

TRILLION DOLLAR COACH

THE LEADERSHIP PLAYBOOK
FROM SILICON VALLEY'S
BILL CAMPBELL

ERIC SCHMIDT
JONATHAN ROSENBERG
AND ALAN EAGLE



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The Leadership Playbook of
Silicon Valley's Bill Campbell

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HARPER
BUSINESS

An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

Dedication

TO BILL

Contents

Cover

Title Page

Dedication

Foreword by Adam Grant

Chapter 1: The Caddie and the CEO

Chapter 2: Your Title Makes You a Manager. Your People Make You a Leader.

Chapter 3: Build an Envelope of Trust

Chapter 4: Team First

Chapter 5: The Power of Love

Chapter 6: The Yardstick

Acknowledgments

Notes

Index

About the Authors

Also by the Authors

Copyright

About the Publisher

Foreword

Nearly a decade ago, I read a story in *Fortune* about Silicon Valley's best-kept secret. It wasn't a piece of hardware or a bit of software. It wasn't even a product. It was a man. His name was Bill Campbell, and he wasn't a hacker. He was a football coach turned sales guy. Yet somehow, Bill had become so influential that he went on a weekly Sunday walk with Steve Jobs, and the Google founders said they wouldn't have made it without him.

Bill's name sounded familiar, but I couldn't place it. Eventually it hit me: I recognized him from a case I had taught a few times on a management dilemma at Apple in the mid-1980s, when a brave, bright young manager named Donna Dubinsky challenged a distribution plan from Steve Jobs himself. Bill Campbell was Donna's boss's boss, and he dished out exactly the kind of tough love you'd expect from a football coach: he tore her proposal apart, pushed her to come up with something stronger, and then stood up for her. I hadn't heard of him since—the next few decades of his career were a mystery.

The story gave me a clue about why: Bill loved shining the spotlight on others but preferred to stay in the shadows himself. I was writing a book on how helping others can drive our success, and it dawned on me that he would be a fascinating character to profile. But how do you profile someone who shuns public attention?

I started by cobbling together everything I could find about him online. I learned that what Bill lacked in physical strength, he made up for in heart. He was the MVP of his high school football team despite standing five feet ten and weighing 165 pounds. When the track coach was short on hurdlers, Bill volunteered. Since he couldn't jump high enough to clear the hurdles, he just ran right through them, bruising himself all the way to the regional championships. In college he played football at Columbia, where he was

elected captain, and he went on to become the head coach there, struggling through six straight losing seasons. His Achilles' heel? He cared too much about his players. He was reluctant to bench walk-ons who gave it their all and refused to ask his stars to put sports above school. He was there to make his players successful in life, not on the field. He was more interested in their well-being than in winning.

When Bill decided to transition to business, it was his old football teammates who opened the door. They were convinced that his weakness in a zero-sum sport could be a strength in many companies. Sure enough, Bill ended up excelling as an executive at Apple and as the CEO of Intuit. Every time I talked to someone in Silicon Valley who had a reputation for unusual generosity, they told me the same thing: it was Bill Campbell who gave them their worldview. Not wanting to bother Bill himself, I started reaching out to his mentees. Soon I had a flurry of calls with Bill's protégés, who described him as a father and compared him to Oprah. The calls usually ended with me scribbling down a dozen new names of people whose lives Bill had changed. One of those names was Jonathan Rosenberg, one of the authors of this book.

When I got in touch with Jonathan in 2012, he took the liberty of copying Bill himself on the email thread. Bill declined to be featured, closing the door on that chapter of my book—and on my quest to find out how he had done so much good for others while doing great for himself as well. Ever since, I've wondered how he flourished as a giver in a field that supposedly rewards takers, and what we could learn from him about leadership and management.

I'm delighted to say that at long last, thanks to this book, I have my answers. *Trillion Dollar Coach* reveals that to be a great manager, you have to be a great coach. After all, the higher you climb, the more your success depends on making other people successful. By definition, that's what coaches do.

