

# THE SMALL THINGS

10 Indispensable Qualities to Living &  
Leading with Excellence

GILBERT A. ANG'ANA, PhD



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# PROLOGUE

## *What Does Excellence Mean to You?*

Over the years, I have posed this question to countless leaders across boardrooms, classrooms, villages, and global platforms. The answers vary, yet common themes emerge: high performance, attention to detail, going the extra mile, achieving goals, and making an impact. But beneath these surface responses lies a deeper, more provocative truth: *excellence isn't merely about doing more or being the best. It's about becoming whole.* This is what I attempt to share through this book.

Is this just another book on leadership?

That question lingered as I sat down to write. My answer? A resounding *yes* - but not in the way you might expect.

We live in an era saturated with leadership books. Each promises the secrets to influence, effectiveness, and success. Many offer valuable frameworks and helpful strategies. They equip readers to climb ladders, optimize systems, and drive performance. But amidst this sea of insights, something vital is missing. In my four decades of working across personal, organisational, and global leadership spaces - from founding

Accent Leadership Group to advising CEOs, mentoring public sector leaders, and championing collaborative leadership and governance, I've observed a sobering reality:

Despite progress in leadership, we are experiencing a profound crisis of excellence. Talented individuals are burning out. Visionary leaders are plagued by self-doubt and chronic fatigue. Organisations are brimming with potential but shackled by toxic cultures and short-term thinking. We've achieved more than ever, yet fulfilment remains elusive. In nearly every space I am involved in, I hear the same question repeated in different ways:

*"How do you do what you do with such excellence?"*

Followed by observations like:

*"You are the most efficient and excellent person I have ever met."*

*"I don't know how you manage all this with such calmness and grace."*

The truth is, I didn't always have this rhythm. I had to learn, unlearn, practice, and progress through failures, fatigue, and moments of deep introspection. Those moments, and the relentless pursuit of becoming better, not just doing better,

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planted the seeds for this book. Not because I have all the answers, but because I have been on this journey. I've lived the tension between ambition and meaning. I've battled the temptation to settle for "good enough." I've walked the road from burnout to purpose. What I've discovered is this: *Excellence isn't an act. It's a way of being.*

### Why This Book? Why Now?

For nearly two decades, I've trained, coached, and consulted with thousands of leaders: from international boardrooms to government halls, from entrepreneurs and executives to civil society leaders and students entering their calling. I've journeyed with leaders standing at the peak of influence, only to find them quietly breaking under the weight of isolation, confusion, or misaligned success. I've also encountered brilliant young minds brimming with ideas but unsure how to align potential with purpose. What stands between them and greatness is often not ability, but rhythm. Not talent, but intention. Not opportunity, but an internal architecture of excellence.

At the organisational level, I've seen toxic politics suffocate innovation, unethical appointments derail progress, and leadership pipelines crumble for lack of clarity and character. Many organisations chase quarterly wins while ignoring the

deeper, sustainable virtues that nurture long-term excellence—trust, truth, and transformation. Globally, I’ve witnessed leaders, particularly in public service and politics, gripped by fear, power-hoarding, and short-termism. We are desperate for a *new breed of leadership* - one that isn’t intoxicated by status but anchored in significance. One that measures success not by what is gained, but by what is given, built, and passed on.

### A New Paradigm for Excellence

This book is not another pep talk, a compilation of catchy quotes or corporate clichés. It is a blueprint for those tired of spinning their wheels. It is a call to arms for those who sense a greater life: one marked not by busyness but by brilliance, not by popularity but by purposeful impact. At the heart of this book are *10 Indispensable Qualities to Living and Leading with Excellence* - a set of small, intentional, practical, and transformative commitments (things) that equip you to live and lead with lasting influence. These qualities are not abstract ideals. They are forged from lived experience, robust research, and my personal and professional leadership journey across continents, cultures, and causes. They form a rhythm - a cadence of living with clarity, ownership, mastery, and legacy.

