

## CHAPTER 1

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# The Caddie and the CEO

On a warm April day in 2016, a large crowd gathered on the football field at Sacred Heart School, in the heart of Atherton, California, to honor William Vincent Campbell, Jr., who had recently succumbed to cancer at the age of seventy-five. Bill had been a transcendent figure in the technology business since moving west in 1983, playing a critical role in the success of Apple, Google, Intuit, and numerous other companies. To say he was tremendously respected would be a gross understatement—loved is more like it. Among the audience that day were dozens of technology leaders—Larry Page. Sergey Brin. Mark Zuckerberg. Sheryl Sandberg. Tim Cook. Jeff Bezos. Mary Meeker. John Doerr. Ruth Porat. Scott Cook. Brad Smith. Ben Horowitz. Marc Andreessen. Such a concentration of industry pioneers and power is rarely seen, at least not in Silicon Valley.

We—Jonathan Rosenberg and Eric Schmidt—sat among the audience, making subdued small talk, soft sunshine contrasting with the somber mood. We had both worked closely with Bill in the previous fifteen years, since we had joined Google as the CEO (Eric, in 2001) and the head of products (Jonathan, in 2002). Bill had been our coach, meeting with us individually every week or two to talk through the various challenges we had faced as we helped grow the company. He had guided us as individuals and teammates, working mostly behind the scenes as Google went from a quirky startup to one of the most valuable companies and brands in the world. Without Bill's help, there was a chance that none of that would have happened. We called him Coach, but we also called him friend, and in this we were like pretty much everyone around us. In fact, as we later found out, many of the people in the audience that day, an audience that numbered well over a thousand people, considered Bill to be their *best* friend. So who, among all of these best friends, would have the honor of eulogizing our Coach? Which high-tech luminary would step to the podium?

## THE CHAMPION FROM HOMESTEAD

Bill Campbell didn't even get to California until his early forties, and he had started his business career only a few years before that. In fact, this Silicon Valley success story packed a few lifetimes' worth of accomplishments into his seventy-five-year span. He grew up pugnacious and smart in

the western Pennsylvania steel town of Homestead, where his father taught physical education in the local high school and moonlighted at the mill. Bill was a good student and worked hard. Astute too: he wrote an April 1955 op-ed in his school newspaper that reminded his fellow students “there is nothing more important to you in later life” than good grades. “Loafing in school may prevent one’s chances of success.” He was a freshman at the time.

A football star at Homestead High, Bill left home in the fall of 1958 to attend Columbia University in Manhattan. He was an unlikely-looking football hero even in that era when football players were far more human-sized than they are today: maybe five ten, 165 pounds (although listed in the program at 180). But he quickly earned the respect of coaches and teammates alike with his all-out play and on-field intelligence. By his senior year, the fall of 1961, Bill was the captain of the team, playing practically every minute of every game as a linebacker on defense and lineman (guard) on offense. He earned All-Ivy honors and helped lead the team to the Ivy League title, the only one in Columbia’s history. The team’s coach, the wonderfully named Buff Donelli, called Bill “a tremendous influence” in winning the title. “If he stood 6 feet 2 and weighed 225 pounds and played pro ball, he’d be the greatest lineman the league ever had, a ball of fire. But he’s a little guy who weighs only 162. Not even in college ball do you find guards that small. Ordinarily you can’t play football with little guys. Attitude generally isn’t enough. A coach needs attitude plus players.”<sup>1</sup>

Bill’s attitude, naturally, was all about the team, saying

## TRILLION DOLLAR COACH

that it succeeded “because the players worked together and had senior leadership.”<sup>2</sup>

## TOO MUCH COMPASSION

Bill didn’t have much money, so he helped pay for his education at Columbia by driving a cab. He learned the city so well that later in life he often argued with his longtime driver and friend, Scotty Kramer, about the best route to take. (When it came to navigating New York you didn’t question the coach,



Bill (67) leads the blocking for Columbia during the Lions’ 26–14 victory over Harvard on October 21, 1961.<sup>3</sup>

## THE CADDIE AND THE CEO

Scotty says.) He graduated from Columbia in 1962 with a degree in economics, received a master's degree in education in 1964, and migrated north to become an assistant football coach at Boston College. Bill was an outstanding coach and quickly became highly respected among his peers. So when his alma mater, Columbia, asked him to return as its head coach in 1974, he agreed. Although Columbia's football program was woeful, Bill's loyalty guided him back to Manhattan.

(One of Bill's coaching colleagues, Jim Rudgers, notes that before Bill "let his heart take him" back to Columbia, he was considered one of the top assistant coaches in the country



Bill's teammates carry him off the field after Columbia's 37-6 win over University of Pennsylvania on November 18, 1961. The victory clinched Columbia's first Ivy League championship.<sup>4</sup>

and was offered the opportunity to coach at Penn State under Joe Paterno. At the time, Paterno was one of the top coaches in the country, and it seems likely that Bill would have continued to thrive as a coach had he joined the Nittany Lions. In fact, this book might have been about Bill Campbell, college football legend, rather than Bill Campbell, Silicon Valley legend. And to learn more about him you might be doing a Yahoo or Bing search!)