For the past ten years, I've had the privilege of teaching the core teamwork and leadership class at Wharton. The course is based on rigorous research, and I'm struck by how brilliantly Bill Campbell anticipated the evidence. He was living theories in the 1980s that experts didn't even develop (let alone validate) until decades later. I was also taken aback by how many of Bill's insights around managing people and coaching teams are still ripe for systematic study.

Bill was ahead of his time. The lessons of his experience are timely in a collaborative world, where the fates of our careers and our companies hinge on the quality of our relationships. But I believe they're also timeless: Bill's approach to coaching would work in any era.

Coaching is in vogue: it used to be just athletes and entertainers who had coaches, but now we have leaders taking on executive coaches and employees learning from speaking coaches. The reality, though, is that a formal coach will see only a fraction of the moments where you could benefit from feedback and guidance. It's up to all of us to coach our employees, our colleagues, and even sometimes our bosses.

I've come to believe that coaching might be even more essential than mentoring to our careers and our teams. Whereas mentors dole out words of wisdom, coaches roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty. They don't just believe in our potential; they get in the arena to help us realize our potential. They hold up a mirror so we can see our blind spots and they hold us accountable for working through our sore spots. They take responsibility for making us better without taking credit for our accomplishments. And I can't think of a better role model for a coach than Bill Campbell.

I don't make that statement lightly. I've had the chance to learn up close from some elite coaches—not just in business, but in sports, too. As a springboard diver, I trained under Olympic coaches, and more recently as an organizational psychologist, I've worked with great coaches like Brad Stevens of the Boston Celtics. Bill Campbell doesn't just belong in that elite group of world-class coaches. He invented his own category, because he could coach people doing work he didn't even understand.

In 2012, the same year that I gave up on writing about Bill, I was invited to give a talk at a global Google event on how I would run the company as an organizational psychologist. Having worked for a few years with Google's pioneering people analytics team, it became obvious to me that almost everything great in the company happened in teams. That was my pitch in the talk: start treating teams, not individuals, as the fundamental building block of the organization. My Google colleagues did one better: they launched a major study, which they published as Project Aristotle, to identify the distinguishing characteristics of their most successful teams.

The five key factors could have been taken right out of Bill Campbell's playbook. Excellent teams at Google had psychological safety (people

knew that if they took risks, their manager would have their back). The teams had clear goals, each role was meaningful, and members were reliable and confident that the team's mission would make a difference. You'll see that Bill was a master at establishing those conditions: he went to extraordinary lengths to build safety, clarity, meaning, dependability, and impact into each team he coached.

Sheryl Sandberg and I have often lamented that every bookstore has a self-help section, but there isn't a help-others section. *Trillion Dollar Coach* belongs in the help-others section: it's a guide for bringing out the best in others, for being simultaneously supportive and challenging, and for giving more than lip service to the notion of putting people first.

What's most remarkable about Bill Campbell's story is that the more you read about him, the more you'll see opportunities every day for becoming more like him. There are small choices, like treating everyone you meet with dignity and respect. And there are bigger commitments, like taking the time to show a sincere interest in the lives of your team—to the point of remembering where their kids go to school.

Bill Campbell didn't need or want the glory of being profiled in a book, let alone being the subject of an entire book. But for a man who lived his life by giving his knowledge away, open-sourcing his secrets strikes me as a fitting tribute.

—Adam Grant

Chapter 1

The Caddie and the CEO

On a warm April day in 2016, a large crowd gathered on the football field at Sacred Heart School, in the heart of Atherton, California, to honor William Vincent Campbell, Jr., who had recently succumbed to cancer at the age of seventy-five. Bill had been a transcendent figure in the technology business since moving west in 1983, playing a critical role in the success of Apple, Google, Intuit, and numerous other companies. To say he was tremendously respected would be a gross understatement—loved is more like it. Among the audience that day were dozens of technology leaders—Larry Page. Sergey Brin. Mark Zuckerberg. Sheryl Sandberg. Tim Cook. Jeff Bezos. Mary Meeker. John Doerr. Ruth Porat. Scott Cook. Brad Smith. Ben Horowitz. Marc Andreessen. Such a concentration of industry pioneers and power is rarely seen, at least not in Silicon Valley.

