



THE

VIKING

CODE



**THE THE ART AND SCIENCE
OF NORWEGIAN
SUCCESS**

A N D E R S I N D S E T



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WILEY

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Contents

<i>Preface: You're Allowed to Defy the Law of Jante</i>	<i>vii</i>	
Part I	Unearthing Hidden Talents	1
Chapter 1	Overcoming the Law of Jante: Trust Thyself	7
Chapter 2	Unleashing the Uncatchables: The Head-start Advantage	31
Chapter 3	Success Is Voluntary; Talent Can Be Found Everywhere	49
Chapter 4	Micro-ambitions	69
Chapter 5	Joyful, Joyful: From the Cultivation of Play to the Mastery of the Game	83
Chapter 6	“Dugnad”: Everyone Participates	103
Chapter 7	The Viking Code: The New Oil	111

Part II	The Viking Code as a Practical Philosophy	115
Chapter 8	The Viking Code in Society: One World Education	123
Chapter 9	Change Factor: The Viking Code Meets Politics	145
Chapter 10	Operating System: The Viking Code and the Economy	175
Chapter 11	Infinite Progress	203
	<i>Epilogue: The Life in Itself</i>	215
	<i>References</i>	219
	<i>About the Author</i>	225
	<i>Index</i>	227

Preface: You're Allowed to Defy the Law of Jante

The Law of Jante

~~You're not to think you are anything special.~~

~~You're not to think you are as good as we are.~~

~~You're not to think you are smarter than we are.~~

~~You're not to imagine yourself better than we are.~~

~~You're not to think you know more than we do.~~

~~You're not to think you are more important than we are.~~

~~You're not to think you are good at anything.~~

~~You're not to laugh at us.~~

~~You're not to think anyone cares about you.~~

~~You're not to think you can teach us anything.~~

In the heart of Norway, protected, near the Swedish border, lies the small but culturally rich town of Røros. With its charming wooden houses and old copper mines, Røros has proudly raised

the “UNESCO World Heritage” shield and made a name for itself far beyond its national borders. The mountain town has retained its authentic charm and historical significance, and I am a proud “Rørosing.”

Through solidarity and cohesion in their closely knit community, built on an open and trustful culture, one might almost call the village of Røros “Typisk Norsk”—typically Norwegian.

It was in Røros where I grew up.

Here in the highlands, I was glued to the TV on January 1, 1992, when then-Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, with a strong voice, told the whole country in the New Year’s address: “The [soccer] girls, the handball girls, the skiing boys, and the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra: they are at the top of the world. We also want to prove that the Norwegian economy can compete internationally. Do we perhaps need a new motto? Typically to be Norwegian means to be good.”

While other regions and countries are famous for certain things, it is not so easy to find something that can be described as typically Norwegian. Yes, there is brown cheese (Brunost), and Norwegians spend their Easter days at the cabin with the chocolate “Kvikk Lunsj” and their backpacks—but these are just (superfluous) objects. Are there any defining Norwegian values?

As a patriot, I have followed Norway’s sporting successes all my life. I have cheered for my fellow countrymen and still watch them on TV today, even though I emigrated 23 years ago. Every 4 years, the Winternation sweeps the medals at the Olympics. But with the advantageous initial conditions—that there is snow at all—it would be presumptuous to label a high-performance culture as “typically Norwegian.” Or is there a hidden secret here?

The interest in “peak performance” was an integral part of my childhood. It wasn’t that I had one vision of becoming the world’s best; I was more interested in progress. I had “micro-ambitions”:

getting a little better every day, participating in every training session, doing something every day myself.

I still remember a time in my life, which now seems almost absurd, when I managed to complete at least one training session for 716 consecutive days—meticulously documented in my training diary. I was obsessed with learning, with making progress, with getting better.

And yet, there's something about the concept of performance (or "high-performance") that is slightly challenging. High performance can indeed be fascinating, but it can also trigger stress responses and have negative impacts.