Despite his abundant coaching talent, Bill did not win in his return to Columbia. Hampered by crummy facilities that were at least a thirty-minute bus ride from campus in afternoon traffic, an administration that was perhaps not fully committed to gridiron success, and a city in general decline, the Lions won only twelve games during his tenure, losing forty-one. His most hopeful season was 1978, when the team started 3-1-1 but then got crushed at Giants Stadium, 69-0, by a much bigger (physically and numerically) Rutgers squad. Bill decided partway through the 1979 campaign that he was going to resign. He completed the season and was done.

Bill worked so hard during his time at Columbia that at one point he had to take a break in a hospital to recover from exhaustion. Recruiting players was particularly challenging. Bill later said that he would have to visit a hundred prospects just to get twenty-five of them to come. "I'd leave after workout programs, at 4:30, and I'd drive to Albany and back in a night. Scranton and back," he added. "Just so I could be back in the office the next day."<sup>5</sup>

His failure, though, wasn't for lack of players. It was, according to Bill, for too much compassion. "There is something that I would say is called dispassionate toughness that

you need [as a football coach], and I don't think I have it. What you need to do is not worry about feelings. You've got to push everybody and everything harder and be almost insensitive about feelings. You replace a kid with another kid; you take an older guy and replace him with a younger guy. That is the nature of the game. Survival of the fittest. The best players play. In my case, I worried about that. I tried to make sure the kids understood what we were doing. I just think I wasn't hard-edged enough.”<sup>6</sup>

Bill may have been correct in believing that success as a football coach depends on “dispassion,” but in business there is growing evidence that compassion is a key factor to success.<sup>7</sup> And as it turned out, this notion of bringing compassion to the team worked much better for Bill in the business world than on the football field.

## LET'S RUN IT

His football career was done. At age thirty-nine, Bill entered the business world by taking a job with the ad agency J. Walter Thompson. He started in Chicago, supporting Kraft, then several months later moved back to New York to support Kodak. He dove into his job with customary passion, impressing his clients in Rochester, New York, so much with his

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\* A 2006 paper by Peter Frost, Jane Dutton, Sally Maitlis, Jacoba Lilius, Jason Kanov, and Monica Worline contains a compendium of research over the past century confirming the high value of compassion in the workplace and organizations.

knowledge and insights about their business that they soon hired him away from the agency. Bill rose quickly at Kodak, and by 1983 he was working in London as the company's head of consumer products for Europe. During his initial job search in 1979, one of his Columbia football buddies had connected Bill with John Sculley, who was then a senior executive at PepsiCo. Bill didn't take the job that John offered at Pepsi, but in 1983 Sculley decamped to Silicon Valley to become CEO of Apple, and shortly thereafter he gave Bill a call. Would he be willing to leave Kodak and move his young family—he had married the former Roberta Spagnola, a dean at Columbia, in 1976—west to come to Apple?

“My career had been blunted by a lot of years as a dumb-ass football coach,” Bill later said. “I felt that because of my background, I would always be below my peer group and trying to catch up. Going out to the wild, woolly west, where it was more a meritocracy, I would have a chance to move quickly and sit on the management team.”<sup>8</sup> Move quickly, indeed. Within nine months of joining Apple, Bill was promoted to VP of sales and marketing and given the task of overseeing the launch of the highly anticipated Macintosh, Apple's new computer that would replace the Apple II as the company's flagship product.

To kick off the launch, the company made a big move: it bought a slot to run a commercial during the Super Bowl, which would be played in Tampa, Florida, on January 22, 1984. Once the ad was produced, Bill and the team showed it to Apple cofounder Steve Jobs. An allusion to George Orwell's novel *1984*, it showed a young woman running through a dark hallway, fleeing guards, and emerging into a



chamber where hundreds of gray-clad, head-shaven men are listening, zombie-like, to a droning “big brother” figure on a large screen before them. With a yell, she throws a large mallet through the screen, causing it to explode. A narrator promises that the Apple Macintosh will show us why “1984 won’t be like 1984.”\*

Steve loved the ad. E. Floyd Kvamme, Bill’s boss at the time, loved the ad. Bill loved the ad. About ten days before the game, they showed it to the board.

The board hated the ad. This is terrible, was the universal opinion, too costly and too controversial. They wanted to know if they could sell the airtime to some other advertiser. Was it too late to back out? A couple of days later, one of the Apple sales executives told Bill and Floyd that she had been able to find a buyer for the slot. “What do you think we should do?” Floyd asked Bill.

“Fuck it! Let’s run it,” was Bill’s response. They never told the board or other top executives that they had a potential buyer for the slot, and ran the ad. It became not only the most popular spot of the game, but one of the most famous commercials of all time, ushering in the era of Super Bowl ads becoming as big as the game itself. A *Los Angeles Times* column in 2017 called it the “only great Super Bowl commercial ever.”<sup>9</sup> Not bad for a “dumb-ass football coach” less than five years removed from his final season.

In 1987, Apple decided to spin off a separate software company called Claris and offered Bill the position of CEO.

