

# The Open Organization: Igniting Passion and Performance

*Jim Whitehurst*

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**Jim Whitehurst : The Open Organization: Igniting Passion and Performance** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Open Organization: Igniting Passion and Performance:

20 of 21 people found the following review helpful. For executives, middle managers, and individual contributors alike By Scott Merrill In The Open Organization, Jim Whitehurst presents a compelling, modern alternative to the traditional top-down hierarchy of business organization. Born from the open source software movement, Whitehurst advocates for a participative organization that values ability more than title. Throughout the book Whitehurst shares personal examples of his own transformation from a traditional leader to an open one. The stories are sometimes

embarrassing, but his honesty and frankness are a key part of what defines a successful leader in an open organization. Even better, to my mind, are the examples that Whitehurst shares of other companies and leaders on the cutting edge of the open organization model. It's one thing to read a personal account of one company's efforts; but to see that company in the context of a larger movement to redefine the structure of success in the business world is truly eye opening. I've been using and contributing to open source software for over a decade, so much of what Whitehurst shares feels self-evident to me. Of course collaborative decision making is hard and messy, but of course the results are almost always better than one person making command decision alone. Despite my own belief in the power of openness, I had yet to see a thorough examination of the business value to such an approach, versus the community value. I had the pleasure of interviewing Jim Whitehurst for TechCrunch.com in early 2012 (<http://tcrn.ch/Ix8AKF>) and the seeds of many of the ideas in *The Open Organization* were clearly present even then. Reading *The Open Organization* felt, in some ways, like the conclusion to that interview. Despite my familiarity with open source and my first-hand history with many of the ideas in this book, I found *The Open Organization* to be a compelling read. The tone is conversational, and easy to read. Examples are plentiful and thought provoking. The scope of the book is appropriate for C-level executives, middle managers, and even individual contributors: an open organization works better when all members participate fully. One of the things I liked best about the book are the numerous -- yet practical -- calls to action. Each chapter closes with "Jim's Leadership Tips", which is a simple list of questions and suggestions to try within your own organization. These are not sweeping pronouncements, nor are they particularly challenging. They are suggestions for things you can try right now, today, to start building success with an open organization. The scope of these suggestions is almost always small, allowing you to try them out one at a time, either with an individual or small team. Whitehurst does not shy away from the reality that an open organization is hard work. It takes a real commitment from leadership to pursue the model that Whitehurst proposes. He reiterates this fact several times through each chapter. But evidence -- from within Red Hat, as well as from other organizations cited in the book -- indicates that the results can be nothing short of amazing. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. predicted that we would be in organizations that feel like communities, not hierarchies By Ian Mann Put these ideas together. Bureaucracy is the organizational form designed to maximize control, coordination, and consistency to produce efficiency and reliability. It worked effectively when workers performed rote tasks on assembly lines or in offices. Today we use robots to do these mundane tasks reliably, accurately and efficiently. Your staff's abilities that can have the biggest impact on the success of your company, are the ones that cannot be managed. These include enthusiasm, caring, commitment, creativity and so on. For the last three decades I have come across examples of companies that were designed in anti-bureaucratic forms and that worked exceptionally well, such as the Spanish Mondragon Corporation (75,000 people,) or W.L. Gore (9,000 people in 30 countries). In an era when a technology-enabled mob can overthrow a dictator, the business question is whether the same energy can be used to drive organizations, serve customers, produce goods or develop software. Jim Whitehurst believes it can and he is in a unique position to make this assertion. As the former chief operating officer at Delta Air Lines, where he took a lead role in the company's much needed restructuring, he understood and ran a top-down, command and control organization. He currently heads Red Hat, the world's leading provider of open-source software, employing more than 7,000 people and with a market value of more than \$ 10 billion. Its software is trusted to power submarines, and its customers include the New York Stock Exchange, DreamWorks, Sprint and 90 percent of the Fortune 500 companies. Some fifty years ago, the leadership thinker, Warren Bennis, predicted that we would be in organizations that feel like communities, not hierarchies. This is no longer an ideal, it is a business necessity. Beating your competition is no longer a one-time event with a clever strategy that lasts forever. Simply pedalling faster is not enough, and central planning is too time- and resource- consuming. Whitehurst saw an alternative way in the process at Red Hat and describes its powerful method as "the Open Organization." Similar methods are in use in the many successful companies he cites. General Electric's Durham jet engine plant has 400 skilled technicians working in self-organizing teams, with the supervision of only one plant manager. Something similar exists in Whole Foods, Pixar, Zappos and Starbucks. These are "communities" where the principles are different. The basis for loyalty is a common purpose, not economic dependency. Openness, transparency, participation, and collaboration are the very reasons the companies make money. The best ideas win, regardless of who they come from. This book is important because so many executives can scarcely imagine an alternative to the organizational status quo, even if they know that bureaucracy is hobbling their organizations and slowing them up. They can feel how close their faster, more nimble universal competitors have come, and they know the danger. An "open organization" responds to opportunities more quickly, accesses talent and inspires, motivates and empowers people at all levels to act with accountability. So, how does one move towards an open organization? It starts with the realization that this is a journey not an event, and that many things will have to be different, starting with executive behaviour. Whitehurst shares a seminal experience he had soon after joining Red Hat. "Early on, I issued what I thought was an order to create a research report. A few days later, I asked the people assigned to the task how things were going. "Oh, we decided it was a bad idea, so we scrapped it," they told me in good cheer." Whitehurst's response was that the team was correct to turn down the job if they thought it was not a good idea, or as importantly, because he had failed

