

## FOREWORD

*Hostage at the Table* is different from other leadership books you will read. George Kohlrieser has created a powerful metaphor born out of years of personal experience and insight as a hostage negotiator. He takes an original approach, drawing on emotional, and at times frightening, situations to underscore his thesis. The result is powerful, and the themes he presents—which guide the reader on a journey to a “hostage free” state of mind—are relevant in both business and life.

I met George for the first time many years ago. He has been a core contributor to the Accenture Leadership Development Program, which has helped develop more than three thousand of Accenture’s future leaders.

Through our program, I have had the privilege of seeing George in action. Over the years, I have realized the power of his hostage negotiation framework—which emphasizes areas such as conflict resolution, bonding, and dialogue—in helping people break through many of the roadblocks to effective leadership.

There are two things our people always remember from their time with George. The first is what he calls the “mind’s eye”—that our state of mind can propel us or limit us; it is an entirely individual choice. As George points out, in life, as in business, if we set the stage in our mind’s eye with the outcome we want to achieve, we set the stage for success.

In my more than thirty years in business—working directly with hundreds of different enterprises—I have become a firm believer that the highest performers (whether individuals or organizations) see possibilities, not limitations. That said, everyone experiences some very high points and some very low ones. In my view, the low

points tend to separate the best leaders from the rest. Those who emerge from tough times are winners who make no excuses. They refuse to be seen as victims.

In fact, this way of thinking has had a profound impact on my own experience. Leaders have the power to influence, motivate, and inspire people to achieve extraordinary things. If there is one quality that defines an exceptional leader it is optimism and a “can do” spirit. To me that is a key element of living “hostage free.”

The second thing our people remember so vividly is how George approaches conflict resolution. As he demonstrates in our courses, leaders need to “put the fish on the table”: instead of dancing around a tough issue, one should acknowledge it, communicate honestly, and show mutual respect.

Perhaps not surprisingly, many leaders struggle to develop this behavior. George offers help by encouraging leaders to view dialogue as a means to a greater truth. Most of us would agree that leaders need to excel at listening and at dialogue. However, George shows that leaders actually can block dialogue without even realizing it or become a hostage when others block the dialogue. This is a critical point because when managed well, dialogue and conflict resolution can build stronger teams and help people feel a much greater sense of engagement.

Overall, the themes in this book echo a constant theme at Accenture about what it takes to achieve and sustain high performance. We believe that the highest-performing organizations have exceptional leaders who know how to get the best from their teams. They also have a “secret sauce” that is the essence of the organization and its people that cannot be copied by competitors.

I believe George would agree. He also recognizes that the ongoing challenge for organizations of all sizes is how to get people to feel empowered, see beyond obstacles, and act like winners—not be held hostage. George offers an answer: leaders can infuse their workforces with powerful mind-sets. They can help people step up and “will” themselves to what and where they want to be.

George’s stories remind us that we are not victims of circumstance—we have the power to react. Our actions will always determine the outcome. That makes all the difference.

This book is certain to make a positive difference in leadership and business, and I want to thank George for making his experiences available to all of us. His insights are truly relevant to anyone or any organization seeking to perform at the highest level. This book will inspire you to raise your game.

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