This book is not just for leaders, CEOs, or executives. It’s for anyone who wants to rise above mediocrity. It’s for the young

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graduate seeking to build with purpose. For the mid-level manager stuck in a cycle of routine. For the visionary entrepreneur unsure how to scale impact without losing soul. For the parent, the policymaker, the pastor, the public servant - all who carry the sacred responsibility of influence.

This is your invitation. My mission is simple: I will push you off the cliff *so you can discover that you were always meant to fly*.

I embody this mission in every aspect of my life – whether at home with my children and spouse, in various community service groups and discussions, within the corporations I've worked with or consulted, in the boardrooms I frequent, or in the consulting environments that span from academic settings with my students to the organisations I teach and coach. My story remains consistent throughout.

Sometimes, I jump with you. Sometimes, I push and follow you down to help. Other times, I leap ahead so you can see that you can too. But one thing is sure: growth demands the courage to jump. That spirit is captured in this book you are holding or reading online. It's the small decisions, the tiny cliffs, the near jumps that shape our destiny.

*The Small Things: 10 Indispensable Qualities to Living and Leading with Excellence* is a compelling guide that explores

how seemingly minor habits, choices, and attitudes can profoundly shape a life of excellence. Grounded in practical and real-life insights and case studies, the book unpacks ten essential qualities that elevate both personal and leadership effectiveness. Through reflective narratives and actionable principles, I challenge readers to embrace the power of the “small things” as foundational to sustainable excellence in every sphere of life.

If you’ve ever felt that there is *more* to your potential than your performance reflects...If you’re done chasing success without significance...If you’re ready to shift from sporadic growth to sustained greatness... Then this book is for you. More than that, this book is about you. It’s about helping you reclaim your power, realign with your purpose, and reimagine what excellence looks like in your life, work, relationships, and world. It’s about building from the inside out - because the most excellent results come from the most excellent souls.

*Are You Ready?* This book is for you—the individual leader ready to stretch beyond comfort and the organisational leader determined to spark real transformation.

Excellence is not about having all the answers. It’s about asking better questions. It is not about competing with others but about becoming the best version of yourself. Not about temporary applause, but eternal impact. This is not a theory. It is a way of

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life. This is not just a book. It is a movement. A *radical call to excellence* in a world that desperately needs it. So again, I ask you:

What does excellence mean to you? More importantly, what will it mean because of you? Your journey to excellence starts with the small things.

**Your Friend**

**Dr. Gilbert A. Ang'ana**

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Gilbert Ang'ana is a seasoned Leadership, Governance, and Policy Consultant and Advisor, renowned for his transformative work shaping leaders across sectors in Africa and beyond. As the Founder and Executive Director of Accent Leadership Group and Accent Global Initiative (Think Tank), he equips leaders to influence beyond positional authority, championing values-driven leadership, institutional integrity, and collaborative governance.

A Policy Leader Fellow at the European University Institute, Dr. Ang'ana combines academic rigour, practical experience, and a heart for community impact. His leadership journey has spanned top corporate organisations, boardrooms, communities, academia, and global policy platforms, where he advocates for collaborative leadership and governance among other purposeful leadership values.

Author of multiple influential books (such as *Radical Leadership*, *Purposeful at HEART*, and *Engaged & Productive*), Dr. Ang'ana is passionate about unlocking potential in others, one conversation at a time, through coaching and teaching. When he is not writing, coaching, or consulting, he invests in

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mentoring next-generation leaders and amplifying Africa's voice on global governance tables.

In this book, *The Small Things*, he offers a soul-stirring reflection and call to action, reminding us that genuine excellence is not found in grand gestures but in the small, consistent choices that shape a life well-lived and a legacy worth leaving.

*Thanks for reading this extracted Chapter!*

If this was useful for you, follow me for more updates on when the book will be officially unveiled at

[www.accentleadershipgroup.com/resources](http://www.accentleadershipgroup.com/resources)

Thanks, and good luck!

**Dr. Gilbert A. Ang'ana**