HOW TEAMS TRIUMPH

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MANAGING BY COMMITMENT

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This book is dedicated to the original developer of the Project Success Method, my friend and colleague, Dr. Tom Clark, who passed away in 2011.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FIRST, I WISH TO recognize and thank the consultants of Project Success, Inc. that go out every day and bring order to chaos for our clients with their passion, diligence, and professionalism. I also wish to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the thousands of clients who have engaged with PSI over the past thirty-seven-plus years to make their organizations better … particularly the senior leaders who had the foresight to realize things could be better, the vision to recognize that we could help, and the courage to implement the process. Together, these two groups form the most powerful of teams.

I want to thank my family for putting up with all the nights I spent in my office working on this book. I appreciate their patience with me and for allowing me the time necessary to complete it. Special thanks go out to my son, Hamilton, for asking me to play basketball or chess, and my daughter, Samantha, for asking me to read to her or play games with her, so that I would remember what's really important.

I would also like to thank my brother, Chris, for sharing the ride during our childhood—for sharing the blame when things inevitably went wrong and for putting up with the obligatory rites of passage visited on all younger brothers and for not hating me for them … eventually. Mostly I want to thank him for being able to make me

laugh every single time we talk and for always having my back. A truer friend does not exist.

I am perhaps most thankful for the journey that inspired this book. While I will admit I didn't exactly volunteer to be an unpaid worker in my parents' entrepreneurial endeavors, the lessons learned and skills developed during that time paid immense dividends throughout my career and laid the foundation for the person I am today.

INTRODUCTION:

THE PEOPLE SIDE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT

ONE DAY STEVE'S BOSS walks into his office at Aeolus and says, "Congratulations, Steve. You're the project manager on the Fendhill Wind Farm Project." Steve's boss hands him a stack of documents, pats him on the back reassuringly, and leaves the room.

Steve stares at his boss's back as he leaves and then turns to the stack of papers. He shakes his head and thinks, "Not today. I've got five other top-priority projects with deliverables that are due in the next four weeks. This will have to wait."

A few weeks later, one of Steve's five projects is closing out, so he begins sifting through the Fendhill Wind Farm documents. It doesn't take long for him to break into a cold sweat. Steve has twenty-four months to deliver an incredibly complicated $100 million project. For each day he and his team are late, the contract calls for $1 million in liquidated damages. In addition to this, the Fendhill Wind Farm will be located in Spain, but Steve and many of his assigned project team are located at the Aeolus corporate headquarters in Florida or at satellite offices across the United States. This means that the people

working on the project are spread out all over the world. It also means that Steve will have to work with two governments and suppliers from at least two countries to meet certain project specs. For example, 20 percent of the windmill components have to be produced in Europe, so Steve needs to make sure that his current approved supplier base meets these requirements; if not, the suppliers will need to be identified, negotiated with, and approved.

At Aeolus, there is no standard approved project management methodology in place, so everyone handles project management a little differently. It's unstructured and ad hoc, if it's done at all. There is no kickoff meeting where everyone who is working on the project flies to one central location—either in the United States or Spain—to discuss and plan the project. Instead, Steve's team of twenty-five—most of whom have never met each other—develops schedules and deadlines via email and phone. As Steve tries to make sense of the Fendhill Wind Farm and all of its moving parts, he is reminded, yet again, of the difficulty of running a project when he literally has no control over his team. Every single person Steve will be communicating with each week on behalf of the Fendhill Wind Farm Project works for someone else. Steve isn't their boss. He can't fire them. He can't hire them. He can't give them reviews. And while he can certainly schedule weekly project meetings with his team that he knows are vital to keep Fendhill on track, he cannot mandate their attendance. At this stage of the project, he's not sure whether they're even the right men or women for the job. Since he's not their boss, he doesn't know their skill sets, and he has no idea if any of them have worked on a project like this before. Not only do Steve's team members work for someone else, but several of the key personnel also work *in Spain*. This creates some additional issues. These team members speak a different language than Steve does, recognize

different holidays than their American counterparts, have a different work style, and work within the parameters of different labor laws.