For me, performance should be viewed positively, worthy of being highlighted. This book shines a spotlight on performance. It takes its cue from the achievements of athletes who have tapped into this greater potential, and I seek to explore what feats might be achievable through our inherent potential. To substantiate this scientifically, modern research also comes into play.

The vision of being the best in the world is not reprehensible. Striving for perfection can be a powerful motivator. The reality, however, is that we can't all build rockets to take humanity to space, we can't all create software companies that change the world, we can't all win Nobel Prizes, and we can't all stand atop the podium as world champions or Olympic gold medalists in highly competitive sports. It's more about finding the basis for progress tailored to our own standards.

This book is about discovering an inner drive that leads to positive outcomes for ourselves and enables a powerful life, regardless of whether we receive applause. It's about exploring the unlimited potential of each individual—one's own possibilities and capabilities, not just performance itself. At its core, every human being has the potential to change the current culture of how we look at success.

It's about finding the positivity in "performance," understanding the power of progress, encouraging others, and unleashing one's own potential. It's the quest for the driving force that leads to success and the essence of a positive performance culture that is creative and moves away from ego-boosting and the pursuit of money and medals at any cost.

The Viking Code shows how we can all lead more meaningful lives by rejoicing in our own successes while simultaneously cheering on others to create a conscious culture of learning and progress.

In this book, we dive into the narrative of a modern Viking culture that is not anchored in the past but firmly looks toward the future. It's not about barbaric conquests or daring historical comparisons. Instead, a story unfolds that leads us into a world yet unknown—our future. It's the vision of a positive future based on progress. In business, politics, education, and society, we discover a new compass to guide us: the Viking Code.

Rosenborg, Røros, and Radio Moments

Back before the real birth of the Internet, it was the radio and, of course, TV, where we could draw inspiration from our role models. I spent countless Sundays on the lawn in front of our house listening to my favorite soccer team, Rosenborg from Trondheim, on the radio. The "Go'Fot Theory" (the theory of the preferred foot, which was about playing the other players well) of manager Nils Arne Eggen still shapes a special culture today, immortalized with a statue of the gesticulating and screaming coach in front of the stadium. The highlight was undoubtedly the 2-1 victory in 1996 against AC Milan at the San Siro stadium and the associated advance to the quarterfinals of the Champions League.

I was also glued to the box in 1998. A whole nation cheered for legendary coach "Drillo" with his rubber boots, "Kick-and-Run"

strategy, and his “Farmers from the North”—the Norwegian national team—as they knocked Brazil out of the Soccer World Cup. The handball and soccer women, well, they have always been good, and yes, being good at skiing is indeed typical in Norway.

But I wasn't just a spectator. My childhood in Røros was marked by playing all kinds of sports and a will to improve every day. Preparing for a typical Wednesday could include looking for long underwear and a thick hat, cleaning the rifle for the biathlon, filling the sports bag with resin and short pants for the later handball session, and clearing the snow from in front of the garage in order to get to my cross-country skiing, biathlon, and handball lessons. These daily sports activities created a purposeful life in mass and high-performance sports.



Even today, I let myself get carried away and fascinated by typical tasks on regular days. I still firmly believe that activity and sports are an essential part of my career and have led to

successes in other areas and that you can learn a lot from playing sports for life.

The Law of Jante: A Pillar of Nordic Humility and Collective Consciousness

My childhood was also shaped by my mother's attitude, rooted in the Scandinavian "Law of Jante," which can be summed up as follows:

"You shall not believe you are anything."

Published by the Norwegian-Danish author Aksel Sandemose in his novel *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*, this unwritten social code of conduct traces its origins to the early twentieth century, but its implications resonate far beyond its historical confines.

Sandemose, drawing from his own experiences in the town of Nykøbing Mors in Denmark, immortalized a set of 10 principles that underscore a pervasive sentiment: the community comes before the individual, and one should never believe they are better or more important than anyone else. Though it might seem constraining on the surface, the Law of Jante is a collection of humility, egalitarianism, and unity. It not only influences personal behaviors and relationships but has also carved pathways in the sociopolitical landscapes of Nordic countries.

