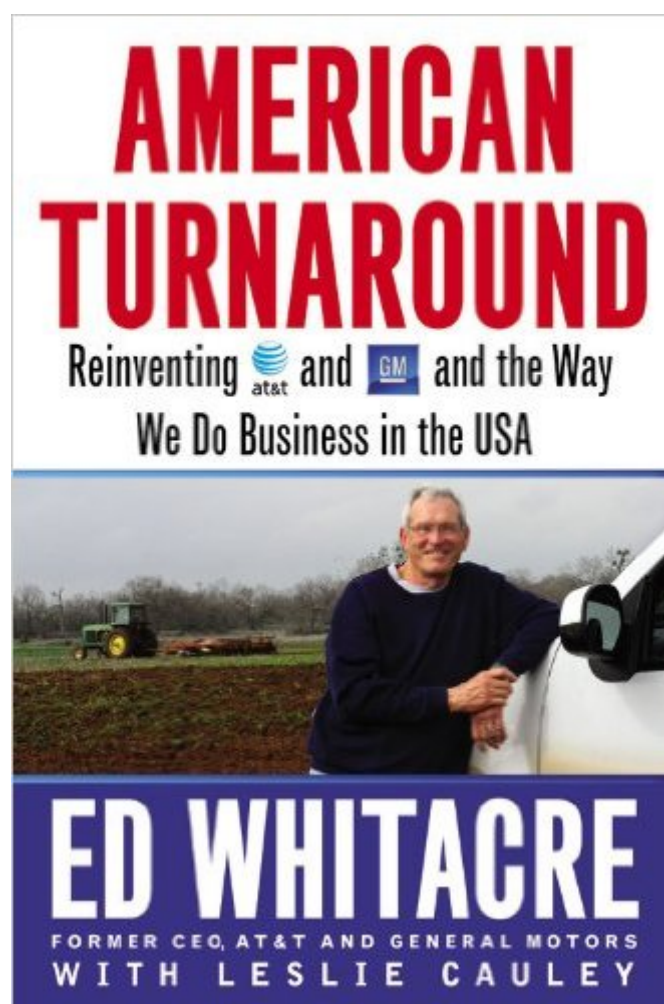


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# American Turnaround: Reinventing AT&T And GM And The Way We Do Business In The USA



## Synopsis

Ed Whitacre is credited with taking over the corporate reins at General Motors (GM) when the automotive manufacturer was on the brink of bankruptcy during 2009 and turned the company around in magnificent fashion. In this business memoir, the native Texan explores his unique management style, business acumen and patriotism. It was President Obama who reached out to Ed Whitacre to come out of retirement and take over GM in 2009. A down-to-earth, no-nonsense Texas native with a distinctive Texas twang in his voice, Whitacre was reluctant to come out of retirement to work at GM. But Whitacre is that rare CEO with great charisma and extraordinary management instincts. And when he got to Detroit, he started to whittle down the corporate bureaucracy right away - and got GM back on track in record time. Before being pulled out of retirement to run GM by Obama, Ed Whitacre had spent his entire corporate career in the telecom business, where he ultimately ended up running AT&T.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ed Whitacre is probably a fascinating man. Clearly very smart, and hard working. His management style is to instill clear focus and accountability. It is what he did at AT&T and again, at GM. I read a description of the book, and also an excerpt, which had me looking forward to the book, which I ordered from. What disappointed me about these amazing stories, was their brevity. Maybe he is just not a natural storyteller. It seems he did not want to make anyone else look bad, -except he couldn't avoid it with the president of GM that he had to replace. I guess I just expected more. I read the entire book in one sitting. The section on GM, I had already read most of in the excerpt. Maybe it

is just a reflection of his management style. View the big picture, don't get caught up in the minutiae. One other thing I will point out, I hoped to read more about the interaction between GM and the government. As he points out, there wasn't any - and so, no story to tell. So, it is worth a read, if you are interested in management and business, but look elsewhere for great depth and management ideas.

I am a recent retiree who worked at the company during Ed Whitacre's entire tenure as CEO of Southwestern Bell/SBC/AT&T. As such, I was mostly interested in reading Mr. Whitacre's description of how he "reinvented" AT&T before moving to GM. I was sorely disappointed that there was very little in this book about the decisions Ed made during his time at AT&T. Other than a couple of anecdotes from his early career at Southwestern Bell and a discussion of the move to San Antonio, Mr. Whitacre didn't write a thing about his strategy while at AT&T. For example, nothing was written about the decisions to buy Pacific Telesis, SNET, Ameritech, and BellSouth. While he did mention that he decided to purchase AT&T despite the opposition of all of his other senior managers, Ed didn't explain why everyone else was opposed to his move. In addition, Mr. Whitacre didn't discuss the major initiatives during his tenure (e.g., U-Verse, Project Pronto) or some of the failed acquisitions (e.g., West Midlands Cable Communications, Hauser Communications). In short, I honestly don't know how Mr. Whitacre reinvented AT&T even after reading this book. As for Mr. Whitacre's tenure at GM, it appears the process used to reinvent GM consisted of setting up an organization chart, firing the interim CEO, making Ed the new CEO, eating at the cafeteria with other GM employees, making unannounced visits to various GM sites, and promoting a couple of senior managers to executive positions. Nothing was written about other important topics such as changes to union work rules or improvements to car quality/styling. In short, this book was lacking in both details and insight.

Homespun, enjoyable, insightful. The surprising rise of Ed Whitacre is only eclipsed by the tale of renewal and management approaches he applied in taking on the role of Chairman and then CEO of General Motors following the company's bankruptcy. While much of the product management and market approaches were underway at the time of the filing, and Whitacre can only take credit for not derailing the progress (which in and of itself is an accomplishment), Whitacre's insights into management and culture - as well as his Texas humility and directness - are great learning points. A good book (and even better on audio - as read by the author).

I read this book last weekend and sort of enjoyed it, though it's mostly evaporated from my mind already. This is basically a condensed diary of a guy who spent four decades as AT&T's CEO, then ten months as GM's (if you're a car person like me and mainly interested in the second part, you can skip chapters 4 through 11). He spends a lot of time talking about himself, his Texas upbringing, his parents and engineering education, etc, then jumps into the chronology of his time at each company. Assuming this is all honest, he seems like a pretty decent, logical guy who writes well -- which makes the reading go down easy. He speaks of some fundamental problems at GM like the "matrix structure" that made every decision take a million times longer than it had to and absolved everyone of responsibility, and of how the temporary CEO he replaced wasn't doing anything to change the culture. I wish he'd expanded on more points like these; most of the pages were dedicated to retelling the basic events of 2009-10 (already familiar to anyone who follows the news) or his opinions about people management, so in the end, you don't learn much. Also, despite explicit statements crediting the employees under him, the book's very title kind of implies he was the one who saved GM. Uh, not quite: GM's turnaround started in 2007, the year they suddenly started making good cars, and also the year they negotiated a far more advantageous labor/wage deal with the United Auto Workers (starting new hires at \$14/hour instead of \$28). The decision to hack off their four most useless brands (Saturn, Pontiac, Hummer, Saab), the \$50 billion in loans+bailouts, and the bankruptcy thing deserve most of the rest of the credit. Seems to me like the foundations for GM's turnaround were well in place by the time he set foot in the door at the end of 2009. Oh well, skim through it if you're bored.

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