

FRANK SLOOTMAN

Chairman and CEO of Snowflake, Inc

AMP UP

*Wall Street
Journal
Bestseller*

Leading for Hypergrowth **with**
High Expectations, Urgency, and Intensity

WILEY

Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Praise for *Amp It Up*](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[PART I: Amping Up](#)

[1 Introduction: The Power of Amping Up](#)

[Amp It Up](#)

[Raise Your Standards](#)

[Align Your People and Culture](#)

[Sharpen Your Focus](#)

[Pick Up the Pace](#)

[Transform Your Strategy](#)

[The Epic Battle](#)

[2 My Journey from Teenage Toilet Cleaner to Serial CEO](#)

[A Childhood Grounded in Discipline](#)

[Landing in the USA](#)

[Burroughs Corporation and Comshare](#)

[Compuware](#)

[Borland](#)

[Data Domain](#)

[Transitions: EMC and Greylock](#)

[ServiceNow](#)

[A Very Brief Retirement](#)

[Snowflake](#)

Becoming an Amped-Up Leader

PART II: Raise Your Standards

3 Make Your Organization Mission Driven

What Does It Mean to Be Mission Driven?

A Great Mission Is Big_(but Not Impossible!).

A Great Mission Is Clear

A Great Mission Is Not About Money

How to Nurture the Mission

Living the Mission Every Day

4 Declare War on Your Competitors and on Incrementalism

The War Against Your Competitors

The War Against Incrementalism

Tying These Battles Together: Using Audacious Goals to Outpace Your Competition

Lead Your People into These Battles

5 Put Execution Ahead of Strategy.

Great Execution Is Rarer than Great Strategy.

Treat Execution like a Teachable Competency

Getting Strategy Right

Strategy Problems versus Execution Problems

You Don't Need to Hire Consultants or Strategists

PART III: Align Your People and Culture

6 Hire Drivers, Not Passengers, and Get the Wrong People off the Bus

Drivers Wanted

Making the Distinction

Getting the Wrong People off the Bus

[Pulling the Trigger](#)

[Finding the Right People](#)

[Maintain an Active Recruiting Posture](#)

[7 Build a Strong Culture](#)

[Culture Matters More than You Think](#)

[Establishing Cultural Values at Data Domain](#)

[Culture at ServiceNow](#)

[Turning Around the Culture at Snowflake](#)

[Your Responsibility to Protect Your Culture](#)

[8 Teach Everyone to Go Direct and Build Mutual Trust](#)

[The Dangers of Silos](#)

[A Better Option: Going Direct](#)

[Building Trust](#)

[Are You a Trustworthy Leader?](#)

[The Benefits of a High-Trust Environment](#)

[PART IV: Sharpen Your Focus](#)

[9 Put Analysis Before Solutions](#)

[The Problem of Racing to Solutions](#)

[How to Focus on Analysis](#)

[Analysis Is Especially Important for People
Decisions](#)

[10 Align Incentives for Customer Success](#)

[Do You Need a Customer Success Department?](#)

[Customer Success Is Everyone's Business](#)

[PART V: Pick Up the Pace](#)

[11 Ramp Up Sales](#)

[Sales Growth Is About Timing](#)

Data Domain: Don't Rush Sales Before You Cross the Chasm

Snowflake: Making Sense of Your Gunslingers and Flatliners

ServiceNow: Seizing the Right Moment to Ramp Up

Conclusion

12 Grow Fast or Die Slow

Why Focus on Growth?

Two Problems: Uncertainty and Fear

Build a Growth Model That Stretches Your Goals

Leave the Competition Behind

Continuing to Grow After You're Already Big

Bringing Down the Costs of Growth

13 Stay Scrappy as You Scale Up

The Paradox of Scaling Up

The Embryonic Company

The Formative Company

The Scaled-Up Company

Hang On to Your Early-Stage Dynamism

PART VI: Transform Your Strategy

14 Materialize Your Opportunities—the Data Domain Growth Story

Strategic Lessons from Data Domain

Takeaway 1: Attack weakness, not strength.

Takeaway 2: Either create a cost advantage or neutralize someone else's.

Takeaway 3: It's much easier to attack an existing market than create a new one.