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\* Search “Apple 1984 commercial” on your favorite search engine to see the ad.

He jumped at the opportunity. Claris did well, but by 1990 Apple pulled it back into the fold as a subsidiary rather than follow the original plan of letting it become its own public company. This shift spurred Bill and several other Claris executives to leave. It was an emotional decision, and when Bill departed, several Claris employees demonstrated their gratitude to him by taking out a full-page ad in the *San Jose Mercury News*. “So long, Coach,” the headline read. “Bill, we’ll miss your leadership, your vision, your wisdom, your friendship and your spirit . . .” the ad continued. “You taught us how to stand on our own. You built us to last. And even though you’re no longer coaching our team, we’re going to do our best to keep making you proud.” Claris continued as an Apple subsidiary until 1998.

Bill became the CEO of a startup named GO Corporation, which attempted to create the world’s first pen-based handheld computer (a precursor to the PalmPilot and today’s smartphones). It was an ambitious vision but ahead of its time, and the company shut down in 1994. “GO didn’t go,” Bill was fond of saying.

Around that time, Intuit cofounder and CEO Scott Cook, along with his board of directors, was looking to replace himself as CEO. John Doerr, a Kleiner Perkins venture capitalist,\* introduced Bill to Scott. At first, the founder wasn’t impressed with the coach. A couple of months passed and Scott still didn’t have a new CEO, so he agreed to meet

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\* John is one of the more successful VCs in Silicon Valley, having led Kleiner Perkins’s investments in companies such as Google, Amazon, Netscape, Sun, Intuit, and Compaq.

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# So long, Coach.

Claris has just lost one of our hardest-working employees.

Bill Campbell is on his way to lead another bunch of impossible dreamers over at GO Corporation, those guys with the pen-based notebook computing system.

And the bunch he left behind would like to publicly tender him the biggest compliment we can conjure:

Bill, we'll miss your leadership, your vision, your wisdom, your friendship and your spirit.

But—thanks to all of the above—we're going to be fine without you.

In 1987, when Apple decided to get out of the software business, you volunteered to start a spin-off company.

You began with a handful of nearly-free Apple software products, a few rebels, a name, "Claris," and built us into the world's leading Mac software company.

We just finished our best quarter ever in sales, profits, market share and growth.

You taught us how to stand on our own.

You built us to last.

And even though you're no longer coaching our team, we're going to do our best to keep making you proud.

CLARIS

Chris Gaede

with Bill again. They went on a walk around a neighborhood in Palo Alto, California, and this time the two clicked. “The first time we met, we talked about business and strategy,” Scott says. “But when we talked again, we got off of strategy and talked instead about leadership and people. The other people I had interviewed had a cookie-cutter approach to developing people. You can have any color you want as long as it’s black. But Bill, he was a technicolor rainbow. He appreciated that each person had a different story and background. He was so nuanced and different in how he approached growth challenges and leadership challenges. I was looking for a way to grow our people in a way I couldn’t. Bill was great at that.”

In 1994, Bill became Intuit’s CEO. He shepherded the company through several years of growth and success, stepping down in 2000.\* Although he did not know it at the time, he was about to enter the third chapter of his career, a return to coaching full-time, but not on a football field.

When Steve Jobs was forced out of Apple in 1985, Bill Campbell was one of the few leaders at the company who fought against the move. Dave Kinser, an Apple colleague of Bill’s at the time, recalls Bill saying that “we’ve got to keep Steve in the company. He’s way too talented to just let him leave!” Steve remembered that loyalty. When he returned to Apple and became its CEO in 1997, and most of the board

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\* Bill stepped down as Intuit CEO in July 1998, then returned to the position in September 1999, when his replacement, Bill Harris, decided to resign. Bill stayed on as CEO until early 2000.

members stepped down, Steve named Bill as one of the new directors.\* (Bill served on the Apple board until 2014.)

Steve and Bill became close friends, speaking frequently and spending many Sunday afternoons walking around their Palo Alto neighborhood discussing all sorts of topics. Bill became a sounding board for Steve on a wide variety of subjects, a coach, mentor, and friend. But Steve was not Bill's only coachee. In fact, even though he left football in 1979, "the Coach" never stopped coaching. He was always available to chat with friends, neighbors, colleagues, fellow parents from his kids' school; he'd give them a hug, listen to whatever was going on, and usually spin some story that helped them gain some perspective, draw some insight, or make a decision.

So when Bill stepped down as Intuit's CEO in 2000 (he remained as chairman until 2016) and was looking for his next challenge, John Doerr invited him to come to Kleiner Perkins, the venerable venture capital firm, and become a coach for its portfolio companies. Venture firms often have "entrepreneurs in residence," bright, usually young, technologists who work at the firms while they noodle over their next big idea. Why not have an executive in residence, John thought, someone who was seasoned in operations and strategy, to help the firm's startups through the ups and downs of growth (or lack thereof)? Bill agreed and settled into life on Sand Hill Road.

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\* Technically, Steve was the "interim CEO" of Apple from 1997 until January 2000, when he dropped "interim" from his title.