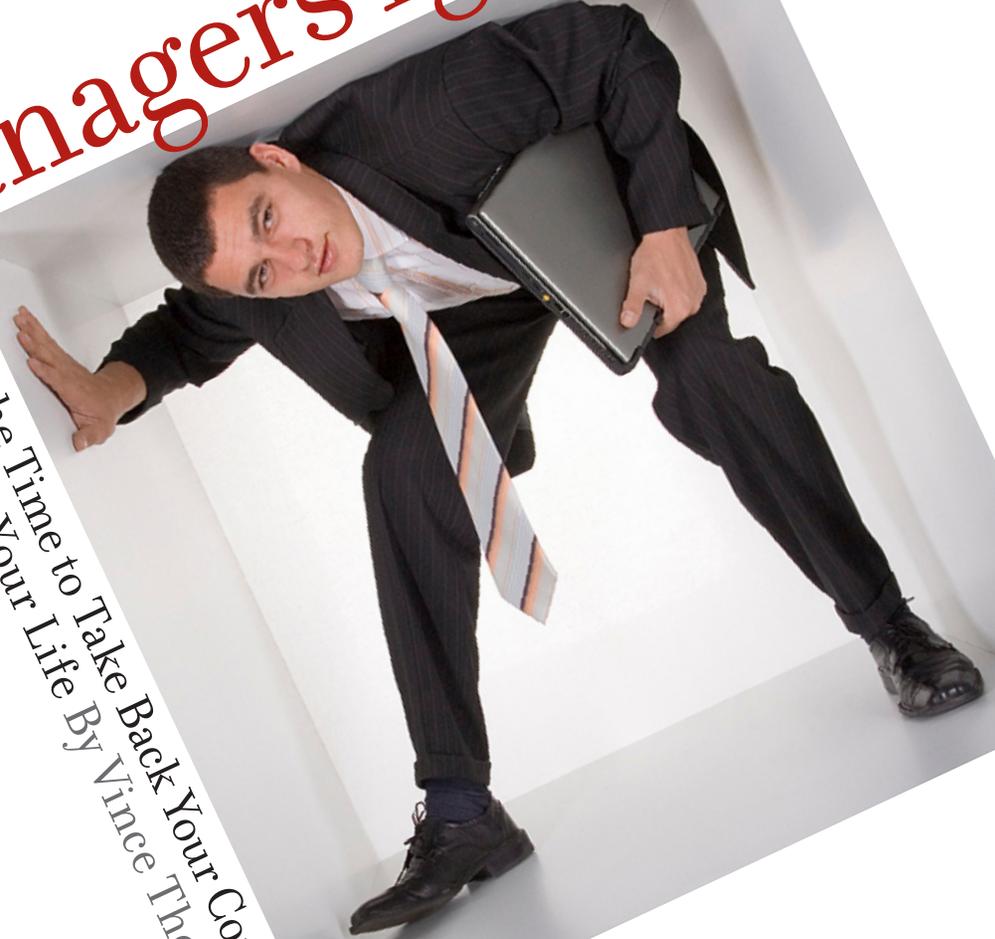




# Managers Ignite!

Now is the Time to Take Back Your Company,  
Your Career, Your Life By Vince Thompson



# Is This You?

Do you have a boss who's not the CEO?  
Do you have direct reports?  
Does their success depend on you and  
your success depend on them?

Welcome to the world of the manager... perhaps the most crucial role in the world of business and, over the last two decades, one of the scariest, as extreme pressure has been building on all sides.

Armed with blackberries and a dozen technologies aimed at making your life easier, you still live in a world of disconnects. More to do at work..more to do outside of work. You likely feel trapped by the confines of time.

To cope with the new realities, you work eight hours a week more than your parents did and sleep two hours less a night than your grandparents.

Can you relate?

# The Ugly Truth

There are 5.4 million managers leading teams in more than 30,000 U.S. firms, most of whom are reeling from the pressures above and below, searching for the answers that matter.

But for too many managers the existing answers fall far short and our workplaces are an absolute mess.

A recent poll of almost 8,000 full-time employees by Harris Interactive offers the following sobering facts:

- Fully one-third of workers feel they are at a dead-end in their current jobs, and 42 percent say they are “trying to cope with feelings of burnout.”
- Only 37 percent believe that their “top management displays integrity and morality.”
- Only 29 percent say that their “top management is committed to advancing the skills of employees.”
- Fewer than half say they “really care about the fate of this organization.”