[Takeaway 4: Early adopters buy differently than later adopters.](#)

[Takeaway 5: Stay close to home in the early going.](#)

[Takeaway 6: Build the whole product or solve the whole problem as fast as you can.](#)

[Takeaway 7: Bet on the correct enabling technologies.](#)

[Takeaway 8: Architecture is everything.](#)

[Takeaway 9: Prepare to transform your strategy sooner than you expect.](#)

[The End of the Data Domain Story](#)

[15 Open the Aperture—the ServiceNow Expansion Story](#)

[My Introduction to ServiceNow](#)

[How to Spot a Potential Super-Grower](#)

[Improving Execution of the Original Strategy](#)

[Expanding Our Opportunities](#)

[Going Public and Going beyond IT](#)

[Surviving the Competition](#)

[16 Swing for the Fences—the Snowflake Growth Story](#)

[Plan the Next Shift Before You Think You Need To](#)

[“The Data Warehouse Built for the Cloud”](#)

[Enter the Data Cloud](#)

[Going Even Broader: Data Marketplaces and Programmability](#)

[Playing Your Strategic Cards](#)

[PART VII: The Amped-Up Leader](#)

[17 Amp Up Your Career](#)

[You Are a Product](#)

[Education Matters Some ...](#)

[... But Experience Matters More](#)

[Aptitude Matters Most](#)

[Personality Tips the Scales](#)

[Develop Your Communication Skills](#)

[Hold On to Your Long-Term Goals](#)

[Do Not Unduly Focus on Title and Pay](#)

[Embrace the Struggle](#)

[Make Sure You Never Fear a Reference Check](#)

[Career Doldrums and Career Killers](#)

[18 Just for CEOs—Dealing with Founders and Boards](#)

[The Challenge of Succeeding a Founder](#)

[Tread Lightly as You Make Changes](#)

[In the Long Run, Success Trumps Popularity](#)

[The Delicate Art of Board Dynamics](#)

[What Not to Do: Subservience](#)

[What to Do Instead: Lead Your Board](#)

[19 Conclusion—Great Leaders Have Great Outcomes](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Index](#)

[End User License Agreement](#)

Praise for *Amp It Up*

"In my 30+ year experience as a venture investor I have never seen anyone rival Frank's operating know-how. With Frank, it all starts and ends with hardcore and focused execution. 'Get comfortable with being uncomfortable', 'hope is not a strategy', and 'the best way to build a brand is to get more customers' are some of the mantras by which Frank has taught us to live. There is no doubt that he has made many of us better board members, as we assist other CEOs along their journeys."

—Doug Leone,
Partner, Sequoia Capital

"Frank Sloodman is one of the best performing CEOs there is. This book is essential reading for every leader who aspires to motivate teams, inspire excellence, and deliver beyond expectations."

—Bill McDermott,
President and CEO, ServiceNow

"*Amp It Up* is a terrific read for leaders and future leaders, whether they are at a start-up, an SMB, or a big company. As a CEO, Frank exudes total clarity on what to do, and equally as important what not to do... so if you are looking for a must-read about leadership, being focused on your mission, and executing at the highest levels, this is the book!"

—Joe Tucci,
former Chairman and CEO, EMC

“Over the past 15 years, I've had a front-row seat to watch Frank Sloodman's operational excellence on display at Data Domain, ServiceNow, and Snowflake. What makes Frank the best technology CEO on the planet: he sets and then beats unreasonably high expectations; he is a high-integrity people leader; he makes the strategy clear to all; and he is a fearless leader willing to do whatever it takes to win. *Amp It Up* is a must-read book for anyone looking to take their team and organization to the next level.”

—Mike Speiser,
Managing Director, Sutter Hill Ventures

“Frank worked for me as Data Domain became EMC and – wow! – what an incredible leader. He built an intensity around clear business priorities and the customer value proposition and drove it through the organization daily. *Amp It Up* tells that story and how it can be recreated in other organizations.”

—Pat Gelsinger,
CEO, Intel

“Frank Sloodman brings his experience of delivering success into plain sight for all of us to learn and be inspired by: simplify the value proposition, focus on the customer, take away distraction and confusion, relentlessly drive execution with excellence, faster... *Amp It Up* is a recipe we can all apply.”

—Frans van Houten,
CEO of Royal Philips

FRANK SLOOTMAN

AMP IT UP

**Leading for Hypergrowth by Raising
Expectations, Increasing Urgency,
and Elevating Intensity**

WILEY

Copyright © 2022 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 646-8600, or on the Web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and authors have used their best efforts in preparing this work, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this work and specifically disclaim all warranties, including without limitation any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives, written sales materials or promotional statements for this work. The fact that an organization, website, or product is referred to in this work as a citation and/or potential source of further information does not mean that the publisher and authors endorse the information or services the organization, website, or product may provide or recommendations it may make. This work is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a specialist where appropriate. Further, readers should be aware that websites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read. Neither the publisher nor authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services or for technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic formats. For more information about Wiley products, visit our web site at www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is Available:

ISBN 9781119836117 (Hardback)

ISBN 9781119836407 (ePDF)

