This is a hard model: you never feel you are doing enough, and a sense of malcontent hovers over you. You need like-minded people around you for this to work.

It also causes us to be not good at celebrations. We are so focused on the next thing that victory laps and self-congratulation are not in our DNA. They feel like we're jinxing ourselves. Instead, we always focus on the challenges in front of us.

Landing in the USA

I graduated cum laude from the Netherlands School of Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam. I never failed a single exam, and I moved through the curriculum quickly. After three years I was a year ahead of schedule, so I took the time to do internships in the United States. I had never been to the US before.

I loved America. The people were welcoming and kind, and everybody always seemed to be in a positive, buoyant mood. It was such a contrast; where I came from people were more resigned to their fate, and whining was a national pastime. But Americans always seemed to think they could do better. The national spirit was quite energizing compared to what I was used to.

I returned to Holland a year later to finish school, write my doctoral thesis, and graduate. I was the only one in my family to graduate from university. Meanwhile, I was offered a follow-up internship, which led me back to the US. That's why I never really worked in my native land, and I didn't miss it. Perhaps I was born in the wrong country.

I landed in the US with about a hundred bucks in my pocket. I needed all sorts of help, which I readily received. Somebody handed me the keys to a 1974 Buick

LeSabre and said, “Pay me when you can” and walked away. People were amazing. Since my internship at Uniroyal was temporary, I needed to land a real job and get my career going. Easier said than done. I spoke with a thick accent, fresh off the plane, with credentials that were hard to pronounce, let alone explain.

Uniroyal was a tire company that also made Naugahyde upholstery, a real smokestack industry. I was taken aback by what I saw there: layoffs, unions, evaporating markets. Back then, we thought the computer industry was the future. It wasn't a huge business yet, but at least it was dynamic and growing. I set my sights on IBM, the gold standard in computers in 1985. But I was rejected by IBM a dozen or so times before I gave up. They didn't know what to do with my European credentials. I have since realized that I was destined for a different path, and they were doing me a favor not hiring me.

Burroughs Corporation and Comshare

Burroughs Corporation was headquartered in Detroit, Michigan. They had a new CEO, Michael Blumenthal, a former Treasury secretary in the Carter administration and professor of economics from Princeton. My credentials perhaps looked less exotic there, and I got hired in a corporate planning role. Not what I wanted, but I figured I would make my way from there. We spent several years on what became Unisys, the merger of Burroughs and Sperry.

One major lesson stands out from those days. Burroughs thought that they were too small to compete with IBM, which was seen as a behemoth. So their strategy was to acquire scale by merging with Sperry. We have since learned that size isn't everything and often is a liability when things are changing rapidly. Every company I later ran would compete against much bigger companies, and our lack of size was an advantage. The big incumbents didn't know what hit them. Babies grow up to become soldiers.

We all need to be careful what “elevator” we get into early in our careers. Some go up, some go down, some don't move. It's largely beyond our control, so choose wisely. We have seen staggering examples of this phenomenon in Silicon Valley. Anybody who spent the last 20 years at Google, Amazon, or Apple would have done spectacularly well, regardless of their individual merit. And anyone who stayed with companies like IBM and HP would have stagnated during that period.

After five years at Burroughs/Unisys, I wanted to get into software, which was

still a nascent industry in the 80s. Microsoft was established, but Oracle still seemed like a start-up. Unfortunately, geography was a factor. Michigan was a great place for automobiles but lousy for software. I landed a new job as a product manager for a time-sharing company in Ann Arbor called Comshare, which was developing “decision support systems,” a forerunner of data analytics and online analytical processing.

At this point I was in my late twenties and desperate to get a shot at proving my mettle. I wanted to scream, “Give me any product, no matter how dreadful, and I will show you what I can do with it.” It was not to be. Companies were more staid, hierarchical, and rigid then. They were not going to take a chance on this ornery upstart from Europe. Product management was a functional role that separated the ownership of various functions between different departments. I always operated as if I owned everything, whether I did or not. That didn't always sit well with peers or superiors. I have since always tried to increase our people's sense of ownership so they will act as owners. That mentality needs to be nurtured.

In an ill-advised move, fueled by frustration, I jumped to a start-up in Holland with some of my college pals. I knew almost immediately that it was a boneheaded move. In hindsight, I was feeling like a caged animal during this period. But in the long run it was helpful, because it broke the trajectory I was on.