## **Burnout. Cynicism. Disconnection. How fun can this be?**

The toll on managers has hit a boiling point. In a national survey of middle managers (Fall 2005), Accenture found that the level of satisfaction that managers reported with their companies had collapsed from 67 percent in 2004 to 48 percent in 2005.

In a more recent Accenture survey (Fall 2006) that included managers in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, and Australia, the numbers remained unchanged. Managers are at risk and the output of this collapse is reflected in their actions.

According to Accenture, 58 percent of U.S. managers are open to changing jobs and 30 percent are currently looking to make a change. In other words, more than half of the managers leading teams today are ready to walk out the door—leaving their teams, their companies, and for some, if necessary, their homes and communities, behind in hopes of making a fresh start elsewhere.

This came as shocking news to some business leaders. But many managers had seen it building for years—years in which managers in The Middle have been displaced by technology, de-positioned by consultants, handcuffed by red tape, distracted by mergers, spoofed in the media and denigrated as low-value bureaucrats.

## A Cause for Pause

Given all this one can't be blamed for moving the kids to Cancun and opening up that beach bar you've always dreamed of. For most of us, this is not the answer and we still find meaning while leading in limited space. The joy of mentoring, the reward of growing a team and the thrill of achieving victory as part of something big.

And...while your social skills may transfer to that beach bar much of what you have learned may not be that portable even between companies in your own industry. As John Kotter, the Harvard professor and management expert details in his book, *The General Managers*, how managers don't hit their full competency until 6-10 years in the job and those skills and knowledge are so unique that little transfers.

So...so while staying may seem like hell, let's give some consideration to our true value and the opportunity developing around us.

First, a powerful truth...

A talented researcher Quy Nguyen Huy wrote the following in the *Harvard Business Review*:  
“A new executive’s fresh ideas don’t have a prayer of succeeding unless they are married with the operating skills, vast networks, and credibility of veteran middle managers.”

You see, as managers, we sit at the fulcrum point between the top of the organization and the field forces.

With our vast networks, ability to know how things really work, relationships with vendors and customers and deep connection to the emotional climate and skills of the organization, we are the ones best positioned to reinvent our companies.

Add to this fact four trends putting the wind at our back and the now is the time for managers to be truly Ignited—staging a Management Revolution.

# 4 Trends Lighting the Way for the Management Revolution

## 1. Demographic Change

As the Baby Boomers approach 60 and prepare to retire, there will be a vacuum of leadership at the top. The vacuum will be exacerbated by the exodus of managers who abandon corporate life for the entrepreneur's or freelancer's road. (Hence an estimate by *BusinessWeek* that some 24 percent of all middle management positions will be vacant in the next few years.) Tomorrow's leadership positions are going to be filled by managers of today who can figure out how best to prepare themselves for the opportunities ahead.

## 2. Increasing Complexity of the Business World

As business becomes increasingly globalized, outsourced, and technology-driven, the complexity of everyday management challenges grows. Companies must rely on the managers in the middle to carry out their corporate strategies, which are often based on complicated networking relationships among manufacturers, marketers, distributors, and customers in many countries around the world. This means that the sophistication and skill of veteran managers are more important than ever—giving those managers greater leverage and bargaining power than they've previously enjoyed.

### **3. Growing Corporate Flexibility**

One positive result of the reengineering movement of the 1990s was the smashing of the old military-style corporate hierarchy, with its rigid job ladders and pay scales. And with the failure of delayering has come a new appreciation of the importance of managers in The Middle—and a growing recognition that companies must attract and reward them.

One great example of the Manager's rise in power is happening at Best Buy where a couple of managers got the idea of doing away with meetings and fixed work schedules. Their small test, labeled CultureRx soon caught the ear of many of their counterparts and within weeks most of the managers at Best Buy's corporate offices were calling for a complete sea-change. The result? Management bought in and Best Buy no longer has meetings. Instead the employees work on their own schedules from wherever they want and are judged not on their attendance but their output.

This complete un-tethering may not be in everyone's future..but one thing is clear. In the future, compensation and work packages will be customized and personalized—for the best managers, standard pay scales will not apply.