ISBN 9781119836414 (ePub)

Cover Design: Wiley/Kathy Davis

Cover Image: ©Irina Karpinchik/Getty Images

To the Man (and Woman) in the Arena:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

—Theodore Roosevelt, 1910

PART I

Amping Up

1

Introduction: The Power of Amping Up

Amp It Up

A few years ago I wrote a popular LinkedIn article, “Amp It Up,” whose main premise was that organizations have considerable room to improve their performance *without* making expensive changes to their talent, structure, or fundamental business model. My basic advice was to keep playing your game but amp things up dramatically. Raise your standards, pick up the pace, sharpen your focus, and align your people. You don't need to bring in reams of consultants to examine everything that is going on. What you need on day one is to ratchet up expectations, energy, urgency, and intensity.

That article triggered thousands of likes, shares, and comments. It also led to a flood of incoming requests for sit-downs and speaking engagements. While I love speaking to other leaders, especially entrepreneurs, and while I speak at conferences and business schools from time to time, I couldn't possibly accommodate everyone who wanted to learn more about my Amp It Up philosophy. I believe it's incumbent on leaders to share our experience with others, but doing so in small groups (let alone one-on-one) isn't efficient or scalable, especially when you have a consuming day job. That's why I'm writing this book: to summarize my convictions, observations, and beliefs about how to lead a mission-driven, high-performance company.

The concepts, strategies, and tactics you will find here were developed over my entire career but especially at the

three very different companies where I served as CEO: Data Domain from 2003 to 2010, ServiceNow from 2011 to 2017, and Snowflake from 2019 to the present. At various times I've also been a venture capitalist, a board member, and a corporate executive, but no experience in business compares to being CEO. I love being fully accountable for a company's leadership, strategy, culture, and execution in an ultra-competitive marketplace.

Things can go bad very quickly in an organization when the leadership team is weak or gets distracted. Human nature being what it is, many people will slow their output to a glacial pace and adopt “good enough” as their standard. Without focused leadership, millions of conflicting priorities compete with each other. Then the best people in the organization get frustrated and start to leave, as talent and energy go untapped and dormant. At this point you're on the path to catastrophic decline—unless you amp things up immediately.

Leadership changes can yield immediate impact long before you can carry out more structural changes in talent, organization, and strategy. You can engulf your organization with energy, step up the tempo, and start executing the basic blocking and tackling with a lot more focus and higher expectations. It will feel like busting a log jam. All of a sudden, everything is moving and shaking.

This phenomenon is not limited to business. We often see sports teams go from losing to winning from one season to the next without dramatic changes in roster. When Vince Lombardi took over as head coach of the Green Bay Packers in 1959, the team had just come off a 1-10 season, not to mention 11 losing seasons in row. The next year, the Packers improved to 7-5, their first winning season in many years. Then they started winning one division championship after another. Leadership really matters. It's

no coincidence that to this day, winners of the Super Bowl receive a trophy named for Lombardi.

My goal for this book is to provide not merely tactical advice but also context and ways of thinking about situations. You can try these ideas on for size and see if they fit. I'm not on a mission to convince the world to agree with me. If you choose not to amp it up, that's up to you. But I believe the chapters ahead will help you stiffen your spine and fight the good fight—not just if you're a CEO but if you're a leader at any level, whether at a start-up, a big company, or a nonprofit.

I also believe that you can only get these insights from a fellow traveler. No offense to my VC friends, but they often think that their investments give them the right to lecture entrepreneurs at board meetings, even though many VCs have never been in the combat seat themselves. Having seen things done is not the same as doing them.

The media have praised the results that my three companies have delivered over the past two decades, as we ramped up to three successful IPOs and generated hundreds of billions of dollars in market value. It's hard to argue with results. But outsiders have also questioned, if not criticized, the ways in which we achieved those results. So let's start with an overview of the five key steps in the Amp It Up process: raise your standards, align your people, sharpen your focus, pick up the pace, and transform your strategy.

Raise Your Standards

The late Steve Jobs was only inspired by “insanely great” things. He set a high bar for seemingly everything, and anything that didn't meet his standards was summarily rejected. Try applying “insanely great” as a standard on a

daily basis and see how far you get. People lower their standards in an effort to move things along and get things off their desks. Don't do it. Fight that impulse every step of the way. It doesn't take much more mental energy to raise standards. Don't let malaise set in. Bust it up. Raising the bar is energizing by itself.

Instead of telling people what I think of a proposal, a product, a feature, whatever, I ask them instead what they think. Were they thrilled with it? Absolutely love it? Most of the time I would hear, "It's okay," or "It's not bad." They would surmise from my facial expression that this wasn't the answer I was looking for. Come back when *you* are bursting with excitement about whatever you are proposing to the rest of us.