Steve knows he needs to get Fendhill moving, so he starts contacting his team, only to confirm his suspicions that Fendhill is one of five, six, or seven projects each team member is working on. So Steve not only doesn't have control of his team members, but he also has to compete with other projects for their time. And when Steve talks to his team members, they tell him the same thing: "Each one of my other project managers says their project is the most important. I'm doing the best I can." What Steve doesn't know is that some of his team members already resent him. They view project management as a punitive experience because every time they have been assigned to a project where "project management" was used, a project manager gave them unrealistic deadlines and expectations without having a conversation with them. Then the project manager used the "official schedule" to batter them when they missed a deadline that they had never committed to. Or worse, the project manager complained to their boss about their incompetence.

Suddenly, Steve feels buried by a crushing weight. How is he going to get such an incredibly complex wind farm project done successfully with all of these challenges? Plus, the twenty-four-month clock actually started when he was handed the project, so in reality he now has only twenty-three months to complete the project.

Twenty-five or thirty years ago, Steve never would have been in this predicament. Back then, project managers were powerful. They often had the ability to hire, fire, and promote their team members, and when someone didn't work out, five qualified people were chomping at the bit to fill the job. Today, project managers have little or no control over their teams. They can't hire, fire, or give pay raises, and when they

lose a team member, they may not be given a resource with similar experience and skill sets to fill the lost position.

This shift has changed how we work. Several decades ago, a marketing project would have been run by and staffed by marketing personnel, an engineering project staffed by engineering personnel, and a software development project handled within the software group. Back then, projects were often planned and executed in silos. There was a marketing silo, an IT silo, and an engineering silo. That isn't the case anymore. Today, project work is cross-functional (it probably always should have been, but now the need is better recognized). Cross-functional project work means that a single project team may include people from engineering, testing, manufacturing, the shop floor, procurement, legal, human resources, and marketing.

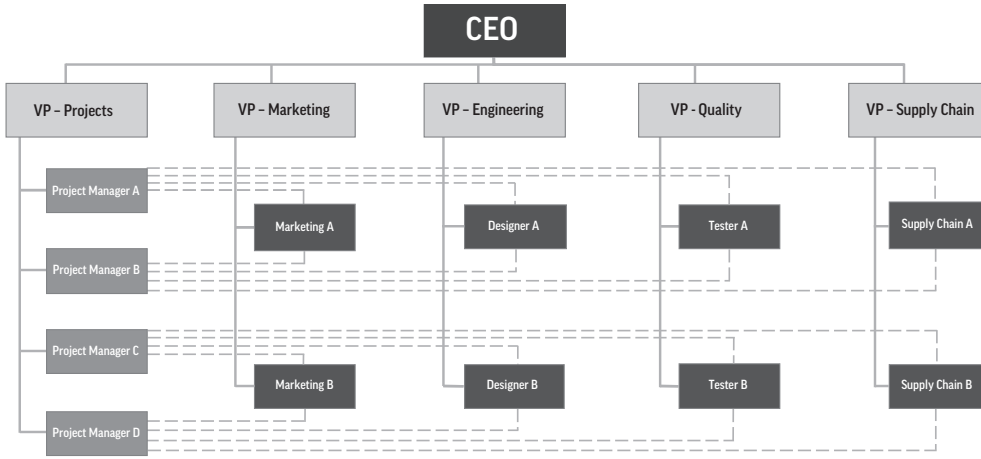
Projects *should* be cross-functional. We should come out of our silos because doing so leads to better project results. Let's say that ACME Corporations is designing a new product. In my training classes, I always use the fictitious ACME Corporations for my product example—I love the old *Road Runner* cartoons—so I'll use it here too. Interestingly, the coyote always failed in his attempts to catch the road runner for many of the same reasons our projects fail—poor planning, improper equipment, faulty execution. In this example, the ACME Corporation's marketing team created marketing plans and marketing collateral to sell the product without having had a conversation with engineering on the viability of the product design or with manufacturing to understand their challenges. Everyone developed their piece of the project in their respective silos.

Here is what should have happened instead. Marketing, engineering, and manufacturing should have come together face-to-face, along with any other needed functions, and built a plan that all agreed to. Engineering would then have been able to design and test product

functions that the customer wanted and that marketing would have been able to sell. Manufacturing would have then ensured that the design was optimized for manufacturability and the like. This is a very different scenario with a much higher probability of success.