### **4. The Demand for Reinvention**

In a world of ever-accelerating change, old business models are becoming obsolete more quickly than ever. Pressure from new technologies, new competitors, new customer requirements, and new social and demographic circumstances are forcing great companies, from GE and General Motors to IBM, Kodak and Disney, to rethink their tried-and-true ways of doing business. No one is immune. Even eBay is working to reinvent. And when a company does reinvent, making a successful transition from one business model to the next, who is it that generally takes the lead? It's the Ignited managers in The Middle—those who understand the context of their environment (internal and external) and are prepared to take over when the entrepreneurial insights that fueled the first phase of growth are exhausted.

There's a real window of opportunity here for managers to seize the power, purpose, and success they deserve. And if they do this right, the benefits will flow to their companies as well. A new, genuinely empowered generation of managers can steer their companies off the paths that have led so many into scandals, unnecessary layoffs, catastrophic misreadings of the market, and other disasters. They can bring about a creative renaissance of American business, a time of renewed profitability, shared value, and productivity that will benefit everyone in the country.

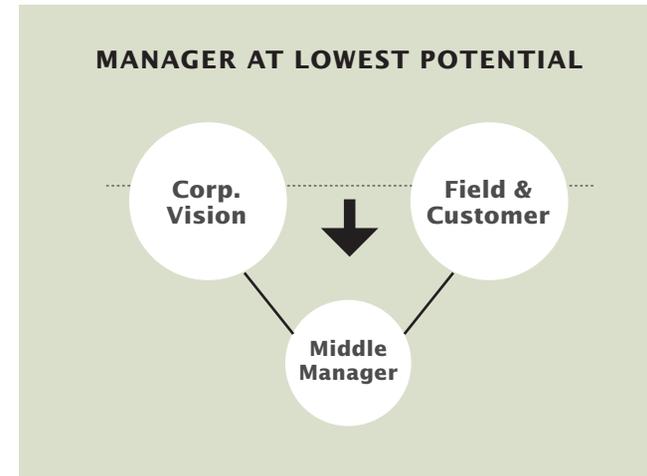
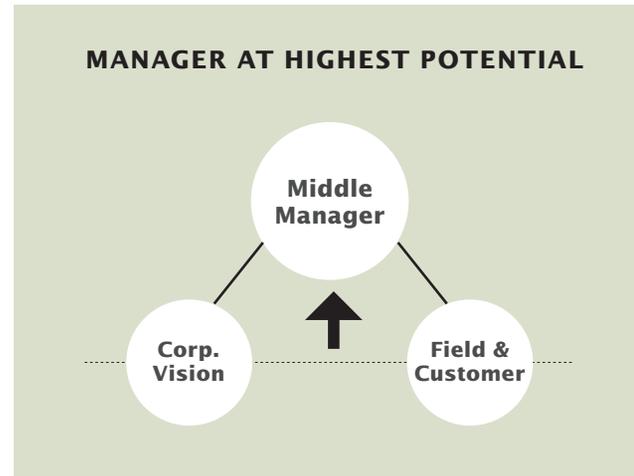
THIS COMBINATION OF CHANGES IS A PERFECT PLATFORM FOR IGNITION—  
THE COMING REBIRTH OF PURPOSE AND POWER THAT MANAGERS IN THE MIDDLE  
CAN EXPERIENCE IF THEY CHOOSE TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.

## Taking Care of Business

Sure we've been training on negotiation, conflict resolution, project management and time management, but how many of us have been trained on how to create extraordinary value and reinvent business as usual?

Key to success in our revolution will be our ability to first take back our roles and then create major change from within our companies.

First, we get solid, and then we harness our power to get Ignited. Ignited managers move their place on the fulcrum from deposed and squeezed to re-positioned with great power.



**Here are three strategies to get your job back.**

## #1. ASK...WHAT'S IT ALL FOR?

A corporate executive on holiday in a small Greek seacoast village was strolling by the docks and drinking in the local color. He complimented one fisherman on the quality of his catch.

“How long did it take you to get all those fish?” he wondered.

“Not very long,” answered the Greek. “An hour or two.”

“Then why didn’t you stay out longer to catch more?”

Shrugging, the Greek explained that his catch was sufficient to meet his needs and those of his family.

The executive asked, “But what do you do with the rest of your time?”

I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, and take a nap with my wife. In the evening, I go to the village to see my friends, dance a little, play the bouzouki, and sing songs. I have a full life.”

The executive said, “I have an MBA from Harvard. I can help you. You should start by fishing longer every day. You’ll catch extra fish that you can sell. With the revenue, you can buy a bigger boat. With the extra money the larger boat will bring you, you can buy a second boat and a third one, and so on, until you have an entire fleet of trawlers. Instead of selling your fish to a middleman, you can then negotiate directly with the processing plants and maybe even open your own plant. You can ship fish to markets all around the world. In time, you can then move to New York City to direct your huge enterprise.”