The Law of Jante

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You're not to think you are more important
than we are.

You're not to think you are good at anything.

You're not to laugh at us.

You're not to think anyone cares about you.

You're not to think you can teach us anything.

The Law of Jante mirrors the Ten Commandments of Moses and forms a sarcastic escalation with the same message rooted in each commandment. It serves as a critique of social constraints. The historical heritage of the Law of Jante is profound. Its echoes are found in the egalitarian policies of the Nordic welfare states, the value placed on collaborative successes, and the deep sense of fraternity.

In particular, during my childhood in the 1980s and 1990s, and with my generation, it was primarily a finger-pointing at all those who positioned themselves above their social groups, or at all those who thought they were “better” than anyone else. It was similar to other cultures like Japan, where they proverbially say “A nail that sticks out gets hammered down” or to Australia and New Zealand with their “Tall Poppy Syndrome.”

The “Tall Poppy Syndrome” describes the sociocultural phenomenon in which individuals who stand out due to their exceptional performances, abilities, or successes are often criticized, avoided, or downplayed, much like the tallest poppy in a field is cut down to preserve equality. It is a reflection of our human tendency to seek equality and yet often dampen the glow of excellence, which is ultimately also the intention of the Law of Jante.

I now see the Law of Jante through two lenses. On the one hand, it laid the foundation for values intrinsic to a Norwegian culture that's admired globally. Understanding Jante reveals the core of the Scandinavian identity: a society that uplifts the collective, values humility, and nurtures a distinct balance of

individual freedom tethered to communal responsibility. On the other hand, this cultural tenet seems to have capped individual self-confidence and self-worth. Such qualities are not only essential in today's competitive and multifaceted society, but they might also shape the very bedrock of trust and relationships in a profoundly different manner.

For athletes, the very nature of their profession demands them to stand out, to strive for personal bests, and to break records. It necessitates a belief in oneself that often transcends what's considered ordinary. So, how does one reconcile a culture that frowns upon standing out with the intrinsic desire to excel and be the best in their field?

To overcome this syndrome, it takes courage and determination to grow and bloom despite headwinds—to stand upright, even if one stands out higher than the rest.

Needless to say, the cultural principle of the Law of Jante has strongly shaped Norway. For me, it was certainly part of the obstacle to being able to enjoy personal successes and progress. Looking back, it created a conflict between my own performance drive and talent and a recurring insecurity and lack of self-confidence, namely, that one is never good enough. So, I grew up with the ambivalent struggle between selfish ambition, which was seen as positive according to the American principle, and the suppression of individuality and personal development.

Versatility, Cohesion, and Community Spirit

My mother always emphasized values and did everything to impart this to her children. She was supportive and only wanted the best for us. What she probably meant by teaching us the Law of Jante was that one can indeed believe in oneself, that one is something, but one should not show it to others. In other words,

don't boast about your accomplishments and leave your feet on the ground.

In Røros, we created an environment where activity, fun, and community work formed a unique performance culture. We won trophies and celebrated successes in team sports such as soccer and handball and individually in winter disciplines. With only 3,500 inhabitants, this small community produced numerous successful athletes from my age group alone. Hans became a biathlete, Krister was among the best cross-country skiers in Norway, Christian played soccer, Erik is a gifted musician, and Kristoffer and Håvard had professional careers as handball players in the German Bundesliga. The good “environment” and our diversity contributed our top performance to our social group.

Godt miljø og allsidighet gir fine sportresultater

Et godt idrettsmiljø er avgjørende for å få fram gode utøvere. Anders Indset, Christian Sæterhaug, Krister Trondsen og Hans Prøsch har fulgt hverandre gjennom skole og idrett. Og alle preges av sportslig allsidighet.

