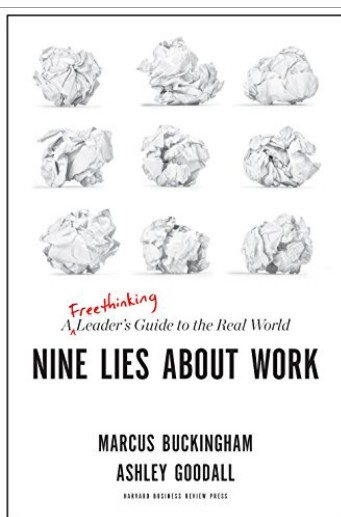


# EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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# Nine Lies About Work

## THE NUTSHELL

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### Introduction

Why do so many of the ideas and practices that are held as settled truths at work wind up being so deeply frustrating to, and unpopular with, the very people they are supposed to serve? We call these things “lies” because they are pushed at us so hard, almost as if they’re being used to steer us away from the world as it truly is. The strongest force pushing back against the lies, and the force that we all seek to harness in our lives, is the power of our own individuality—that the true power of human nature is that each human’s nature is unique, and that expressing this through our work is an act, ultimately, of love.

### LIE #1: People Care Which Company They Work For

When we push on the data, and examine closely its patterns and variations, we arrive at this conclusion: while people might care which company they join, they don’t care which company they work for. The truth is that, once there, *people care which team they’re on*. When you’re next looking to join a company, don’t bother asking if it has a great culture—no one can tell you that in any real way. Instead, ask what it does to build great teams.

### LIE #2: The Best Plan Wins

Though you are told that the *best plan wins*, the reality is quite different. Many plans, particularly those created in large organizations, are overly generalized, quickly obsolete, and frustrating to those asked to execute them. It’s far better to

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coordinate your team's efforts in real time, relying heavily on the informed, detailed intelligence of each unique team member. Trust the intelligence of your team.

## **LIE #3: The Best Companies Cascade Goals**

In the real world, there is *work*, meaning stuff that you have to get done. In the theory world, there are *goals*. Work makes you feel trusted; goals make you feel distrusted. Work is work; goals aren't. Since goals are only and always an expression of what a person finds most meaningful, then to create alignment in our company we should do everything we can to ensure that everyone in the company understands what matters most. The truth is that the best companies don't cascade goals; *the best companies cascade meaning*.

## **LIE #4: The Best People Are Well-Rounded**

If we were all the same, there would doubtless be things that all of us could not do, and that therefore the team could not do. We need to partner with people whose strengths are different from ours if we are to achieve results that demand more abilities than any of us has alone. This means that the more different we are from one another, the more we need one another. The more different we are the more we rely on understanding and appreciating the strengths of others, on building a shared understanding of purpose, and an atmosphere of safety and trust so that those strengths can be most usefully put to work.

## **LIE #5: People Need Feedback**

It goes without question that feedback for each and every one of us at work is a good thing, and that more feedback is an even better thing. However, neurological science tells us that negative feedback doesn't enable learning. It systematically inhibits it and is, neurologically speaking, how to create *impairment*. If what you want is improvement, then look for whenever someone on your team does something that really works, and then find a way of telling that person what you just saw.

## **LIE #6: People Can Reliably Rate Other People**

Virtually every organization conducts some version of the talent review, but any tool that pretends to reveal *who you are* is false. What you want is not the truth of you, but just the truth. You don't want to be represented by data that attempts, arrogantly, to divine who you are. Instead, you want to be represented by data that simply, reliably, and humbly captures *the reaction of your team leader to you*. That's not you, and it shouldn't pretend to be you. It's your leader, and what she feels, and what she would do in the future.

## **LIE #7: People Have Potential**

It's not true—or, indeed, useful—to think that *people have potential*. Instead, the truth is that *people have momentum*. Potential is a one-sided evaluation. Momentum is an ongoing conversation. There is no such thing as having potential. Or rather, there is, but it doesn't mean anything, or rather, it doesn't mean anything beyond being a human. To say that you have potential means simply that you have the capacity to learn, and grow, and get better, like every other human.

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## **LIE #8: Work-Life Balance Matters Most**

In the real world, does anyone, anywhere, man or woman, young or old, affluent or barely solvent, ever actually find balance? This is why balance is more bane than benefit. In the end, balance is an unachievable goal because it asks us to aim for momentary stasis in a world that is ever changing. Supposing we ever get things just exactly in balance, we know for sure that something will come along and unbalance them and that we'll be back to pushing our balance rock up the hill again. Balance as an ideal erases our humanity—the essence of who each of us and aspires to be—and replaces it with a Sisyphean coping strategy.

## **LIE #9: Leadership is a Thing**

We can say that there appears to be broad agreement that certain people exhibit a definable, consistent, and meaningful quality called leadership, and that all the best leaders possess this set of qualities. As a consequence, if you want to be a leader, you have to have this set of qualities. That's like saying your cat has catness because he's a cat. It might be true, but it's hardly helpful to your hamster if he dreams, someday, of being a cat. Leading and following are not abstractions. They are human interactions; human relationships. Their currency is the currency of all human relationships—the currency of emotional bonds of trust and love.