“How long would that take?” asked the Greek.

“Twenty, perhaps twenty-five years,” replied the executive.

“And after that?”

“When your business gets really big, you can sell stock and make millions!” exclaimed the executive with zeal.

“Millions? Really? And after that?”

“After that you’ll be able to retire, live in a small village near the coast, sleep late, play with your grandchildren, catch a few fish, take a nap with your wife, and spend your evenings singing, dancing, and playing the bouzouki with your friends.”

If we’re ever going to achieve what we’ve set out for we’re going to have to realize what’s important to us and what the endgame is. In fact it’s the only way we can achieve some sense of balance or success for without the endgame we’ll never know what we are working for.

This extends to how we judge ourselves and how we let others judge us. When you have an endgame you can use your own standards for success. No longer do we fall victim to the office politics of who's hot and who's not. Our system of judgment becomes our own.

## #2. YOUR BIGGER YES

Let's face it: the workplace can be scary as hell. Warring factions, tribal leaders and, for some, the constant reminder that those who rock the boat will soon be swimming.

It's all well and good to talk about "counting to ten" or "taking a deep breath" when emotions start to overwhelm you but given the workplace stress we are facing something much bigger is needed.

We recommend building your "Bigger Yes," a phrase familiar to many from its use by author Stephen Covey of *Seven Habits* fame.

Ambrose Redmond put it this way: *"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear."*

Having The Bigger Yes is having something more important driving you, something that gives you the courage to stand up in the face of fear, anxiety, anger, or any other overwhelming emotion and do what you know is the right thing. Your Bigger Yes may be your principles, values, or sense of justice. It may be your knowledge of a better opportunity. Whatever it is, your Bigger Yes is stronger than the emotions that are trying to control you, and it gives you something to cling to rather than allowing the emotions to sweep you away.

Consider the case of Michael Drake...

Mike left his private practice as an executive talent recruiter to join Freddie Mac, the independent financial corporation chartered by Congress to improve liquidity in the mortgage marketplace and therefore help more Americans own their own homes.

Although Freddie Mac undoubtedly does a lot of good work that benefits millions of people, it's an organization with a very conservative, risk-averse, even repressive internal culture—a culture Mike characterizes as “based on fear.” This atmosphere has been intensified since 2003 as a result of public battles over Freddie Mac's accounting practices.

Like many Freddie Mac employees, Mike wanted the company to have a fresher perspective. Unlike most of the others, however, Mike was given a powerful opportunity to create positive change. In his new role as the person in charge of hiring for the organization, Mike was given the goal of hiring 1,000 new employees within a year—a huge influx representing 20 percent of the 5,000-person Freddie Mac workforce.

Mike saw the assignment as an exciting opportunity to do something much bigger than just recruit a few employees. However, many others at the company wanted to maintain the comfortable status quo. A struggle between the two sides was already in high gear when Mike arrived.

Unsurprisingly, Mike soon found himself embroiled in these battles.

The hiring process at Freddie Mac required that each candidate not only receive the endorsement of the hiring manager, but also an endorsement from each of the other team leaders. This “veto power” made the work of getting candidates with fresh perspectives and new ideas into the organization very difficult. If even a single interviewer felt threatened by a candidate with game-changing perspectives or ideas, he or she could simply shut the candidate down—no questions asked.

After a few candidates (whom Mike really believed in) failed to make it through the process, he decided to take a more aggressive stance. He began questioning the managers, forcing them to defend their positions on job candidates. Challenging the prevailing culture at Freddie Mac in this way wasn't an easy thing to do. "I was scared at first, but I believed that what I was doing was right for this company. That's what got me through the fear."

The initial response from the other managers was shock and resentment. But in time, the managers began to see that Mike's motivations were sincere. The candidates he was pushing had smarts, energy, and commitment, and they were in fact the kinds of new workers that Freddie Mac needed to carry out its program of reform.

Changing a corporate culture is never an easy task. It takes years of blood, sweat and tears, and even then is often only partially successful. Throughout his time at Freddie Mac (he has since moved on), Mike found working within that bureaucratic world frustrating at times. It would have been easy for him to allow emotional reactions like anger, despair, cynicism, and hostility to overwhelm him.