Alle fire har vært sammen om håndball og fotball. I tillegg var Krister, Hans og Anders med på ski og skiskiskyting. De har tatt kreftmesterskap gjennom flere år både i håndball og fotball. De har vunnet Berstad-cup i fotball. Dalgårdstafetten på ski og de ble nummer en, to og tre i Østlandsmesterskapet i skiskiskyting. Dette var som 13-åringene.

SKOLE OG IDRETT
Kort sagt har de hatt en meget allsidig karriere. Og de har fulgt hverandre på skoleveien. Hans og Krister fra første dag, med Anders og Christian fra fjerde klasse.

ANDERS INDSET
I dag er de blitt mer spesialisert. Anders har lagt hovedvekt på håndball. Han ble kreftmester for klubben første gang som 12-åring. Han har deltatt på kretsleget i Sør-Trøndelag. Håndballretts og har vært med på tre samlinger for juniorlandslaget, der 15 spillere blir innkalt. Dette utvikles på oppdriftsenteret i Oslo, tre til fire dager hver gang. Det er disse samlingene som danner grunnlag for uttak til junior-EM, som arrangeres i høst.

KRISTER TRONDSEN
Krister Trondsen har vært sterkt preget av allsidighet. Han har deltatt både i fridrett, fotball, håndball og ski. Det er langrenn som etter hvert er blitt hans hovedgren. Han har hatt mange flotte plasseringer, blant tolv mestere i 17 års klassen ved NM på Steinkjer, sølv ved NM i skiskiskyting i Vingelen og bronse i stafett under VM, for å nevne noe.

CHRISTIAN SÆTERHAUG
Christian Sæterhaug har hatt sine hovedinteresser i håndball og fotball. Han har deltatt sammen med de øvrige i flere fotball og håndballcuper, med meget bra resultat. Christian er også aktuell for juniorlandslaget i fotball og har nettopp deltatt på en landslagsanmelding.

HANS PRØSCH
Hans Prøsch har vært aktiv i mange idrettsgrener, både sommer og vinter, fra svømming og tennis til folkedans og musikk. For Hans har idrett alltid vært en lek. Litt mer konkurranse ble det fra 12 års alderen, da han sammen med andre rørosinger, begynte å konkurrere med folk i Trondheims-regionen. I alderen 14-15 år ble det hovedlandtrening og fra 16 års alderen Norges-cup og junior NM. Idag er Hans på juniorlandslaget i skiskiskyting. Nå prioriterer Hans skiskiskyting, men prøver å få med seg en god del langrenn. Hans ble Norgesmester som 16-åring i skiskiskyting. Han har tatt sølv i langrenn, og sølv som 16-åring. Samme år ble han vinner av Norgescupen. I år har han stilt til start både i VM og EM i skiskiskyting, og har nå en pause før NM i skiskiskyting og Bjerkvik. Under EM ble hans lag nummer fem i stafetten og i VM nummer fem i lagkonkurransen, bare 20 sekunder unna medalje.

SVEIN TORE TØRRES
Svein Tore Tørræs tilhører en litt yngre aldersgruppe, men har i likhet med de øvrige vært svært allsidig, med deltagelse både i håndball, ski og fotball. I NM på Vang ble han nummer 3 over 15 km skiskyting.

Fra venstre Anders Indset, Christian Sæterhaug, Krister Trondsen og Svein Tore Tørræs.






At that time, I was hardly aware that this path was any different than the “American dream” we saw on TV. Our coaches also applied a different leadership style than those I got to know later on my journey through Europe, and that I have since come to know through my work—from authoritarian training and leadership styles in Eastern Europe to Baltic ball wizards with a unique formula for success that has produced remarkable soccer, basketball, and handball players over decades.

However, this book is not about my path, and the Viking Code is not a historical narrative. Rather, it’s a deep dive into the present.

“Over night” a new generation of Norwegian athletes has conquered the world stage and is currently attracting global attention in almost all major sports. Their “surprising” successes create the feeling of something new, unprecedented. They are praised and valued, are team players, and practice fair play. Examples include Erling Haaland and Martin Ødegaard, two of the world’s greatest soccer players; Viktor Hovland and Caspar Ruud,

respectively, among the best golf and tennis players in the world; Karsten Warholm, who reinvented the 400-meter hurdles; the two best triathletes in the world; and even the two best beach volleyball player in the world.

The Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet* published a view of the performance of the Norwegians in very different sports: “What’s up with this country?” The Austrian *Der Standard* ventured an attempt:

The Norwegians are outdoor people. Even caregivers of the smallest children are obliged to bring their charges into nature every day—regardless of the weather. The discussion about the daily gym lesson would be incomprehensible to anyone in Norway.

In a world dominated by many tales of rapid success and sudden genius, I find myself pondering: What is the secret behind Norway’s triumph? What lessons could the global economy, educational systems, and political decision-makers learn from this unique Norwegian culture that embodies both peak performance and fundamental values? Is it possible that what I call the Viking Code can shed light on the dark corners of our most pressing global dilemmas?

A new culture of achievement has been born in Norway. Today, we find self-assured modern Vikings with a solid foundation of values everywhere.

Is this typically Norwegian? Does the Law of Jante no longer apply? Can the Viking Code teach us something on a global scale? Can we collectively mobilize a new culture of performance, one that is rooted in values? Can this new performance culture help us address current challenges in business, politics, education, and society?

These questions led me to a man whose name—Marcel Da Cruz—might sound more at home in the alleys of Rio de Janeiro than on the snow-covered slopes of Oslo. Despite his exotic name and equally impressive personality, athletic trainer Marcel is in many ways the living embodiment of the Viking Code. Together with him, we delve deeply into the essence of the code in the first part of this book. It's time to introduce you to Marcel.

PART



Unearthing Hidden Talents

“IT’S LIKE A coltsfoot growing through concrete.”

Marcel pauses to ensure I’ve grasped the essence of his analogy. He is a sucker for details. I have just learned about the subtle differences between choosing a “cortado” and the challenges of making a good cappuccino.

With Marcel, his perfectionism is palpable.

He has an innate ability to find beauty in intricacies, lending an ethereal quality to his words and demeanor. As I listen, I can’t help but be pulled into his orbit, drawn to his every word. There’s a resonance, an alignment of thought and spirit, as we delve deeper into the world of intrinsic motivation and the thirst for progress.

Marcel and I find ourselves nestled in Kaffestuggu, an age-old coffee haunt situated on one of the two primary streets in Røros. This quaint village bears witness to centuries of history, with

artwork and architecture echoing its almost 400-year evolution as a mining town. Capturing the essence of what makes Røros uniquely captivating is a challenge. Yet, its “success,” mirroring life and achievement, was inspired by experts from Erzgebirge in Germany to the visionary “consultants” from Trondheim. The myriad influences, hues, creators, and inspirations amalgamate into a delightful “Smörgåsbord” of distinction.

Remarkably, this is only the second time Marcel and I are meeting face-to-face, following a fleeting encounter at a local tavern a few years ago. Marcel’s spouse hails from Røros, which serendipitously allowed our schedules to align, granting us this shared moment in Røros to reflect upon the developmental strides of recent decades. The familiarity between us belies the brevity of our acquaintance. Our exchanges flow effortlessly, reminiscent of a genial tennis match, where the objective is mutual exploration and understanding of the other’s skills and core competencies.

Marcel unites theory and practical experience. In his days as a basketball shooting guard, Marcel bore witness to diverse training cultures and emerging talents spanning the globe.

Marcel and I establish a common ground, mutually enriching our perspectives and venturing beyond Norwegian borders in search of the elusive formula for success. We’re both drawn to the enigma we’ve termed the Viking Code. Specifically, we’re intrigued by the genesis of high-performance cultures.

Our conversation drifts to the former Soviet Union’s strategy—carving regions into specialized hubs. Lithuania, for instance, emerged as the epicenter for nurturing basketball prodigies. Whenever a promising talent—much like the resilient coltsfoot—surfaced in other Soviet territories, they were promptly relocated to Lithuania’s rigorous training camps. This strategy bore fruit, evident in the prominence of Lithuanian athletes in the NBA, an impressive feat for a nation of merely three million.