We—Jonathan Rosenberg and Eric Schmidt—sat among the audience, making subdued small talk, soft sunshine contrasting with the somber mood. We had both worked closely with Bill in the previous fifteen years, since we had joined Google as the CEO (Eric, in 2001) and the head of products (Jonathan, in 2002). Bill had been our coach, meeting with us individually every week or two to talk through the various challenges we had faced as we helped grow the company. He had guided us as individuals and teammates, working mostly behind the scenes as Google went from a quirky startup to one of the most valuable companies and brands in the world. Without Bill's help, there was a chance that none of that would have happened. We called him Coach, but we also called him friend, and in this we were like pretty much everyone around us. In fact, as we later found out, many of the people in the audience that day, an audience that numbered well over a thousand people, considered Bill to be their *best* friend. So who,

among all of these best friends, would have the honor of eulogizing our Coach? Which high-tech luminary would step to the podium?

THE CHAMPION FROM HOMESTEAD

Bill Campbell didn't even get to California until his early forties, and he had started his business career only a few years before that. In fact, this Silicon Valley success story packed a few lifetimes' worth of accomplishments into his seventy-five-year span. He grew up pugnacious and smart in the western Pennsylvania steel town of Homestead, where his father taught physical education in the local high school and moonlighted at the mill. Bill was a good student and worked hard. Astute too: he wrote an April 1955 op-ed in his school newspaper that reminded his fellow students "there is nothing more important to you in later life" than good grades. "Loafing in school may prevent one's chances of success." He was a freshman at the time.

A football star at Homestead High, Bill left home in the fall of 1958 to attend Columbia University in Manhattan. He was an unlikely-looking football hero even in that era when football players were far more human-sized than they are today: maybe five ten, 165 pounds (although listed in the program at 180). But he quickly earned the respect of coaches and teammates alike with his all-out play and on-field intelligence. By his senior year, the fall of 1961, Bill was the captain of the team, playing practically every minute of every game as a linebacker on defense and lineman (guard) on offense. He earned All-Ivy honors and helped lead the team to the Ivy League title, the only one in Columbia's history. The team's coach, the wonderfully named Buff Donelli, called Bill "a tremendous influence" in winning the title. "If he stood 6 feet 2 and weighed 225 pounds and played pro ball, he'd be the greatest lineman the league ever had, a ball of fire. But he's a little guy who weighs only 162. Not even in college ball do you find guards that small. Ordinarily you can't play football with little guys. Attitude generally isn't enough. A coach needs attitude plus players."¹

Bill's attitude, naturally, was all about the team, saying that it succeeded "because the players worked together and had senior leadership."²

TOO MUCH COMPASSION

Bill didn't have much money, so he helped pay for his education at Columbia by driving a cab. He learned the city so well that later in life he often argued with his longtime driver and friend, Scotty Kramer, about the best route to take. (When it came to navigating New York you didn't question the coach, Scotty says.) He graduated from Columbia in 1962 with a degree in economics, received a master's degree in education in 1964, and migrated north to become an assistant football coach at Boston College. Bill was an outstanding coach and quickly became highly respected among his peers. So when his alma mater, Columbia, asked him to return as its head coach in 1974, he agreed. Although Columbia's football program was woeful, Bill's loyalty guided him back to Manhattan.



Bill (67) leads the blocking for Columbia during the Lions' 26-14 victory over Harvard on October 21, 1961.³

(One of Bill's coaching colleagues, Jim Rudgers, notes that before Bill "let his heart take him" back to Columbia, he was considered one of the top

assistant coaches in the country and was offered the opportunity to coach at Penn State under Joe Paterno. At the time, Paterno was one of the top coaches in the country, and it seems likely that Bill would have continued to thrive as a coach had he joined the Nittany Lions. In fact, this book might have been about Bill Campbell, college football legend, rather than Bill Campbell, Silicon Valley legend. And to learn more about him you might be doing a Yahoo or Bing search!)