How did he control these feelings? It went back to Mike's commitment to something more important than his day-to-day struggles on the job—his Bigger Yes.

Here's how Mike explains it:

"Each day I wake up, look at myself in the mirror, and say, 'Today, I am going to do what I know is right for this organization. It doesn't matter what anybody else says. It doesn't matter whether I make friends or enemies. It doesn't even matter if my efforts succeed or fail. If somebody else sabotages what I'm trying to accomplish, so be it. What matters is that I do the right thing. If I do that, I'll feel good about myself when I go to bed tonight.'"

Mike's fearless commitment to his personal values in the midst of corporate intrigue is greatly strengthened by his career and financial situation.

"It helps a lot to know that, even if I were to lose my job at Freddie Mac, I would be all right. I'm good at my job, and I know others who will pay me well to do it. I've got some money saved, and I'll be fine no matter what happens. I'm just not going to be afraid."

There's a great irony here: Mike Drake can do what's right for others—he can put his company and his team of employees first—because he's already taken care of himself. Unlike some "company men" who are helplessly dependent on the good will of their corporate employers and live in terror of the pink slip, Mike can stand on his own. And this enables him to be a better employee—more honest, more independent, more truly loyal. It's all because Mike has built his own...Bigger Yes.

### **Your Own Bigger Yes**

You want to be fearless at work: Build your Bigger Yes.

- Have a backup plan.
- Know your value and track your accomplishments on your resume in quarterly increments.
- Not only keep your resume fresh but keep your skills fresh. Know your options.
- Have "Screw You" money in your bank account. Know that you'll be fine financially if you've got to make a move.

# YES

## #3. GET YOUR TIME BACK

### **The Problem with Time Management**

In order to get our time back, we have to finally win the battle of action for action sake and get to creating real traction.

If you've been living in the corporate world for some time, you've probably attended a training session where one of the exercises was to conduct a "time spent" analysis in order to increase your efficiency. You cracked open your calendar, reviewed how you spent your time for the past week, and identified black holes that were wasting your energy. Maybe you even went so far as to break your activities into categories, separating the "urgent" things from the "important" things and both of these from the "insignificant" things.

Time management studies like these can be interesting, but the findings are almost always the same. Virtually every manager who works through the exercises discovers that he or she is spending too much time on "putting out fires"—dealing with the daily dramas and emergencies around the office—and not enough time thinking and planning for long-term projects that really matter. E-mails, instant messages, phone calls, and that guy from Purchasing who drops in "just for a second" and chews the fat for 45 minutes undo our best-laid plans—not to mention the endless, interminable, usually pointless meetings.

*We know all this. Why doesn't it ever change?*

The problem lies in our approach. Time management programs usually focus on your personal productivity, analyzing how you choose to spend your time. This is all fine and dandy, but it misses one essential truth: In an organization that's devoted to thriving on chaos you better thrive on chaos or have a damn good reason not to.

That's why, after the PowerPoint presentation had ended and the trainer went home, you fell back into your old, unproductive rhythms—not because you didn't agree with the time management expert's analysis but because you were working to meet the needs of your boss.

### **Managing Your Managers**

In order to take back your time, your life, and your career, you need to make a new kind of change in your approach to self-management. You must step into the realm of managing your managers and thereby altering their expectations related to your time. The goal is to achieve complete alignment between what your bosses want (and perhaps need) you to do and what you believe you really should do.

The first step in managing your manager is to move beyond your own needs to examine your bosses' needs. Sounds reasonable—but understanding those needs and figuring out what to do to meet them isn't usually straightforward. In fact, it's a challenge in itself, requiring a whole new set of skills most people have never thought about.

### **Explicit Needs and Implicit Needs**

Let's start by dispelling a common misunderstanding. Lots of people in business assume that “meeting the boss's needs” means doing exactly what the boss wants them to do—accepting the boss's vision and direction wholesale. Wrong!

This assumption is simple-minded and inaccurate. It leads to managers in *The Middle* focusing on aligning their lips with their boss's backsides rather than meeting anyone's actual needs.

Real “managing upward” demands a more serious and subtle analysis of human needs, which starts with the realization that needs come in two forms—explicit needs and implicit needs.

Explicit needs are easier to understand. They may be stated in the strategic plan promulgated by the company or the division, or they may be announced by your boss whenever the team gets together for the usual pep talk/torture session.

