

# Matthew Kelly

Tom Peters' Cool Friend Interview – November 9, 2007



Matthew Kelly is an internationally acclaimed speaker and author and the founder and president of Floyd Consulting, a consulting firm founded on the belief that your organization can only become the-best-version-of itself if the people who drive your organization are striving to become the-best-version-of themselves®. Over the past decade, he has given more than 2,500 keynote presentations and seminars, and, in the process, spoken to three million people in fifty countries. Kelly has a passion for helping companies understand that developing their employees is the first step to achieving corporate goals, and he seems to effortlessly elevate and energize people to pursue the highest values of the human spirit and achieve their personal and

professional goals.

His books have sold more than one million copies and have appeared on the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Publisher's Weekly*, and numerous other best-seller lists. His titles include [\*The Rhythm of Life: Living Every Day with Passion and Purpose\*](#), and [\*The Seven Levels of Intimacy\*](#).

Bio adapted from [floydconsulting.com](http://floydconsulting.com).

Erik Hansen spoke to him about his latest book ([Tom called it magnificent!](#)) [\*The Dream Manager\*](#).

**tompeters.com** asks ...

**Matthew, what is a dream manager?**

**MK:** Essentially, we're all dream managers. We're dream managers to our friends, our spouses, our kids, as well as to the people we manage in the workplace. In a more formal sense, a dream manager is the ultimate life coach who sits down with an employee once a month and takes them through a process of learning to think strategically about their life and their career to better equip them to fulfill their personal and professional dreams.

## **Why do we need a dream manager?**

**MK:** As human beings we're driven by our dreams. I think there's a growing awareness that we have a turnover problem in corporate America. It's a big problem. Disengagement is probably the only problem larger than the turnover problem. A lot of employees quit and stay. So, they're disengaged on the inside, but they keep showing up to work and collecting a paycheck. These people are poisonous to an environment. They're absolutely toxic to a business. The most engaged employees are those who can see the connection between the work they do each day and their personal dreams. Dream Managers make that real.

## **Some studies show that 20 percent of those employees are actively engaged *against* you.**

**MK:** Exactly. Along with turnover and disengagement, corporate America and the corporate world, in general, are facing the onset of what many people have termed "the war for talent." Tom has pointed this out as well as anybody, and what we're calling "a war for talent" at the moment is nothing but a back-alley skirmish. When you take into account the retirement of the baby boomers and the growing intolerance for illegal immigration, we're going to have a labor shortage of monumental proportions here in the U.S. It's going to be very easy for good people to work wherever they want to work. We have an obligation to make our organizations attractive. The success of our businesses depends on it.

The most attractive thing to an employee is the belief that if they help your organization achieve its dreams, you will help them, in turn, achieve their dreams.

## **But, at the moment, nobody's talking in those terms, are they?**

**MK:** That's why I wrote the book. [Laughter]

## **When I saw your book, I thought it was a book about the ideal manager. But it's actually focused on dreams in a corporate context. At this point, the idea seems a bit out there.**

**MK:** The truth is, it's both. It is both a concept that is a little on the soft edge of things and a concept that is on the hard edge of things. The book is as much about being the ideal manager as it is about having a Dream Manager. Because if you want to effectively manage people, you must understand what their personal hopes, ambitions, and dreams are. It is impossible to effectively manage someone without a clear understanding of his or her dreams. People are driven by their dreams. People move in the direction of their dreams.

## **Yet it seems very difficult for a lot of people to vocalize their dreams. You seem to deal a lot with material dreams in the book. Maybe it's just my age, but I feel like material dreams don't really matter anymore. The more spiritual, the less tangible the dream is, the more interesting.**

**MK:** No question. But I think that is a testament to the fact that you've lived out some of what I would call your lower-level dreams. The first time you ask people to list their dreams, they tend to put together a shopping list and a travel book. But, as they begin to live a little bit more and experience some of those dreams, they begin to ask, "What are my legacy dreams? What are my character dreams? What are my spiritual dreams? What are my adventure dreams? What are my creative dreams?" Those are the higher level dreams.

But it's important to recognize that a lot of people have stopped dreaming. And if they've stopped dreaming in their own life, good luck trying to get them to subscribe to a dream that you have for your organization. It's simply unreasonable to expect people to do something for your business that they are not willing to do for their own lives.

Let me give you an example. You cannot hire someone to run your accounting department who doesn't balance his or her checkbook. If they're not going to take care of their own money, why would you hire them to take care of yours? We want people to think long-term and strategically about our business. But they don't think long-term or strategically about their lives. They spend more time planning next year's vacation than they do planning the next year of their lives.