Bill's teammates carry him off the field after Columbia's 37-6 win over University of Pennsylvania on November 18, 1961.

The victory clinched Columbia's first Ivy League championship.⁴

Despite his abundant coaching talent, Bill did not win in his return to Columbia. Hampered by crummy facilities that were at least a thirty-minute bus ride from campus in afternoon traffic, an administration that was perhaps not fully committed to gridiron success, and a city in general decline, the Lions won only twelve games during his tenure, losing forty-one. His most hopeful season was 1978, when the team started 3-1-1 but then got crushed at Giants Stadium, 69-0, by a much bigger (physically and

numerically) Rutgers squad. Bill decided partway through the 1979 campaign that he was going to resign. He completed the season and was done.

Bill worked so hard during his time at Columbia that at one point he had to take a break in a hospital to recover from exhaustion. Recruiting players was particularly challenging. Bill later said that he would have to visit a hundred prospects just to get twenty-five of them to come. “I’d leave after workout programs, at 4:30, and I’d drive to Albany and back in a night. Scranton and back,” he added. “Just so I could be back in the office the next day.”⁵

His failure, though, wasn’t for lack of players. It was, according to Bill, for too much compassion. “There is something that I would say is called dispassionate toughness that you need [as a football coach], and I don’t think I have it. What you need to do is not worry about feelings. You’ve got to push everybody and everything harder and be almost insensitive about feelings. You replace a kid with another kid; you take an older guy and replace him with a younger guy. That is the nature of the game. Survival of the fittest. The best players play. In my case, I worried about that. I tried to make sure the kids understood what we were doing. I just think I wasn’t hard-edged enough.”⁶

Bill may have been correct in believing that success as a football coach depends on “dispassion,” but in business there is growing evidence that compassion is a key factor to success.^{*7} And as it turned out, this notion of bringing compassion to the team worked much better for Bill in the business world than on the football field.

LET’S RUN IT

His football career was done. At age thirty-nine, Bill entered the business world by taking a job with the ad agency J. Walter Thompson. He started in Chicago, supporting Kraft, then several months later moved back to New York to support Kodak. He dove into his job with customary passion, impressing his clients in Rochester, New York, so much with his knowledge and insights about their business that they soon hired him away from the agency. Bill rose quickly at Kodak, and by 1983 he was working in London as the company’s head of consumer products for Europe. During his initial

job search in 1979, one of his Columbia football buddies had connected Bill with John Sculley, who was then a senior executive at PepsiCo. Bill didn't take the job that John offered at Pepsi, but in 1983 Sculley decamped to Silicon Valley to become CEO of Apple, and shortly thereafter he gave Bill a call. Would he be willing to leave Kodak and move his young family—he had married the former Roberta Spagnola, a dean at Columbia, in 1976—west to come to Apple?

“My career had been blunted by a lot of years as a dumb-ass football coach,” Bill later said. “I felt that because of my background, I would always be below my peer group and trying to catch up. Going out to the wild, woolly west, where it was more a meritocracy, I would have a chance to move quickly and sit on the management team.”⁸ Move quickly, indeed. Within nine months of joining Apple, Bill was promoted to VP of sales and marketing and given the task of overseeing the launch of the highly anticipated Macintosh, Apple's new computer that would replace the Apple II as the company's flagship product.

To kick off the launch, the company made a big move: it bought a slot to run a commercial during the Super Bowl, which would be played in Tampa, Florida, on January 22, 1984. Once the ad was produced, Bill and the team showed it to Apple cofounder Steve Jobs. An allusion to George Orwell's novel *1984*, it showed a young woman running through a dark hallway, fleeing guards, and emerging into a chamber where hundreds of gray-clad, head-shaven men are listening, zombie-like, to a droning “big brother” figure on a large screen before them. With a yell, she throws a large mallet through the screen, causing it to explode. A narrator promises that the Apple Macintosh will show us why “1984 won't be like *1984*.”*

Steve loved the ad. E. Floyd Kvamme, Bill's boss at the time, loved the ad. Bill loved the ad. About ten days before the game, they showed it to the board.