They may sound something like this:

- “We need to expand our business internationally.”
- “We need to commerce-enable our Web site before Amazon.com decides to start selling the same kinds of widgets we sell and drives us out of business.”
- “We need to hire two more designers, fast, so we’ll have a prayer of getting the fall product line into the stores sometime this year.”
- Explicit needs are the kinds of things that make it into the lists of goals you write every year at objective-setting time. They’re the things you tell people you’re working on when they ask. They tend to be the things you are proud of accomplishing (if and when you happen to accomplish one of them).
- Implicit needs are more subtle. People don’t talk about them. Sometimes they’re not even aware of them. Most of the time they are things that people would deny if confronted with them.

They sound like this:

- “Make me look good in front of my boss so that when he gets kicked upstairs he’ll recommend me for his job.”
- “Help me demonstrate my creativity by coming up with some ideas for next year’s marketing campaign that I can tweak a little and show off at the next divisional conference as if they were mine.”
- “Help me feel more like a leader and less like the kid who was always picked last in the school-yard basketball games.”

While explicit needs tend to run a linear path, implicit needs tend to be random, triggered by emotion and circumstance. But don't think of them as flighty and certainly not as insignificant. They are ever-present, tenacious, and can overrule the explicit needs with a swiftness and power that can be awe-inspiring.

It's a fun exercise to sit down with a sheet of paper and try listing your boss's implicit needs. It's also deadly serious. From the first day you meet your new boss through the last day you work together, you need to devote a portion of your time and energy to scoping out his or her implicit needs and defining them with as much precision as possible.

Then measure whatever you do against those needs. (Your boss certainly will.)

One implicit need that virtually every boss has (and therefore belongs on the to-do list of every ignited manager) is the need for confidence.

Your boss must have confidence that you are working in his best interest and that you are capable of delivering what he needs (both explicitly and implicitly). Fail to maintain this confidence and your boss will most likely drive you crazy—and will often drive you out.

Understanding the implicit and explicit needs of your boss and his bosses sets a course by which you can align your own efforts. When that alignment is clear and accurate, you're on track to creating an environment in which traction is possible.

In order to confirm you are on track with your boss, ask these questions:

- “What are the activities I am engaged in when I am contributing the most?”
- “What are the activities that you and the company most need me to do?”
- “What do you consider to be the best and most productive use of my time?”
- “What do you think is the special contribution that I am best positioned to offer to you and the company?”
- “Of all the things that I’m engaged in on behalf of this company what are the three areas where you believe that I can contribute the most?”

Listen carefully to your boss’s answers. Using them as a guide, you can begin to understand exactly how your boss views your contributions.

If we know where we are going like the Greek Fisherman, face the fears with the Bigger Yes as Mike has and manage our managers with greater awareness, we are ready for something much greater.

# Ignited Managers

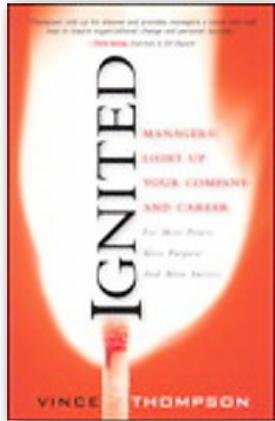
A manager at Dutch Telekom learned that the company needed to reduce costs and jobs were in jeopardy. Instead of backing down, he joined the task force and used his expertise as a process master to save your company the cost of outsourcing while saving 200 jobs.

Gary Thompson, a manager at Harrah's, tapped into an emergent strategy and changed the face of his company. Realizing that The World Series of Poker was an asset held by Binions, Gary tracked the company and look for opportunities. When they were shut down by the feds, he alerted his management and helped make the case. Within weeks, Harrah's bought Binions, flipped the casino and held onto The World Series of Poker. An asset some value at over a billion dollars. Gary's now the director of Tournament operations.

Two Ignited Managers at Overstock broke down silos to turn a cost center into a profit center. They did it by moving into the same office together. Now able to listen in on each other's meetings and calls, they were able to understand each other operations like never before.

Ignited Mangers start with a strong base and then rise far above their limitations by harnessing the true power in their unique roles. Taking back their jobs first, they are able to harness to true power, purpose and success intended for them.

# info



## BUY THE BOOK

For more details or to buy a copy of Thompson's *Ignited: Managers! Light up your Company and Career* [click here](#).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vince Thompson is the author of *Ignited: Managers! Light Up your Company and Career for More Power, More Purpose and More Success*.

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