

Mark Aesch

Author of Driving Excellence and Former CEO of the Rochester Genesee Regional Transportation Authority

Driving Excellence – A Turnaround Story. Mark Aesch, author of the best-selling Driving Excellence, a book on high-performance public sector management, discusses the challenges he inherited as CEO of the Rochester Genesee Regional Transportation Authority (RGRTA) and how he overcame them in order to turn the business into a highly successful – and highly utilized – transportation authority. He explains how he took a listless public agency and turned it into a streamlined, hard-charging culture that cut fares, ran a surplus for five consecutive years, and reduced its reliance on taxpayer subsidies. In a time when airlines are charging to bring luggage on board and companies are becoming more reliant on taxpayer dollars, Aesch achieved results that many leaders in the private sector can only dream of in recent years. Covering a range of topics from management style and creating buy-in among employees to service excellence and leadership, Aesch uses his farm-kid background to connect stories to business strategies and leaves his audience inspired and motivated to create positive change in their own companies.

Leadership and Management. Mark Aesch discusses his management style and the leadership lessons that he learned during RGRTA’s successful turnaround. He encountered reluctant workers – those who didn’t believe in his changes and those who actively tried to undermine him, angry customers, and bureaucratic obstacles. To cope, he created a hybrid form of management – taking cues from both public and private sector corporations. He even developed an incentive structure that worked in a public sector setting. Ultimately, he says managers must listen hard to employees and customers, prevent finance from dictating strategy, engage the entire organization in the new direction, create a culture of no-ego, and more. Aesch explains how he navigated the challenges he faced, how he stayed on course, and how he got everyone at the RGRTA on board.

Service Excellence. One of the key moments that Mark Aesch identifies in his turnaround of the RGRTA is when he announced that riders would no longer be referred to as “passengers” but instead as “customers.” This, he believes, helped create an environment that was more open to change and more focused on the value and experience that customers were getting from the Authority. Aesch explains how these organizational and attitudinal changes led to cleaner buses, better service, and, ultimately, more riders and more revenue and how other organizations can take his core ideas and apply them to their own businesses.