We should all be thrilled with what we're doing. So channel your inner Steve Jobs. Aim for insanely great. It's much more energizing!

Align Your People and Culture

Alignment becomes a more important concept as a business grows and there are many moving parts. The question is, are we all pulling on the same oar? Are we all driving in the same direction?

When I joined Snowflake, the company was being run as what I would call a pseudo-SaaS company with a subscription model. But it's basically a utility company for cloud computing with a consumption model. As with your local electric company, you pay only for what you use. Yet, like a SaaS company, our sales force was completely focused on bookings, or sales contract value, even though Snowflake did not recognize a single revenue dollar on bookings. Only actual consumption causes revenue to be recognized. Consumption drove bookings only indirectly; as

customers ran out of capacity, they would reorder. This lack of alignment was everywhere: reps only marginally cared about consumption, and many customers were oversold on bookings, which led to smaller renewals, or what we call down-sells, in future periods. The cost of commissions was out of whack with revenues because there was no direct relationship between sales compensation and revenues.

It took a few quarters to transition the company to consumption. Consumption became our middle name. We now looked at everything through the lens of consumption. We got better alignment.

Where alignment matters further is in incentive compensation. We pay everybody the same way on our executive team, and we have a very select, focused set of metrics that we pay bonuses on. Our sales exec does not get paid on a commission plan if the rest of us aren't. Everybody knows what we are aiming for.

Another source of misalignment is management by objectives (MBO), which I have eliminated at every company I've joined in the last 20 years. MBO causes employees to act as if they are running their own show. Because they get compensated on their personal metrics, it's next to impossible to pull them off projects. They will start negotiating with you for relief. That's not alignment, that's every man for himself. If you need MBO to get people to do their job, you may have the wrong people, the wrong managers, or both.

Sharpen Your Focus

Organizations are often spread too thinly across too many priorities, and too many of them are ill defined. Things tend to get added to the pile over time, and before we know it, we have huge backlogs. We're spread a mile wide and an

inch deep. The problems with pace and tempo are, of course, related to having too much going on at the same time. It feels like swimming in glue, moving like molasses.

Leaders can do two things that bring almost instant benefit. First, think about execution more sequentially than in parallel. Work on fewer things at the same time, and prioritize hard. Even if you're not sure about ranking priorities, do it anyway. The process alone will be enlightening. Figure out what matters most, what matters less, and what matters not at all. Otherwise your people will disagree about what's important. The questions you should ask constantly: What are we *not* going to do? What are the consequences of *not* doing something? Get in the habit of constantly prioritizing and reprioritizing.

Most people have a relatively easy time coming up with their top three priorities. Just ask them. As an exercise I often ask: if you can only do one thing for the rest of the year, and nothing else, what would it be and why? People struggle with this question because it is easy to be wrong, which is exactly the point. If we are wrong, resources are misallocated. That's concerning. But we avoid these pointed dialogs because it is easier to list five or ten priorities. The right ones may not even be buried in there somewhere.

“Priority” should ideally only be used as a singular word. The moment you have many priorities, you actually have none.

At ServiceNow, I had such a “what is the one thing” conversation with our new chief product officer. Product organizations have a million things to do, and they really need to elevate their thinking to see the forest for the trees. This was not a quick or easy conversation, because it's easy to lose sight of the big picture when drowning in day-to-day obligations. I knew what I thought the answer

should be, but would the CPO see it the same way? Did he even have a top priority?

What we arrived at was a singular focus on fashioning our rather industrial user experience to a consumer-grade service experience. This was not a short-term project; it would require a long-term shift in strategy, if not engineering culture, with sustained effort. It was important to the company's future yet also hard because it required changing our DNA. Our customers were IT people who had a high tolerance for these rather industrial, not very user-friendly experiences. The company had to forcibly move itself away from where it had come from. Having clarity is key, or people will just chip away at a problem, without significantly moving the needle. Intentions are often good, but they are then under-prioritized, under-resourced, and not fully crystalized.

Vagueness causes confusion, but clarity of thought and purpose is a huge advantage in business. Good leadership requires a never-ending process of boiling things down to their essentials. Spell out what you mean! If priorities are not clearly understood at the top, how distorted will they be down the line?

Pick Up the Pace

In a troubled organization there's no rush, no urgency. Why? People have to be there anyway, so what's the point in moving faster? If you have ever seen the inside of a California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), you know what that looks like. The staff doesn't start moving till 4:00 p.m. because quitting time is 4:30 p.m., and that backlog has to get cleared so everybody can depart on time. The rest of the day, who cares? They have to be there anyway.