The challenge with cross-functional teamwork is that it's created a matrix environment for project managers like Steve. In this environment, each cross-functional team member officially reports to someone other than the project manager, usually their functional manager. Whoever the team member works for full-time has both the whip and the carrot because they can hire, fire, give pay raises, and even promote that person. The project manager cannot. As we saw with Steve and the Fendhill project, in a matrix environment, each team member simultaneously works on many projects that have nothing to do with the project Steve needs done. Steve gives the team member direction on only *one* project—his own.

EXAMPLE MATRIX ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



In a matrix environment, project managers have little to no control over their resources. They don't have the whip, so they can't come down on team members for failing to do a good job, and they don't have the carrot, so they can't reward them for doing well. In reality, project managers don't have the ability to *make* the people who are assigned to their project do anything. So how do today's project managers deliver a quality project on time and on budget in a matrix? By leveraging their people skills. Today's successful project managers know how to build loyalty and trust among their project teams so that those teams want to help them achieve a goal. The challenge is that many project managers tend to be strong on technical skills but weak on relationship building.

In 2009 I published *The Project Success Method: A Proven Approach for Achieving Superior Project Performance in as Little as Five Days*. That book clearly explains the Project Success Method, which is the process that my company, Project Success Incorporated (PSI), and hundreds of our clients use to effectively manage projects around the globe. While *The Project Success Method* has been a well-received guide for the technical side of project management and is even used in some college courses, it does not comprehensively address the people side of the equation. As a project manager, you can be the smartest and most technically sound person in the room, but in a matrix environment, if you don't have the leadership skills required to effectively motivate people, your project will fail by going over budget, missing agreed-upon deadlines, or delivering poor quality.

In *How Teams Triumph*, I reinforce and build on where *The Project Success Method* leaves off and show you how to plug the gap between the technical expertise needed to design a project and the softer skill set—the people skills—needed to get your team excited about and committed to finishing a quality project on time and on budget.

At PSI we have already shown hundreds of companies how to do this. After one of our northern California Fortune 500 clients started using the Project Success Method (PSM), they reduced their project lateness by 90 percent while also reducing cycle time. That's a huge improvement, especially considering the fact that these projects can require up to twenty, thirty, or even forty team members. Imagine how much finishing a project eight months earlier than expected saves on personnel costs alone. By the way, did I mention the reduction in cycle time they were able to achieve? This company has mastered the Project Success Method in its entirety, both the process *and* people skills needed to excel at project management in the twenty-first century. In this book I'm going to show you how to do the same.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEAMWORK

I'm a huge college football fan and a Georgia Tech alumnus, so whenever Georgia Tech has a home football game, you'll find me in the stands. In the middle of the 2017 football season, I was sitting with one of my good friends—fellow South Carolinian and fellow proud alumnus Joe Hamilton—watching Georgia Tech get its backside kicked (again) by the University of Georgia. Joe is a fantastic guy with a greater-than-average understanding of how successful teams work. He's a former Georgia Tech quarterback; he earned first-team All American honors, won the Davey O'Brien Award for best NCAA quarterback, and was the first runner-up for the Heisman Trophy. While we watched the game, instead of talking about the score, Joe and I couldn't stop talking about the people on the field and sideline. Our team was passionless. Their bodies were there, but their minds were somewhere else. They didn't jump up and down after plays, they

didn't motivate each other to do better, and they didn't communicate. No wonder we were losing!

Whether you're playing football, designing a new product, or managing a project, teamwork is everything. It holds sports teams together—how often have we heard that a head coach lost his job because he "lost the locker room," meaning that his team was no longer working as a team and no longer respected his authority. Teamwork also holds relationships together, and it holds projects together. This is why I personally view life in terms of "we." If Georgia Tech is losing, we are losing. If one of my clients is struggling with project management, we are struggling. This *we* attitude is crucial to effective project management.