It's unreasonable for us to expect that they would think and act differently toward our business than they do toward their lives. The Dream Manager and the Dream Manager Program teach people how to think strategically about their lives. It gets them dreaming again.

### **Why do people stop dreaming?**

**MK:** For some people it's because they were focused for a long time on one dream, they achieved it, and they never really dreamt another dream. For other people it's because they've had their heart broken by an unfulfilled dream, and they've never really recovered from it. Some people just get caught up in the hustle and bustle of life, and they stop dreaming.

If you can stimulate people to dream again in their personal life, they will be significantly more engaged in the process of organizational dreaming.

### **You've written a parable. It's fiction, so, of course, everything works out well in the end. Is this actually going on in companies as we speak?**

**MK:** Absolutely. We have clients all the way from small, privately held companies to Fortune 500 companies like Procter & Gamble and McDonald's. All of them have engaged us to begin this program in their companies.

### **What skills does a Dream Manager have?**

**MK:** Normally, when companies ask us to help them get a Dream Manager Program started for them, we implement a six- to nine-month pilot program with 30 to 50 of their people, utilizing our own Dream Managers. Once they're convinced that this program is going to deliver measurable results to their business, then we will help them find, hire, and train their own Dream Manager.

Ideally, a Dream Manager is someone who has strong competitive urges. The three qualities we look for are hungry, humble, and smart. We want people to be hungry in the sense that they have some ambition. We want them to be humble in the sense that a Dream Manager is not responsible for living the dreams, and shouldn't take the credit when people do live their dreams. We want them to be smart, not necessarily in the academic sense, but more street-smart.

We usually want someone who has a strong financial background because every dream has a financial component. Even if you say to me, "I want to spend more time with my kids or grandkids," well, you have to have the finances in place in order to make that happen. We look for someone who's a good listener; someone who can listen verbally and non-verbally. We want someone who is approachable, someone who can be trusted. We want someone who's good at appreciating and encouraging people.

And yet it has to be someone who, like all good managers, can be tough, but fair. When you ask people to reflect on their past and to describe their best boss, coach, or teacher, inevitably they say, "Tough, but fair."

**In dealing with dreams, you up the ante. If someone dreams a dream and despite having a Dream Manager there to shepherd it along, it doesn't happen, that's almost worse than not dreaming. Or, is it better to have dreamed and failed than not to have dreamed at all? You're setting up a very high level of expectation here.**

**MK:** No question. But at the same time, it's important to understand that it is not the Dream Manager's job to accomplish the dreams for the participant. It is a Dream Manager's job to faithfully present the program and to encourage the participant, to guide and steer the participant in the direction of the resources he or she might need. We want to create empowerment, not entitlement.

A bad Dream Manager gets too involved. A bad Dream Manager does too much. A bad Dream Manager crosses the line. Rather than encouraging, the bad Dream Manager actually does things that the participant should be doing for him- or herself. When we do that we create a spirit of entitlement which is poisonous to the human person.

**So is there somebody who's always monitoring the Dream Manager?**

**MK:** Absolutely. We're always training and re-training the Dream Managers. And we're constantly getting together in person or on conference calls, sharing our experiences. We're constantly learning new things.

**When did this Dream Manager idea first occur to you? What prompted it?**

**MK:** Maybe six or seven years ago. I was out playing golf with a friend of mine who owns a janitorial company. He was telling me about his turnover problem; 400 percent is the industry standard. That seemed insane to me.

The first thing we did was put out a survey asking his employees why people were leaving. The book evolved from that. The book is fiction, but it's really a conglomeration of our experiences in a dozen companies actually doing the program. We've taken lots of stories from our clients and put them into one story.

**Why does this have to be such a revelation? Something as simple as asking people why they're leaving should be obvious. There's some mistaken conventional wisdom that executives should know all the answers. They shouldn't, but apparently they feel as if they should.**

**MK:** Exactly. It's amazing. Before we start the program with a company, we usually get the executive team together, and do a one- or two-day offsite. These people are the best of the best, the brightest in their field, making lots of money, and 70 percent of them have not sat down to think about what their personal dreams are, for a decade, sometimes multiple decades. To see that process begin in a person is staggering.

Because at the end of the day, Erik, everybody has dreams. At the executive level, or the manager level, we spend so much time focused on a vision for our organizations, it's amazing how little time we spend on a vision for our lives.

