

Centennials

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It was US President Harry S. Truman who asserted: 'Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers'. As the season of giving and receiving arrives, look no further than *Centennials* by Alex Hill if you want to treat yourself or a colleague.

Leaders brought up on such texts as *In Search of Excellence* (1982), *Built to Last* (1994), and *Good to Great* (2001) will find in Alex Hill's writings equally provocative and practical thinking. Education leaders have rightly pushed back on the assumption that business orthodoxies can be swallowed wholesale into running schools and colleges.

Indeed, stung by such friendly critique, Jim Collins published a sequel to his landmark book, significantly titled *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* (2006).

Alex Hill and his team decide to focus on enterprises that have outperformed their peers for over 100 years: British Cycling, Eton College, Royal College of Art, Royal Shakespeare Company, NASA and - no book on excellence can be complete with them - the All Blacks.

At the heart of his extensive studies into these organisations and their sustained success he affirms:

Centennials strike a careful balance between what might be termed the 'disruptive experts' essential for innovation and change, who are always questioning, challenging and trying to move things forward, and the 'stable stewards', who preserve what is best about the organisation's culture and stop it lurching off track.

And the skill of leaders is to gauge in what proportion, at any one point in time, is the balance between the 'stable core' and the disruptive edge'.

In the spirit of Rudyard Kipling, these organisations treat the two imposters Triumph and Disaster with equal attention and calm. The book is sub-titled 'The 12 Habits of Great Enduring Organisations' which at once evokes Stephen Covey's Seven Habits; and in common with much writing about leadership, Hill

seeks to crystallise his ideas under snappy chapter headings: Build your north star, Perform in public, Shake all trees, Make time for random.

There is depth and humour, intelligent analysis and fascinating research throughout the text, with each chapter offering a useful summary manifesto. The Epilogue and its fun questionnaire is a 'must' for senior teams reviewing how they sustain excellence in a turbulent world.

Don't be put off by its overall length of 282 pages. The essence of the book ends on page 212, followed by the usual Endnotes for those seeking wider references!

In this month's Blinks [guest column](#) which features an extract from another important book, I cite high intention, sincere effort and intelligent execution lying at the heart of excellence in any walk of life. *Centennials* helps us redefine excellence in leadership for the 2020s, in the way Tom Peters et al shaped our late 20th century thinking.

Roy Blatchford's book [The Three Minute Leader](#) is available from John Catt Bookshop.