Looking back, I realize I've been part of teams my entire life. I grew up in Orangeburg, South Carolina—a small town with a population of less than fourteen thousand. My upbringing was unconventional to say the least, in large part because of my dad, who was a serial entrepreneur that expected his kids to work on his team. When I was growing up, Dad owned gas stations, beer and wine stores, and a liquor store, among other businesses. Not to be left out, my mom owned a wine and cheese shop. When I was six years old, I was picking up trash in the parking lot. By the time I was eight years old, I worked at my dad's gas stations pumping gas for customers. I wasn't tall enough to check the oil, but I could wash windshields, so I did that too. From a very young age, I was a team player. I worked with my dad, my mom, my brother, and my dad's employees to make our customers happy. That was our common goal, and each of us had our own role in contributing to that goal. This is exactly how project management should work.

Working for my dad gave me a sense of being part of a team and probably helped develop my love of numbers. Back then, we didn't

have electronic cash registers, so I wore one of those metal devices that clips onto your belt and has cylinders for quarters, nickels, dimes, and pennies. I would total our customers' bills and make change from that belt. At the beer and wine and liquor stores, I'd carry beer cases to the customers' cars. At the drive-up window, I'd sell them their requested products, calculate and add the 4 percent sales tax, take their money, and calculate the change in my head. I saw people from all walks of life and of every economic status come through our businesses. One day I'd say hello to the town mayor as I pumped his gas; the next day I'd be talking with a panhandler while ringing up his Coke and peanuts (a combination that is considered a Southern delicacy). My dad always treated both with the same level of respect. His saying was, "Money is green. It spends no matter who hands it to you," which I interpreted to mean that all people have value regardless of their occupation. That's an attitude I've taken my whole life—no matter their perceived station in life, all people matter. Being exposed to every class of people taught me how to deal with people as individuals, another crucial skill for project management.

At eighteen, I didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life, so I joined the US Navy and spent almost five years of my six-year enlistment on an aircraft carrier, the USS *America* (CV-66) as an electrician's mate. When I first arrived aboard the ship, I was twenty years old but looked sixteen. A senior enlisted man took pity on me and said, "Son, you look lost. Let me help you out. Here are some things you need to come to terms with, and if you do, your time on board will go much more smoothly and be a lot less stressful." First, he explained the term *haze gray and underway*, which was the color the ship was painted and where we were expected to be at all times. Then he quoted the phrase "Sailors are made for ships, and ships are made for sea." This was the navy's way of explaining that its mission was

best achieved by being at sea all the time. Finally he said (and this was my personal favorite), "Being in the navy is just like being in prison." He smiled, paused for effect, and continued. "With the added risk of drowning." At that moment, I truly realized what I'd gotten myself into when I signed up for a six-year enlistment—a job you could never quit, but if you were fired from, your long-term employability would be limited. Lesson learned!

Navy days were long (twelve to sixteen hours a day, seven days a week) and 100 percent focused on team and commitment. Every one of us worked toward a common goal by performing the job they were assigned. If a single person failed at their assigned task, the overall mission could be compromised.

After six years in the navy, I was ready for a change, so I left to work in a shipyard. That's where I got my first lesson in thermodynamics. I walked into the shipyard, which was obviously right on the water, and the winds coming off the water sliced right through me. It was frigid. I remember lying in the bilge at the bottom of the ship where I was running electrical cables, realizing that the heat from my body was radiating through the hull into the ocean. That was the lesson in thermodynamics: My body wasn't a big enough heat sink, and it was causing me to freeze. I vividly recall thinking, "There must be something better to do with my life than this." That's when I decided that college wasn't such a bad idea. So I applied to and was lucky enough to get accepted into the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) to study engineering. After all, I'd wanted to be an engineer since I was nine or ten years old.

College was my next lesson in working as a team. First, I received my electrical engineering degree from Georgia Tech, and then I later earned my MBA from Duke University. At both schools, I had to work on teams with other students. Sometimes, as with all teams, there were

issues. Someone wouldn't do their work on time, or they'd get lazy with the project, and other team members would have to pick up the slack so we wouldn't get a bad grade. If you think about it, most of us have early memories of teamwork, even if forced, in school projects, playing sports, or jobs. The thing about teamwork is that it doesn't work if the players on that team can't (or won't) communicate, aren't committed to each other, or don't understand how their role in the team affects the common goal. Nowhere is this more obvious than when your favorite college football team is losing but can't seem to muster enough enthusiasm to care.

