

Seven lessons from dwarfs

Ask great execs to rank their favourite management books, and chances are three will appear near the top of their lists: *In Search of Excellence* (Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman Jr.), *Built to Last* (James Collins and Jerry Porras), and *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Stephen Covey). These tomes reside within the realm of undisputed classics—business wisdom that is not about cheese yet somehow manages to move.

So it is with genuine pride that the Consultant Debunking Unit returns, after some court-ordered bed rest, to report that these books—all written, incidentally, by consultants—are actually the same book. Although their authors laboured separately, poring over masses of data, they all

arrived at pretty much the same seven “insights.”

But these seven ideas weren’t even original to begin with. One has to go back to the origins of



learning, to the earliest moments of childhood, to reveal the true originators of the seven-concept business theory. We refer to Snow White’s side-kicks, those rascally Seven Dwarfs.

What does Dopey have to do with excellence? Not much, of course. The Dwarfs are a cautionary tale—examples of what not to do. They demonstrate the seven habits of highly ineffective people.

MARTIN KIHN

Martin Kihn is the author of *House of Lies: How Management Consultants Steal Your Watch* and then *Tell You the Time* (Warner Books), due out in March 2005. Taken with kind permission from *Fast Company* (October 2004), a leading magazine on how business affects society.

CONCEPT	IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE	BUILT TO LAST	7 HABITS	CAUTIONARY DWARF
Take action	Bias for action	Try a lot of stuff, and keep what works	Be proactive	Sleepy
Focus on the customer	Close to the customer	Good enough, never is	Seek first to understand	Bashful
Have a mission	Autonomy and entrepreneurship	Big, hairy audacious goals	Begin with the end of mind	Dopey
Be who you are	Stick to the knitting	Preserve the core, stimulate progress	Put first things first	Grumpy
Believe in your team	Productivity through people	Cult-like cultures	Synergize	Doc
Work on yourself	Simple form, lean staff	Home-grown management	Sharpen the saw	Happy
It's not about the money	Hands-on, value-driven	More than profits	Think win-win	Sneezy