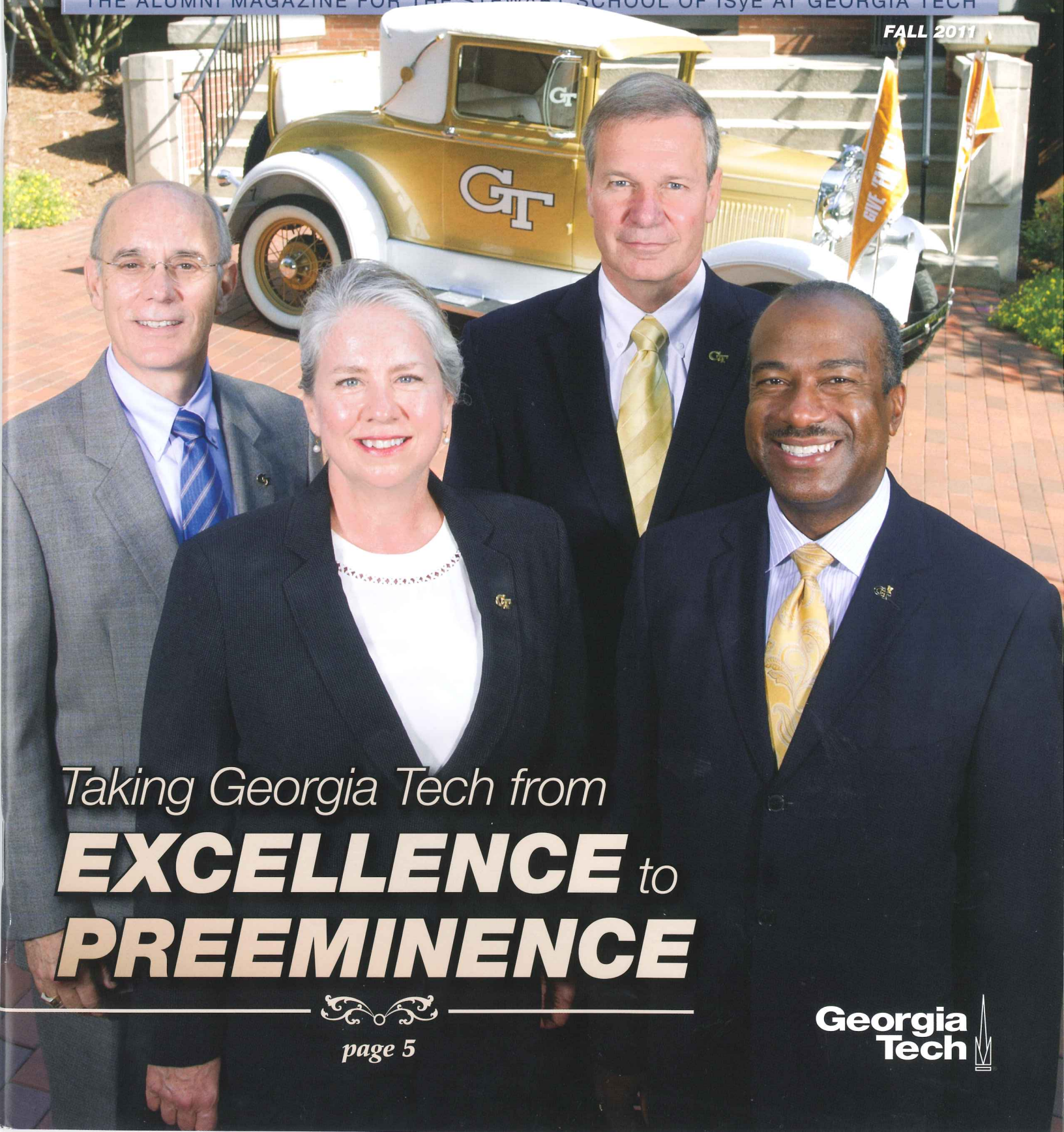


INDUSTRIAL & SYSTEMS ENGINEERING

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Taking Georgia Tech from
EXCELLENCE to
PREEMINENCE