PEOPLE SKILLS MATTER

As I already mentioned, I have wanted to be an electrical engineer for as long as I can remember. When I was only ten or eleven, I would ride my bicycle to one of our two nearby colleges to check out books on robotics and lasers. In fact, one of my science projects in high school was to use a laser to create a hologram (yes, this was shortly after the original *Star Wars* was released). So, while I've always been interested in the technical side of engineering, I didn't realize how much the people side was ignored in technical fields like engineering until I went to college. At Georgia Tech, I studied hard. I opened and closed the library Sunday through Friday. Saturday was reserved for watching Georgia Tech sports or having fun (I was a singing bartender for a while, which is hands down the most fun job I've ever had, but that's a different story for another book). As I said, I opened and closed the library six days a week. My attitude was that you might be smarter than me, but you are *not* going to outwork me. However, I noticed that no matter how hard I studied, some students got better grades than I did. This bothered me until I realized they never got dates.

Suddenly, I was OK with my place in the pecking order. I had better people skills and, as it turns out, social skills matter!

When I got out into the real world and started working, it became even more obvious to me that many engineers lacked the social skills necessary for teamwork. This is because we engineers often live in a very black-and-white world. I like this about the engineering field. I've always liked looking at the answer key in the back of the book and confirming that two plus two is indeed four. I don't like subjective questions.

I remember having to write an essay about *The Great Gatsby* for an English literature exam in high school. The assignment read "Please describe the significance of the author's use of the color red in *The Great Gatsby*." Years later I still don't know what the correct answer was; however, I can tell you it definitely was not "Red is the author's favorite color." I had not read the book, and it was the best answer I could come up with at sixteen years of age. I learned two things from that experience: First, I should have followed the assignment and read the book. Second, and more importantly, I learned that I dislike subjective questions. Even if I had been able to interview F. Scott Fitzgerald about his use of red, my answer might have been wrong. Why? Because the question wasn't really "Please describe the significance of the author's use of the color red in *The Great Gatsby*." The real question was "Please describe what your teacher believes the significance of the author's use of the color red is in *The Great Gatsby*." Those are two very different questions!

I like objective answers, and I bet that most people who walk into a building or cross a bridge also like to know that the engineers who built those structures don't like subjectivity. They like precision. This attitude is all well and good when designing and building structures, but a black-and-white attitude is antithetical to teamwork. I've

watched engineers bring this attitude to teams. It's a black-and-white "you're wrong; I'm right" or "you lose; I win" mentality. On a good team, no one person wins or loses. The team wins or loses. The team works together collaboratively to develop a solution that works.

THE PEOPLE SIDE OF PSI

For the last twenty-five-plus years, my job has been to help technical-minded people learn how to develop teams that can deliver massive projects, which often last several years, on time, on budget, and of high quality.

My company works with global corporations, such as Caterpillar, Inc., the Coca-Cola Company, CNN, AGCO, Maxim Integrated, and Marvell Technology Group (to name a few), across all industries to plan and execute their largest projects. We do this by training project teams in the Project Success Method and then working with them to ensure they have the skills to take over the project as we work ourselves out of a job. The Project Success Method was developed by Dr. Tom Clark. It's based on the Critical Path Method from the 1950s, with an added emphasis on the people side of project management. It's a project management process that allows the project team members to identify their own actionable items, ones that need to be done to complete the project. This results in more accurate project timelines leading to high-quality projects that are finished on time and on budget. The Project Success Method also clarifies roles and expectations for each team member, documents project plans and schedules, makes team members accountable for their work, and improves communication. PSI has helped companies develop and launch new products ranging from agricultural tractors to semiconductor chips; plan sponsor activations for major events such as the Olympics, the

FIFA World Cup, and the UEFA EURO; develop and implement new software; and successfully complete mergers and acquisitions, just to name a few, using the Project Success Method. Additionally, PSI has helped firms execute major construction projects such as the design and construction of 1 World Trade Center, the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere and seventh tallest in the world, as well as the design and construction of New York City's Bank of America Tower—the fifth tallest building in that city and the first skyscraper to receive a platinum LEED certification for green design[1]—and the north and south towers of the Time Warner Center, both of which are among the fifty tallest buildings in New York City.