**I really like this notion of being responsible for each other's dreams. At least half of this boils down to people dealing with their families. I think there's a guy in your story who goes back and has a real sit-down with his wife and gets reacquainted with her dreams. We lose touch with our own dreams. We lose touch with the dreams of the people around us. That seems to be the tragic part.**

**MK:** Yes.

**Now, let's talk about one of your dreams. You mentioned doing the [500-mile El Camino de Santiago walk](#). Can you tell us a little bit about it and why you did it?**

**MK:** The Camino is a 500-mile walk from southern France, across the Pyrenees, and west across northern Spain. I first heard about it in the mid-90s, and I was intrigued by it. But I never really thought I'd do it. I have a pretty busy life; I'm on the road 200 days a year. Toward the end of 2004 I decided, "Hey, next summer I'm going to take a month off and I'm going to make this walk." I walked 20 to 25 miles a day for about 23 days. No iPod, no cell phone, no internet. I was literally gone from the world for a month. It was an extraordinary experience. It brought a lot of clarity to me.

Sometimes the only way to slow down is to stop.

**Didn't the Camino start off as a religious pilgrimage? I'm guessing a number of people still do it for that reason, but all sorts of people are doing it for other reasons.**

**MK:** Yes, I was amazed at the diversity among the people walking the path, but the thing that amazed me the most is that the most populous demographic out there was 50-year old women walking it on their own.

**I wonder why? Perhaps it's a result of the empty nest or divorce. We know from our [Cool Friend Marti Barletta](#) that they certainly have the money to do it. Boomer women can afford to take a month off to do something like this. It's a major commitment, isn't it?**

**MK:** No question.

**That's interesting. They're looking for clarity in their lives.**

**MK:** Aren't we all? [Laughter] It really was life changing for me. I had wanted to write *The Dream Manager* for three or four years. For whatever reason, I had not been getting around to it. I came back from the walk, sat down, and wrote *The Dream Manager* in three days.

**That's fantastic. What was the effect of your absence on your company?**

**MK:** Phenomenal question. My absence from my company empowered people to do all the stuff that I should have been getting out of the way of for years. I came back and realized that I have a really competent staff. And if you leave them alone to do their thing, they get it done. Did they make some mistakes while I was gone? Yeah, but probably only three percent of the time. Nothing diabolical. The greatest gift of the experience was that I came back liberated. I realized that they can do their jobs; I don't have to watch over them. It's my job to set direction, and once I do, if I have hired competent people I should get out of the way and let them get on with it. Be available to them, but not meddle with them.

**That's great. You read all these horror stories about executives going off on vacation but calling back into the office every morning. The people in the office just get pissed off because they're thinking, "Enough already, we're adults, we can do the work." By taking a leave for that length of time you indicated that you really trust your staff.**

**MK:** Exactly.

**Your company is called Floyd Consulting. Why Floyd?**

**MK:** [Laughter] Well, Floyd was my father's first name. Floyd is my middle name. And we use it as an acronym for Finally Living Out Your Dreams.

**Nice. I'm not usually that keen about parable books. What I like about your book is the section at the back where you have a laundry list of ways to implement the ideas in the book. What caused you to put that section in the book?**

**MK:** I didn't want the book to be an infomercial for our consulting services. I wanted people to be able to read the book and if they wanted to call us and have us formally implement the program, fantastic. But, if they didn't want to, or they didn't have the money to call on us, I wanted them to be able to start implementing some of these things in their lives and in their businesses the very next day.

**What would you tell someone who has lost touch with their dreams and is reading this interview, but hasn't read the book yet? What's the first thing they should do to get back in touch with their dreams?**

**MK:** Sit down and put together a list of 100 dreams. It will be hard work at first, but take a look at the 12 areas: physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, psychological, material, professional, financial, creative, adventure, legacy, and character. Essentially, if you come up with eight dreams in each of those areas, you've got your list of 100 dreams.

If you simply write your list of 100 dreams, put it in a drawer, and never look at it ever again, that one experience is life changing.

The next step is to start a conversation with the people in your life about their dreams, whether it's your spouse, your children, or the people you work with. You have to be careful with that. It will freak them out if you spring it on them out of nowhere. To ease into it, try saying, "If there were no limits on time or money, where are seven places you'd love to go in the next seven years?" And then you both make a list and talk about it. See which ones match up and which ones are very different. I think that's an easy way to start that conversation because lots of people dream of traveling. I think it's a great way to ease into the conversation.

**Excellent. Thank you. It's been great fun talking with you.**

**MK:** Thanks, Erik, you're very welcome.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Tom Peters Company.  
All Rights Reserved.