Or take the city of Split in Croatia, for instance. Comparable in size to Norway, Croatia has a special tradition for world-class

athletes, and the city of Split seems to attract talent magnetically, molding them into stars in tennis, basketball, and soccer. Marcel's interactions with Marin Čilić shed light on the region's unique capacity to consistently produce overachievers. This reminds me of the pioneering work of Rasmus Ankersen, who, in his book *The Gold Mine Effect*, looks into the making of such global high-performance hotspots. Tragically, Ankersen's own promising soccer career was cut short by a severe knee injury during his professional debut at age 21. This setback led him to transition into a "talent anthropologist," authoring other notable works like *Winner's DNA* and *Hunger in Paradise*. Today, he wears multiple hats: director of soccer at Southampton, president of Göztepe, and a part-time chairman of the Danish Superliga club, FC Midtjylland.

But high-performance endeavors are not just engineered and built; they often have a significant element of serendipity, or what one might call "happening by chance." Humans, by nature, tend to seek explanations, sometimes even when there aren't any. We're prone to retrospectively charting our paths, creating a clear, linear narrative leading to our crowning achievements.

The Viking Code is not a mere "one-size-fits-all" blueprint. Instead, it digs deep, elucidating the intricacies and multifaceted components of cultivating high performance. When we infuse "values" into this equation, the intricacy, unsurprisingly, intensifies. It isn't a singular hotspot or sponge absorbing talent. It's more analogous to fungi, naturally dispersed over Norway's expansive 1,700 kilometer stretch. There isn't a mystical formula, a dedicated region, or even a specific sport that encapsulates Norwegian success. That's the allure for us. Our explorations suggest this success could be the outcome of cultural evolutions uniquely positioning Norway to foster numerous athletes. Interestingly, this historical pattern might not even resonate with the present-day youth.

High performance is intricate, with many intertwined components. Yet, one fundamental truth emerges: *success mandates sheer will.*

In this part of the book, we show how you can secure an early advantage—becoming uncatchable—in order to lay a solid foundation for the path to greatness.

What about talent? Well, talent is everywhere. Or as Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, in their 2005 bestseller *Freakonomics*, argue, “This whole idea of raw talent and genius is vastly overrated.” They argue that “if you look at anybody in the world who’s really, really good at anything, the odds are that they were not so great at that when they were a little kid.” Marcel cites Norwegian soccer player Martin Ødegaard as an example. Martin’s coach emphasized how practice, specialized training, and the right guidance honed Martin’s skills from a young age. This begs the question: why did only Martin flourish and not his peers? Didn’t they undergo similar training? Ultimately, the pursuit of success and high performance is a personal choice. Undeniably there are instances of exceptional talent, but there is more to it.

Marcel’s metaphor of the coltsfoot exemplifies resilience, urging us to recognize the boundless potential inherent in the human spirit. Just as the coltsfoot sprouts from unlikely places, so do many great achievers, underscoring that talent is ubiquitous and success attainable for all, a phenomenon that we will also take a closer look at in this part of the book.

Our shared quest is to decipher the Norwegian success story beyond just high performance.

What’s the secret ingredient that has propelled Norwegian athletes to unparalleled achievements? How do societal values factor in?

We’ll take a closer look at the tradition of “dugnad,” examine Norway’s triumph over the limiting Law of Jante, and highlight the significance of joy, fun, and what we term “micro-ambitions.”

Perhaps even more intriguingly, we’ll ponder whether this success was meticulously orchestrated and engineered.

Was this global domination a result of deliberate strategies, resources, and structure?

Or did a substantial portion emerge per chance?

Through this exploration, we will uncover counterintuitive success factors and hope to uncover lessons for our ongoing human journey of pushing boundaries and achieving greatness.

First, let's take a closer look at the mystical Law of Jante.