At PSI our driving goal is to make you fully self-sufficient at implementing the Project Success Method as quickly as possible. This knowledge transfer starts with teaching the Project Success Method. Two-day training sessions get everyone who is part of the project team in a room so they can learn how to *work together* to successfully plan future projects. I really love the way one of our clients describes the value we add. He says, "Other courses might teach you how to use a hammer, a drill, or a screwdriver—the individual tools you need to use to build something. But, while you learn how to use the tools, you don't gain the knowledge needed to actually build anything. With the Project Success Method, I learn how to build a table. Along the way, of course, I also learn how to use each tool *while building the table*. So when I leave the training, not only can I use the tools, but I can also build tables. Plus, I can then extrapolate from that knowledge so I can build chairs, stools, etc."

1 Jeff Desjardins, "The 100 Tallest Buildings in New York City," Visual Capitalist, April 26, 2019, https://www.visualcapitalist.com/100-tallest-buildings-in-new-york-city/.

When I first started at PSI in 1994, I focused more on process than people. Luckily, the process protects the people on the team, so I was safe in doing so. However, the more I used the Project Success Method and the more I taught others to use it, the more I came to understand *why* the process specified certain things. For instance, one rule is that we can only have a single person assigned to a task as the owner, and that person must be physically present, and that person must verbally agree to accept the role. I came to see that learning about the people side of things led to great results, in the same way that learning to use a hammer and saw led to the creation of a table or chair. PSI focuses on developing teams that will build that table. We know that when you work in a matrix—when you have team members all over the world whom you have no direct authority over—developing a relationship with them is as important to getting the project done as is understanding each action that must be taken to complete the project.

While the people side is crucial to project success, it takes a while for some to wrap their head around that fact. Several years ago, I was teaching a class in Irvine, California, when I was introduced to someone at Warner Brothers who was interested in how we might be able to help him streamline his process and how our techniques could be applied to movie production. As is the case with any large project, if a movie goes over deadline, it costs money. So I drove to Los Angeles from Irvine and met with this vice president over lunch. He was polished, engaged, and clearly used to running the show. Once I started talking about PSI and our process, he stopped eating, raised his eyebrow, and said, "Wait a minute, I thought you said you were an engineer. What is all this touchy-feely people stuff?" He had probably expected me to tell him, "Do this; don't do that; this will work here; this won't" and leave it at that. He had expected me to focus more on

the process used than on the people involved. It dawned on me then that, yeah, the touchy-feely stuff is exactly what we're talking about. Project management isn't just about math and process. It's also about people.

At PSI, we have always done just three things.

- We teach people how to manage projects using the repeatable, team-centric Project Success Method—a proven, collaborative approach that enables teams to build actionable project plans that they are committed to delivering.
- We help our clients complete their projects successfully by taking the knowledge learned in the classroom and implementing it on the client's actual projects. We stand beside the person who becomes the project manager, mentoring that person, teaching them everything we know over the course of that project so that when it is over they can manage future projects on their own.
- We provide guidance in the development and implementation of effective Project Success Systems including the selection and implementation of project management software, project procedures documentation, report formats, and status memo standards.

Essentially our mission is twofold: to bring order out of chaos and to work ourselves out of a job.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS BOOK

In *How Teams Triumph*, you will learn the people skills necessary to implement the Project Success Method with your cross-functional, matrixed project team:

- How to use the tools in your tool kit to develop a strong, communicative, committed team
- How to gather the right team
- How to foster accountability by developing relationships that ensure people matter
- How to prepare for and deal with unknowns
- How to effectively use your team to exercise project control
- How to support your team without micromanaging
- How to communicate most effectively with your team
- How to manage dispute resolution
- How to work with teams operating internationally or virtually

I have the greatest job in the world because I know that if I follow my process and use my people skills to build teams, I will be successful in any project that I work on. Each one is unique, but I know going in that I'm going to win and that the rest of the team will win too. It's like a baseball player walking up to the plate knowing he's going to get a hit. The pitcher is always different, and so are the ballpark and the uniforms, but the outcome is the same. You will always triumph if you follow our process and rally your team behind you.

“Two things are necessary
for great achievement: a plan,
and not quite enough time.”

—LEONARD BERNSTEIN