

# Foreword

I am surprised and flattered that my close friend and distinguished colleague chose to dedicate his new book to me. I am especially pleased that my question to Dr. Jagdish Sheth all those years ago proved to be the impetus for *The Self-Destructive Habits of Good Companies*—one of the most insightful business books to appear in some time.

My friendship with Jag (as he is known to all) goes back many years, as does my debt to his wise counsel. Jag was a trusted confidant of mine, and of BellSouth's, during years of considerable turmoil in the telecommunications industry, and he helped us challenge the status quo business beliefs that followed our company as we exited our monopoly ancestry. Jag helped us challenge the thinking of senior leaders as well as middle managers and that work influenced the culture that emerged in a competitive BellSouth.

Of course, BellSouth is but one of many companies for whom Jag has provided his invaluable expertise. The list of distinguished companies that have called upon his help is a long one and spans three continents—North America, Europe, and Asia. I'm constantly amazed at his frenetic consulting and speaking schedule, yet he still finds time to teach some of the most popular courses at Emory University's Goizueta Business School, where he holds the Charles H. Kellstadt chair. The university and the community were fortunate when Jag decided to make Atlanta his home.

This new book (the latest of several, by the way) quickly reveals the breadth of Jag's expertise and the depth of his insights. For obvious reasons, I was particularly interested in the chapter entitled "Complacency: Success Breeds Failure," especially about the complacency that results "when your past success came via a regulated monopoly." Reading again about the forced break-up of AT&T in 1984 reminded me of the painful lessons that companies in many industries were forced to learn thanks to deregulation—lessons which Jag spells out in no uncertain terms. I must say I

had to laugh when Jag's account reminded me that, after the break-up, AT&T at first wanted to rename itself American Bell International, until Judge Harold Greene intervened. Jag writes that he still has the tie that Randall Tobias gave him with the new ABI logo on it. "Hold onto it," Tobias told Jag. "It'll be a keepsake one day."

I also particularly enjoyed the chapter, "The Territorial Impulse: Culture Conflicts and Turf Wars." It's no secret that teamwork has always been a mantra of mine, and Jag's metaphor of the company structured as "a complex of 50-story office towers, connected only by common areas at the bottom and the top" speaks volumes about the way many businesses are run today.

So it is in chapter after chapter that Jag analyzes companies like Digital Equipment, GM, Firestone, and Zenith. Jag's dozens of illustrations are always incisive, but the book wouldn't be complete without, at the end of each chapter, his "warning signs" of each bad habit and, most helpful, his step-by-step approach to breaking each habit before it does its damage.

*The Self-Destructive Habits of Good Companies* is entertaining, instructive, and tremendously valuable. I could not recommend it more strongly.

—F. Duane Ackerman, Chairman Emeritus, BellSouth Corporation