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Georgia
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ALUMNI PERSPECTIVE

Bill George on Authentic Leadership

Bill George (BSIE 1964, Honorary PhD 2008), professor of management practice at Harvard Business School, is the author of five best-selling books: *7 Lessons for Leading in Crisis*, *True North: Discovering your Authentic Leadership*, *Finding Your True North* (workbook), *Authentic Leadership*, and the recently released *True North Groups: A Powerful Path to Personal and Leadership Development*. At Harvard, George teaches leadership and leadership development.

George is the former chairman and CEO of Medtronic and currently serves on the boards of ExxonMobil and Goldman Sachs. He is also a trustee of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the World Economic Forum USA. He has made frequent appearances on television and radio, and his articles have appeared in numerous publications. He has been named to the “Top 25 Business Leaders of the Past 25 Years” by PBS.

George received his bachelor’s in industrial engineering with high honors from Georgia Tech, his MBA with high distinction from Harvard University, where he was a Baker Scholar, and honorary PhDs from Georgia Tech, St. Thomas University, and Bryant University.

In 1999, he and his wife Penny founded the George Family Foundation as a way to foster wholeness in mind, body, spirit, and community and to further the development of authentic leaders. Their interests include integrative medicine, leadership, spirituality, and community.

The Georges, who reside in Minneapolis, MN, also support academia at Georgia Tech through fellowships and an endowed chair in the area of health systems.

What are some characteristics you believe every leader should possess?

BG: Leadership is about character, not characteristics. I could give you a list of characteristics that are desirable, but I could also show you leaders who have those characteristics and are poor leaders.

In 2006, we conducted research on 125 outstanding leaders asking them this same question. What we learned was that these leaders were not interested in talking about characteristics. They wanted to discuss life stories and their crucibles, and how they can stay true to their values. This research was the basis for my book, *True North*. Your “true north” is what you believe at your deepest level—your beliefs, values, and principles. The essence of leadership is captured in your character.

What are some frequent mistakes you witness in leaders?

BG: One mistake is when leaders deviate from their true north. It is quite easy when things are going well to practice good values. It is far more difficult and important to stay true when things do not go your way. A good question to ask yourself is: are you true to your values when the pressure is on?

Closely associated with that is putting your own personal interest ahead of the organization for which you are responsible because you want to get ahead or look good. Another mistake is when leaders do not own responsibility and blame others instead.

What advice would you give students who want to prepare for future leadership opportunities?

BG: Go lead! There are myriad opportunities on campus to lead, whether at the graduate or undergraduate level. I had tremendous opportunities when I was at Tech. In my freshman and sophomore years, I lost some elections, until some friends helped me get on track. After that, I ended up leading many student organizations at Tech. I learned a lot from those experiences, both in being rejected and in landing leadership roles. When I was at Medtronic, some of those early leadership experiences on campus kept coming back to me—the mistakes

I made, what I'd learned from them, and how to build genuine relationships with people. In my courses at Harvard, students learn to lead through a lot of personal sharing about their life stories, their crucibles, and their leadership experiences.

What advice would you give someone going into a leadership position for the first time?

BG: I would advise them to learn everything they can about the experience and to engage in it 100 percent. Don't look ahead to your next job, but make it a habit to learn from the people around you, especially from your subordinates. Take some risks, and ask for help when it is needed.

It is extremely helpful to have a support group of peers around you, a true north group. This is a group of trusted peers with whom you communicate on a regular basis. When you face dilemmas and difficult problems, you can take them to your group. They will probably not give you magic answers. However, they will be able to give you insights and help you uncover your blind spots which are essential in effective leadership.