Compuware

While still at Comshare, I had been getting recruiting calls from Compuware in Farmington Hills, Michigan. Compuware was growing and wanting to move into what we then called open systems—basically any platform other than IBM mainframes or DEC minicomputers. I was hired as the first non-mainframe open systems product manager at Compuware, which accelerated my career. Within seven years I would rise to VP and general manager, and I'd be well prepared for bigger challenges.

I only spent 18 months or so in their Michigan office. Compuware happened to acquire a Dutch company called UNIFACE, which developed cross-platform applications software. It wasn't long before they ran into trouble with the stubborn Dutch culture and needed a manager with a Dutch passport to help them sort through the issues. I jumped at the opportunity to return to Amsterdam and take on the entire operation, which seemed in disarray. Colleagues warned

me not to go because the place could not be saved, and they thought I would go down with the ship. Compuware had bought UNIFACE toward the end of its viable product cycle.

But by now, my career had been about taking on what seemed like long odds, jobs nobody else would touch with a ten-foot pole. It was the only avenue open to me anyway, and it didn't matter to me how hairy these deals were. As a young person, you easily overestimate your capabilities. This is when I started learning what happens when you step into the wrong elevators.

We did manage to stabilize UNIFACE, and it is still around today, 25 years later. That became a formative career experience in my mid-30s. I had never had numerous large, mission critical customers before and hundreds of employees in my charge. I also started to develop an eye for talent, which became a cornerstone of my management focus going forward. I demanded plenty of myself but also of others. You can go far with good people, but they demand and deserve real leadership.

I was supposed to return to Michigan after three years, but Compuware had another fire burning, this time in California. The company had bought a series of start-ups in Silicon Valley and ran them as a single division, called EcoSystems. The set-in-their-ways Midwestern conservative values ran headlong into an ascending Silicon Valley. I arrived there in late 1997, the height of the tech bubble. Companies were going public on the strength of their eyeball metrics, not growth or profits.

We were caught between a rock and a hard place—the traditional, conservative business culture of the Midwest on the one hand and the radical, entrepreneurial ways of Silicon Valley on the other. We stabilized the struggling product lines we managed there, but we kept losing good talent because headquarters wouldn't let us match the salaries and equity offered by the dotcoms. Skilled workers flocked to other companies that were giving out promotions, pay raises, and share grants like Halloween candy. It was nuts. We had a sizable recruiting operation, but people left faster than they arrived.

We coped in ways I have used ever since: hire people ahead of their own curve. Hire more for aptitude than experience and give people the career opportunity of a lifetime. They will be motivated and driven, with a cannot-fail attitude. The good ones would grab the opportunity to accelerate their careers with us.

I still try to hire more for aptitude than experience. We don't always require been-there, done-that types. Checking boxes on a resume is easy. Assessing

aptitude is harder. Look for hunger, attitude, innate abilities. Perhaps, look for the same career-frustrated person I had been all these years. It was quite satisfying to turn this into a high-powered strategy to drive business. I ended up with better, cheaper, more loyal, more motivated talent than we would have with a conventional hiring mentality. It does come with risk, but there is always risk in hiring. I have misfired with great resumes plenty of times.

Borland

Mid-year 2000 I cut the Compuware cord and joined Borland as SVP of product operations, basically running everything except sales and corporate functions. Borland was another former name-brand highflier with a loyal, if not fanatical, developer following. But it had fallen on hard times, even changing its name to Inprise. We changed the name back and resurrected the Borland brand and business. Borland did well on the Sun Microsystems Java platform with its line of software developer tools. Now pushing 40, I was still taking on problem children.

Having left the Midwestern womb of Compuware, I started to become more networked in Silicon Valley. You can go to an infinite number of meetings in Silicon Valley. Recruiters, venture capital firms, and any number of companies that want to buy, sell, invest, or hire. The place sometimes feels like a single beehive that is reconstituting new companies all the time.

I quickly learned that my seven years at Compuware, and all the things I had done there, impressed few people in the Valley. I did start getting calls for CEO roles of start-ups in trouble, basically the bottom of the venture pile. I was cautioned along the way by industry friends to hold out as long as it took. Avoid the second- and third-string deals, which would probably be elevators to nowhere.

I got rejected for better deals over and over with the same excuse: you have never run sales. While that was true, I was (in my own estimation) a highly sales-oriented product person. How would I ever check that box? You don't just cross over into sales after having been a product person all your career. I led from the front and sold shoulder-to-shoulder with sales. These rejections left me with an unfavorable opinion of many venture capitalists who could not recognize talent if it smacked them in the face.

I would later get some satisfaction over the naysayers by serving as CEO of three of the fastest-growing companies in Silicon Valley history.