



# The Breakthrough Imperative: How the Best Managers Get Outstanding Results

By Mark Gottfredson, Steve Schaubert

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## The Breakthrough Imperative: How the Best Managers Get Outstanding Results By Mark Gottfredson, Steve Schaubert

Every general manager today—all the way up to the CEO—is expected by his or her stakeholders to achieve new breakthroughs in performance—and fast. Those who don't make visible progress toward that goal within the first year or two will likely find themselves looking for another job. It is precisely because of this growing breakthrough imperative that managers today, whether in corporations or nonprofits, need to get off to a fast start. They don't have time for mistakes or for going back and redoing what they should have done right in the first place.

But, despite the intensity of these pressures, despite the high expectations and short time frames, a number of CEOs and general managers turn in truly exceptional results. How do they meet and exceed the breakthrough imperative? To answer this question, consultants and former managers Mark Gottfredson and Steve Schaubert interviewed more than forty CEOs from both industry and the nonprofit sector, conducted an intensive study of what successful managers do right—and what some do wrong—and drew on their own combined fifty-plus years of experience at Bain & Company, where their insights have consistently been found in the pages of the *Harvard Business Review*. Together they came up with the four straightforward principles—deceptively simple yet remarkably powerful—that everyone must follow to succeed at achieving breakthrough results:

1. Costs and prices always decline
2. Competitive position determines options
3. Customers and profit pools don't stand still
4. Simplicity gets results

Although seemingly simplistic, mastering these four laws means mastering the basics of great management—a foundation on which to build the rest of one's management strategy. Whether you're managing a small work group or a multinational corporation, a single division or an entire nonprofit, *The Breakthrough Imperative* presents these core laws of business to help you determine where you are, just how far you can go, and how to get there with stellar results.

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### Editorial Review

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Consulting firm Bain prides itself on—and profits from—its unique intellectual capital. Yet rarely do such firms build on the expertise and knowledge contributed by previous partners. The exception is Gottfredson and Schaubert relying on both Frederick Reichheld's *The Loyalty Effect* (1996) and Chris Zook's *Profit from the Core* (2004) to explain and show new leaders the how-to's of achieving breakthrough results. The four rules behind the authors' program seem deceptively simple: (1) costs and prices always decline, (2) competitive position determines your options, (3) customers and profit pools don't stand still, and (4) simplicity gets results. Yet, as to be expected, charts, graphs, and some rather complicated calculations, along with a wealth of corporate data (some 1,500 companies), dominate the more detailed explanations. Corporate case histories do provide enough illustrative material to negate any mathematical mysteries. After expounding on these basics and including implications for general managers at the end of each chapter, the authors outline a road map for new leaders to follow: how to diagnose your current state, plan the end goal, and get results. --Barbara Jacobs

### Review

"[Gottfredson and Schaubert] outline a road map for new leaders to follow: how to diagnose your current state, plan the end goal, and get results."

### About the Author

Mark Gottfredson is a partner in Bain & Company's Dallas, Texas, office, which he founded in 1990. Currently global head of Bain's performance improvement practice, he has advised clients in a wide range of industries and is a leader in the firm's business strategy, airline, manufacturing, and retailing practices. In 2005, *Consulting Magazine* named him one of the world's top twenty-five consultants. He has written extensively for publications such as the *Harvard Business Review*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Singapore Business Times*, *The Edge* (Malaysia), *South China Morning Post*, *London Business School's Business Strategy Review*, and *World Business Review*. He is fluent in Japanese and has worked extensively in Japan. Mark graduated magna cum laude from Brigham Young University and received his MBA from Harvard Business School with high distinction in 1983. He lives in Dallas.

Steve Schaubert is a partner in Bain & Company's Boston, Massachusetts, office. He joined the firm in 1979 and became a partner the following year. Currently Bain's chief investment officer, he has worked with clients in numerous industries including steel, textiles, automotive, health care, consumer products, distribution businesses, and financial services. Prior to joining Bain, he held several senior general management positions in the health care industry. A summa cum laude graduate of Yale, Schaubert earned his MBA from Harvard Business School with high distinction, and an MS in engineering management from Northeastern University. He lives in Boston.

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**Marissa Wegener:**

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**Joshua White:**

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