The board hated the ad. This is terrible, was the universal opinion, too costly and too controversial. They wanted to know if they could sell the airtime to some other advertiser. Was it too late to back out? A couple of days later, one of the Apple sales executives told Bill and Floyd that she had been able to find a buyer for the slot. “What do you think we should do?” Floyd asked Bill.

“Fuck it! Let's run it,” was Bill's response. They never told the board or other top executives that they had a potential buyer for the slot, and ran the

ad. It became not only the most popular spot of the game, but one of the most famous commercials of all time, ushering in the era of Super Bowl ads becoming as big as the game itself. A *Los Angeles Times* column in 2017 called it the “only great Super Bowl commercial ever.”⁹ Not bad for a “dumb-ass football coach” less than five years removed from his final season.

In 1987, Apple decided to spin off a separate software company called Claris and offered Bill the position of CEO. He jumped at the opportunity. Claris did well, but by 1990 Apple pulled it back into the fold as a subsidiary rather than follow the original plan of letting it become its own public company. This shift spurred Bill and several other Claris executives to leave. It was an emotional decision, and when Bill departed, several Claris employees demonstrated their gratitude to him by taking out a full-page ad in the *San Jose Mercury News*. “So long, Coach,” the headline read. “Bill, we’ll miss your leadership, your vision, your wisdom, your friendship and your spirit . . .” the ad continued. “You taught us how to stand on our own. You built us to last. And even though you’re no longer coaching our team, we’re going to do our best to keep making you proud.” Claris continued as an Apple subsidiary until 1998.

Bill became the CEO of a startup named GO Corporation, which attempted to create the world’s first pen-based handheld computer (a precursor to the PalmPilot and today’s smartphones). It was an ambitious vision but ahead of its time, and the company shut down in 1994. “GO didn’t go,” Bill was fond of saying.

Around that time, Intuit cofounder and CEO Scott Cook, along with his board of directors, was looking to replace himself as CEO. John Doerr, a Kleiner Perkins venture capitalist,* introduced Bill to Scott. At first, the founder wasn’t impressed with the coach. A couple of months passed and Scott still didn’t have a new CEO, so he agreed to meet with Bill again. They went on a walk around a neighborhood in Palo Alto, California, and this time the two clicked. “The first time we met, we talked about business and strategy,” Scott says. “But when we talked again, we got off of strategy and talked instead about leadership and people. The other people I had interviewed had a cookie-cutter approach to developing people. You can have any color you want as long as it’s black. But Bill, he was a technicolor rainbow. He appreciated that each person had a different story and background. He was so nuanced and different in how he approached growth

challenges and leadership challenges. I was looking for a way to grow our people in a way I couldn't. Bill was great at that.”

So long, Coach.

Clarix has just lost one of our hardest-working employees.

Bill Campbell is on his way to lead another bunch of impossible dreamers over at GO Corporation, those guys with the pen-based notebook computing system.

And the bunch he left behind would like to publicly tender him the biggest compliment we can conjure:

Bill, we'll miss your leadership, your vision, your wisdom, your friendship and your spirit.

But—thanks to all of the above—we're going to be fine without you.

In 1987, when Apple decided to get out of the software business, you volunteered to start a spin-off company.

You began with a handful of nearly-free Apple software products, a few rebels, a name, "Clarix," and built us into the world's leading Mac software company.

We just finished our best quarter ever in sales, profits, market share and growth.

You taught us how to stand on our own.

You built us to last.

And even though you're no longer coaching our team, we're going to do our best to keep making you proud.

CLARIS

Photo credit: Chris Gaede

In 1994, Bill became Intuit's CEO. He shepherded the company through several years of growth and success, stepping down in 2000.* Although he did not know it at the time, he was about to enter the third chapter of his career, a return to coaching full-time, but not on a football field.

