

# GREAT BY

# CHOICE

UNCERTAINTY, CHAOS, AND LUCK—

WHY SOME THRIVE DESPITE THEM ALL

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# 10XERS

## KEY POINTS

- ▶ We named the winning protagonists in our research “10Xers” (pronounced “ten-EX-ers”) because they built enterprises that beat their industry’s averages by at least 10 times.
- ▶ The contrast between Amundsen and Scott in their epic race to the South Pole is an ideal analogy for our research question, and a remarkably good illustration of the differences between 10Xers and their comparison companies.
- ▶ Clear-eyed and stoic, 10Xers accept, without complaint, that they face forces beyond their control, that they cannot accurately predict events, and that nothing is certain; yet they utterly reject the idea that luck, chaos, or any other external factor will determine whether they succeed or fail.
- ▶ 10Xers display three core behaviors that, in combination, distinguish them from the leaders of the less successful comparison companies:
  - *Fanatic discipline:* 10Xers display extreme consistency of action—consistency with values, goals, performance standards, and methods. They are utterly relentless, monomaniacal, unbending in their focus on their quests.
  - *Empirical creativity:* When faced with uncertainty, 10Xers do not look primarily to other people, conventional wisdom, authority figures, or peers for direction; they look primarily to empirical evidence. They rely upon direct observation, prac-

tical experimentation, and direct engagement with tangible evidence. They make their bold, creative moves from a sound empirical base.

- *Productive paranoia:* 10Xers maintain hypervigilance, staying highly attuned to threats and changes in their environment, even when—especially when—all’s going well. They assume conditions will turn against them, at perhaps the worst possible moment. They channel their fear and worry into action, preparing, developing contingency plans, building buffers, and maintaining large margins of safety.

- ▶ Underlying the three core 10Xer behaviors is a motivating force: passion and ambition for a cause or company larger than themselves. They have egos, but their egos are channeled into their companies and their purposes, not personal aggrandizement.

## UNEXPECTED FINDINGS

- ▶ Fanatic discipline is not the same as regimentation, measurement, obedience to authority, adherence to social structure, or compliance with bureaucratic rules. True discipline requires mental independence, and an ability to remain consistent in the face of herd instinct and social pressures. Fanatic discipline often means being a nonconformist.

- ▶ Empirical creativity gives 10Xers a level of confidence that, to outsiders, can look like foolhardy boldness; in fact, empirical validation allows them to simultaneously make bold moves *and* bound their risk. Being empirical doesn’t mean being indecisive. 10Xers don’t favor analysis over action; they favor empiricism as the foundation for decisive action.