to convince them of its importance. Open organizations such as Red Hat are the product of complex, subtle, and powerful organizing systems that truly free people to take more initiative, be more creative and more effective. As business gets harder it is easy to forget the role of passion in an organization. The leader's role in a twenty-first-century organization includes being the "cheerleader-in-chief." Having boundless passion for the mission is common in start-ups but seems to fade as the organization grows. The 7,000 people in Red Hat spread across more than 80 offices, and working remotely worldwide, are fired by the passion most companies ignore. Only a deep passion for what the organization stands for drives people to bring their all to their work. Whole Foods has as their purpose nothing less than to provide food and beverages so that their customers become healthier and live fuller lives. Open-source is no different for those who work at Red Hat. Passion will fade unless it is diligently, carefully and consistently nurtured. "The Open Organization" is a chronicle of successful practices that Whitehurst uses to fire employees' passion and really engage them. Engagement is not serving sushi lunches, but rather actually engaging with people, and enabling them to engage with their work and colleagues. The book shows how everyone can and should have an earned level of influence through the merit they display. Most importantly, it is a fine description of the changing nature of leadership required today. This book could change the way your company functions and change your level of success. Readability Light --- Serious Insights High --- Low Practical High --- Low

\*Ian Mann of Gateways consults internationally on leadership and strategy and is the author of Strategy that Works. 8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. One of the best books by a CEO I've ever read. By J. Fligner. One of the best books by a CEO I've ever read. Open organizations are the way of the future and this book explains why, MUST READ!!

TODAY'S LEADERS KNOW THAT SPEED and agility are the keys to any company's success, and yet many are frustrated that their organizations can't move fast enough to stay competitive. The typical chain of command is too slow; internal resources are too limited; people are already executing beyond normal expectations. As the pace accelerates, how do you inspire people's energy and creativity? How do you collaborate with customers, vendors, and partners to keep your organization on the cutting edge? What kind of organization matches the speed and complexity that businesses must master—and how do you build that organization? Jim Whitehurst, CEO of Red Hat, one of the world's most revolutionary companies, shows how open principles of management—based on transparency, participation, and community—reinvent the organization for the fast-paced connected era. Whitehurst gives readers an insider's look into how an open and innovative organizational model works. He shows how to leverage it to build community, respond quickly to opportunities, harness resources and talent both inside and outside the organization, and inspire, motivate, and empower people at all levels to act with accountability. The Open Organization is a must-read for leaders struggling to adapt their management practices to the values of the digital and social age. Brimming with Whitehurst's personal stories and candid advice for leading an open organization, as well as with instructive examples from employees and managers at Red Hat and companies such as Google, The Body Shop, and Whole Foods, this book provides the blueprint for reinventing your organization.

"If you're looking for a good business book to dive into, add this to your list." — The Huffington Post "CEO Jim Whitehurst's The Open Organization is the best business book of the year." — Seeking Alpha (seekingalpha.com) ADVANCE PRAISE for The Open Organization: MICHAEL DELL, Chairman and CEO, Dell—"In The Open Organization, Jim Whitehurst clearly demonstrates how building avidly engaged communities of employees, partners, and customers can ignite the kind of passion and innovation that drive outsized results for businesses and for society as a whole. This is a great read for anyone hoping to lead and succeed in a society being redefined by expectations of transparency, authenticity, access—and yes, openness." CHRIS ANDERSON, Cofounder and CEO, 3D Robotics; former Editor in Chief, Wired magazine—"In a wired world, everyone knows that management needs to change from 'command and control' to leadership based on transparency, collaboration, and participation. But the question is, how do you actually lead that way? Jim Whitehurst's interesting tale of his own reinvention as a leader, with lessons from other leaders in companies such as Whole Foods, Pixar, and Zappos, finally provides the blueprint that leaders have been seeking." JEANIE DANIEL DUCK, Former Senior Partner and Managing Director, The Boston Consulting Group; author, The Change Monster—"Many people are wary of change. For executives who worry about Millennial employees and the power of the internet, it is scary indeed. Yet those same employees could offer valuable new perspectives, ideas, and passion. The question is, how do today's managers capture those desirable attributes without setting off the perfect storm? The answers are in Jim Whitehurst's book." CHARLENE LI, Founder and CEO, Altimeter Group; author, The Engaged Leader and Open Leadership—"In today's disruptive economy, only the leaders—and their organizations—who are open and learn to adapt to the fast-changing needs of customers and employees will survive. Whitehurst speaks from personal experience about what works—and what doesn't—to foster openness and speed. If you have even an inkling of a desire to lead an innovative, fast-moving, and engaged organization, this book is for you." JOHN CHAMBERS, Chairman and CEO, Cisco—"With The Open Organization, Whitehurst takes us where all leaders need

to be if we want to succeed in the future—outside of our traditional comfort zones.”