When Steve Jobs was forced out of Apple in 1985, Bill Campbell was one of the few leaders at the company who fought against the move. Dave Kinser, an Apple colleague of Bill's at the time, recalls Bill saying that "we've got to keep Steve in the company. He's way too talented to just let him leave!" Steve remembered that loyalty. When he returned to Apple and became its CEO in 1997, and most of the board members stepped down, Steve named Bill as one of the new directors.* (Bill served on the Apple board until 2014.)

Steve and Bill became close friends, speaking frequently and spending many Sunday afternoons walking around their Palo Alto neighborhood discussing all sorts of topics. Bill became a sounding board for Steve on a wide variety of subjects, a coach, mentor, and friend. But Steve was not Bill's only coachee. In fact, even though he left football in 1979, "the Coach" never stopped coaching. He was always available to chat with friends, neighbors, colleagues, fellow parents from his kids' school; he'd give them a hug, listen to whatever was going on, and usually spin some story that helped them gain some perspective, draw some insight, or make a decision.

So when Bill stepped down as Intuit's CEO in 2000 (he remained as chairman until 2016) and was looking for his next challenge, John Doerr invited him to come to Kleiner Perkins, the venerable venture capital firm, and become a coach for its portfolio companies. Venture firms often have "entrepreneurs in residence," bright, usually young, technologists who work at the firms while they noodle over their next big idea. Why not have an executive in residence, John thought, someone who was seasoned in operations and strategy, to help the firm's startups through the ups and downs of growth (or lack thereof)? Bill agreed and settled into life on Sand Hill Road.

THE GOOGLE COACH

One day in 2001 a local startup, run by a couple of brash kids from Stanford, decided to bring in a "professional" CEO: Eric Schmidt. Eric built

the software operations at Sun Microsystems and served as CEO and chairman at Novell. John Doerr advised Eric that he needed Bill Campbell as his coach. Eric had met Bill when Sun CEO Scott McNealy tried to hire him and was impressed with his accomplishments and energy. Once, when Bill came into the Sun offices for a meeting, he remarked that he had just returned from a one-day trip to Japan! This made a huge impression on Eric.

But still, Eric was a rightfully proud man and Doerr's suggestion offended him. By that time, Eric was already a big deal: CEO of Novell, former CTO of Sun, MS and PhD in computer science from Cal, and BS from Princeton. That's a lot of letters; what could this gruff guy from Pennsylvania—an ex-football coach!—have to teach him?

A lot, it turns out. In less than a year, Eric's self-review showed how much he had come around: "Bill Campbell has been very helpful in coaching all of us," he wrote. "In hindsight, his role was needed from the beginning. I should have encouraged this structure sooner, ideally the moment I started at Google."

For fifteen years, Bill met with Eric just about every week. And not only Eric: Bill became a coach to Jonathan, Larry Page, and several other Google leaders. He attended Eric's staff meeting every week and was a frequent presence on the company's Mountain View, California, campus (which, conveniently, was a stone's throw from the Intuit campus, where Bill was still chairman).

For those fifteen years, Bill's counsel was deeply influential. It's not that he told us what to do—far from it. If Bill had opinions about product and strategy, he usually kept them to himself. But he made sure the team was communicating, that tensions and disagreements were brought to the surface and discussed, so that when the big decisions were made, everyone was on board, whether they agreed or not. We can say, without a doubt, that Bill Campbell was one of the people most integral to Google's success. Without him, the company would not be where it is today.

Which would be enough for just about anyone, but not Bill. While he was working with Google's senior team and with Steve Jobs at Apple, he was also helping so many more. He coached Brad Smith, former CEO of Intuit. He coached John Donahoe, former CEO of eBay. He coached former U.S. Vice President Al Gore. He coached Dick Costolo, former CEO of Twitter. He coached Mike McCue, CEO of Flipboard. He coached Donna