

Required Reading

What Is It And Have You Got It?

[Tara Weiss](#), 04.27.07, 6:00 AM ET



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Talk show host Bill Boggs estimates he's interviewed between 7,000 and 8,000 people over the course of his career. It's impossible to conduct that many interviews and not learn some lessons--especially when the subjects included Frank Sinatra, Quincy Jones and Martha Stewart.

He used those interviews as fodder for an off Broadway-show he wrote called *Talk Show Confidential*, but he felt it didn't truly impart wisdom he knew these people had. That's why he wrote *Got What It Takes?: Successful People Reveal How They Got To The Top*.

It's not a dense business book you have to force yourself to open. Boggs conducted 44 interviews with leaders across all industries and the result is an energizing, quick read that's full of interesting anecdotes about how the best of the best made it.

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Granted, Boggs hasn't discovered the fountain of youth. Much of the advice is common sense, such as working hard and not goofing off. But the interviewees' stories are a fun read and a look into how average people became extraordinary.

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Take cosmetics guru Bobbi Brown. She was floundering, unsure of what direction to take in professional life. She was on the verge of dropping out of college when her mother serendipitously gave her life-altering advice: "Forget about what you want to do with your life. Pretend it's your birthday. You can do whatever you want." Brown replies, "I thought and thought. And out of the blue I said, I want to go to Marshall Field's and play with makeup."

Boggs recently chatted with Forbes.com about how Matt Lauer, Bill O'Reilly, James Blake and others made it to the top of their careers.

Forbes.com: What were common traits you noticed among those you interviewed?

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Boggs: They don't have a sense of entitlement. Also, many of them said there's no substitute for hard work. Each person had a will to prevail. They believe in themselves and knew how powerful faith is in pulling them through good and bad times.

The other thing is, they aren't risk adverse. They were willing to take a chance even though there was a possibility they'd fail. U.S. Rep. Kay Bailey Hutchinson said, 'Unless you fail big in life you'll probably never succeed big either. There's a whole set of coping skills that surround failing that enable you to succeed better.'

You devote a chapter to luck. Doesn't that go against the hard work idea?

The idea is being able to capitalize on luck and timing. In some cases some people said they were lucky but they were also prepared to take advantage of it. Take Matt Lauer. He was down because he just had his fourth show canceled. He was living in the woods eating food out of a can. The phone rings and it's NBC. Luckily someone saw a tape. The key thing about that is he went in to this dinner meeting with the

general manager of the network, and he didn't pretend to be anything other than he was. He told me that he didn't pretend to be news anchor. He was himself.

Do you have to have a hot, new idea to be successful?

No. Look at chef and restaurateur Bobby Flay. In the culinary field you can execute the basics perfectly and have good business sense and be really successful. You don't have to do something radically new to be successful.

Linda Hewitt, the president of Weight Watchers was a member and worked her way up. Jeff Lurie, owner of the Philadelphia Eagles, didn't invent a new way to play football. All he did was implement a sense of values and the desire to do something in the best possible way.

There's a chapter about temptation. Why include that?

Temptation can come in the way of success. Jim Cramer said that if you're going to be tempted to do things like drink every night, get it out of the way in your 20s. It slows you down later in life.

Got What It Takes? Successful People Reveal How They Got To The Top by Bill Boggs is published by HarperCollins (\$21.95).