

**Reader's Guide:** It takes a rare mind to define a strategy of excellence based on achieving "Second Place". Two *Open4Definition* members collaborate from common, yet different perspectives to reveal this intriguing definition. Matt (Boom) shares this story from his U. S. Marine Corps days through the lens of Reut who is also both a dedicated mother and an ex-officer in the Israeli Army. Bottom-line; they challenge America's infatuation with all things First Place. (600 words) Other definitions: First Place; excellence.

## **Second Place Wins the Race? - Define Today, Lead Tomorrow**

*By Mr. Matt Daniel and Mrs. Reut Schwartz-Hebron*

### **Definitions dictate choices.**

My wise Squadron Commander, Lt. Colonel Mike Hough (USMC), back in the early 1990's would say, "I don't care about what you can do, boys. What I care about is what you can consistently do."

He would say, "Shoot for SECOND PLACE. That, we know we can achieve. If we consistently achieve SECOND PLACE, we'll end up being the best!"

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**"If we consistently achieve SECOND PLACE, we'll end up being the best!"**

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And we did. We also had a great time doing it.

Success and excellence are often defined as doing more and doing it better all the time. When success is defined in terms of winning First Place — striving for being in that spot leads to dysfunctional results far more often than it leads to effectiveness.

- **Definitions define priorities** — winning is not just about providing value. The 'Over-Promise, Under-Deliver' ditty has a nasty tone to it. Long term goals such as customer loyalty, reputation and brand value can be poorly developed if success is defined solely as being First Place.
- **Peak performance cannot be maintained** — First Place expectations mean everyone needs to give all of themselves all of the time. An effort that is locked on maximum volume can create unrealistic expectations which mean people ultimately get exhausted, discouraged and detached.

- **Competition is not always the best choice** — when success is defined as being first, competition itself may become an all-consuming goal. Often, this isn't the best strategy. As an example, if you are starting a business in the razor blade market, competing with a company like Gillette for First Place is probably not the best way to go. Most markets are large enough to comfortably sustain more than one strong player. Perhaps a better strategy would be differentiation by continuous improvement or profound customer support or innovative product development.

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**Our core values as a society drive us to follow the definition of First Place even when it is completely inappropriate. It is a subconscious definition.**

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And yet for some reason our core values as a society drive us to follow the definition to strive for First Place even when it is completely inappropriate. That is, when cooperation and choosing consistent excellence (Second Place) can lead us to far better results than being absorbed with going all out to be first.

As parents we think that achieving First Place will give our children better chances at securing a good position, good wages and renown, but we forget that money and pride are just strategies to attain happiness or better yet, contentment. Sometimes when children are pushed to maintain First Place they are not spending enough time learning how to enjoy life, how to cooperate and the skill set needed to build healthy relationships. Defining First Place as success in these cases may lead to frequent disappointments and sometimes to the extreme point of catastrophic results; maybe even suicide or depression.

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Employees when pushed to perform in full mode all the time lose creativity, tend to burn out faster, are more prone to conflicts and are generally less engaged. With the costs of turnover this definition of success certainly isn't worth it for most businesses.

Definitions have power. They can ensure that our efforts are aligned with our goals or conversely can lead us to choose the wrong strategy. They can strengthen or weaken us. However, if we are more conscious of definitions we can be more successful in any situation, at any time. This is one choice we should make more often. **Define Today, Lead Tomorrow.**