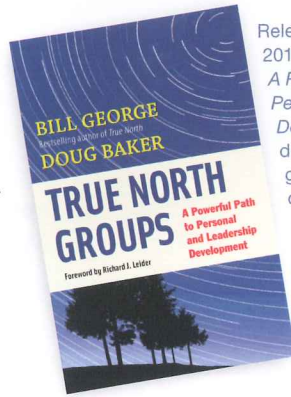
How do you select people to participate in your true north group?

BG: You can start with a group of trusted peers. These groups are a two-way street, as you have to be willing to offer to them as much as they offer to you. You select a group of people willing to be open, honest in giving and receiving feedback, willing to share openly, and willing to be authentic in their dealings and their relationships. My most recent book, *True North Groups: A Powerful Path to Personal and Leadership Development*, is dedicated to setting up such a group or enabling your current group to have deeper and more meaningful discussions about the vital questions of life.

What are you doing to ensure you continue to grow and develop as a leader?

BG: I continue to learn every day. My role shifted completely when I completed my term at Medtronic in 2002. Since then, I have been focusing on helping people become more effective leaders, from college students up to CEOs. I continue to learn a great

deal from my students even though they may be thirty years younger than I. I learn from new CEOs and the challenges they face. These days, I'm learning how to lead better by learning directly from other leaders. At Medtronic, I learned the importance of learning from my subordinates. Now, I'm expanding my knowledge and focusing on learning from other leaders.



Released in September 2011, *True North Groups: A Powerful Path to Personal and Leadership Development* is dedicated to setting up a group or enabling your current group to have deeper and more meaningful discussions about the vital questions of life.

Have you found a vast difference in leadership styles among universities?

BG: I have found dramatic differences among academic institutions. Essentially, it comes down to two questions: does the faculty genuinely want to learn from its students and help them exchange knowledge amongst themselves or is the faculty principally oriented toward transferring knowledge to students? I see many academic institutions where the latter is the case. This is a missed opportunity. Great academics learn from their students every day.

The second question gets to the nature of the world in the twenty-first century. Does the faculty work together across disciplinary lines? We live in a world of extraordinarily complex and intractable problems that are not subject to single-disciplinary solutions. Solving these problems requires that people work together across disciplinary lines. Although we hail scientific breakthroughs like sequencing of the human genome, without multidisciplinary approaches it will take decades to translate that into benefits for mankind. This is one of the things Georgia Tech does very well.

How can universities and businesses work together to bridge the gap from academic research to technology transfer?

BG: Some academic institutions are far too preoccupied with research grants and with publication of knowledge. They have not spent nearly enough time looking at how this knowledge is utilized in real-world situations. I think by engaging with business, academics can learn how business operates and how it uses information. Also, academics should consider how they approach businesses when it comes to their theories. I think it is best to come from a place of testing their theories instead of getting businesses to adopt them. Great academic institutions seek out businesses to work with to learn what they are doing and then see if they can take those specific cases and translate them to be useful to many other organizations.

Often businesses are too focused on achieving measurable results and are unwilling to take the disruptive or radical solutions that may be needed to improve performance. Academic institutions can play leading roles by providing test beds for radical innovation. We've seen that take place in medical technology. An example is the Georgia Tech-Emory research collaboration. I've seen it in the computing field where academic institutions were way ahead in spawning innovations like Google, Facebook, and Apple. That's why business and industry should be hungry to work with academic institutions.

What are some ways that ISyE could lead more effectively?

BG: I think the role of industrial and systems engineering is to become the great integrator and the systems thinker to guide us to those breakthrough ideas that will move society forward. It is essential that we solve critical issues today by looking at the whole system, something that is not being done in healthcare, for example.

I see ISyE as the integrating force throughout Georgia Tech. Every student at Tech, no matter the discipline, needs to have that broader approach to systems thinking and should be required to take courses in industrial and systems engineering. It is the only way we are going to be able to solve the critical issues we face today in healthcare, logistics, energy, the environment, and manufacturing.