

Mission-Driven

An Interview with Frank Sloatman, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Snowflake, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Frank Sloatman currently serves as Chairman and CEO at Snowflake. He has more than 25 years of experience as an entrepreneur and executive in the enterprise software industry. Sloatman served as CEO and President of ServiceNow from 2011 to 2017, taking the organization from around \$100 million in revenue, through an IPO, to \$1.4 billion. Prior to that, he served as President of the Backup Recovery Systems Division at EMC following an acquisition of Data Domain Corporation/Data Domain, Inc., where he served as the Chief Executive Officer and President, leading the company through an IPO to its acquisition by EMC for \$2.4 billion. Sloatman holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in economics from the Netherlands School of Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam.



Frank Sloatman

COMPANY BRIEF Snowflake (snowflake.com) enables every organization to mobilize their data with Snowflake's Data Cloud. Snowflake's customers use the Data Cloud to unite siloed data, discover and securely share data, and execute diverse analytic workloads. Wherever data or users live, Snowflake delivers a single data experience that spans multiple clouds and geographies. Thousands of customers across many industries, including 223 of the 2021 Fortune 500 as of October 31, 2021, use Snowflake's Data Cloud to power their businesses.

How do you describe Snowflake's mission?

Snowflake's mission is the Data Cloud. A Data Cloud is a global orbit of data where data can be analyzed, enriched and broadly accessed. A Data Cloud has not existed in the history of computing. Unlike computing infrastructure and enterprise applications which have been massively scaling and consolidating in the cloud, data continues to be highly fragmented, proliferated and difficult to access. The ability to enrich data from any source and/or location enables data scientists to discern data relationships which in turn can be used for prediction.

The Data Cloud also has to enable a broad array of workloads so that customers do not have to export, copy and move data, and then go elsewhere for workload execution. So, our mission is to broadly enable the data cloud with options that span the workload spectrum.

How has Snowflake's business evolved and how do you define the Snowflake difference?

I joined Snowflake in early 2019. The company had done well focusing on modernizing legacy analytical workloads and moving them to the cloud. Cloud scale combined with Snowflake's revolutionary architecture yielded incredible performance breakthroughs which fueled its growth trajectory. While this worked great as an entry strategy, we could not stay there indefinitely. We subsequently evolved to a Data Cloud strategy which combined Snowflake's legendary workflow performance with unfettered access to data. Each customer, and industry, would have incarnations and instantiations of their unique data relationships comprising their data cloud.

The Snowflake difference is a software architecture redesigned and reimagined for cloud scale computing. Aside from stellar performance, it solved the data access and sharing problem through a frictionless and zero latency approach. Data is the beating heart of the modern enterprise and Snowflake is the technology that enables it.

How did Snowflake adapt its business to address the challenges caused by the pandemic and how proud are you to see the resilience of your team during this challenging time?

Snowflake did not miss a beat as a function of the pandemic. One day in March 2020 we vacated our offices worldwide and the next day we resumed our operations using the same video conferencing platforms everybody else used. We were already a fully cloud hosted enterprise without data centers or any on-site equipment which made things easier. Our people adapted and adjusted admirably to this new dynamic. We never slowed down on growth, and we even took the company public in 2020 without ever hitting the road to sell the offering. The Snowflake IPO was billed as the largest software IPO in history at the time.

No doubt our employees suffered Zoom fatigue during the day, juggled kids and school and missed the interpersonal interactions of our offices, but they never let that get in the way of doing their very best for Snowflake.

You have a new book, *Amp It Up*. What interested you in writing the book and what are the key messages you wanted to convey?

I had written a book in 2010 to share the experiences at an earlier company called Data Domain. I joined Data Domain in 2003. We took it public on NASDAQ in 2007, and it was acquired by EMC, now Dell Technologies, in 2009. I was pleasantly surprised by the reaction – many readers clutched it like a combat manual for entrepreneurs. It was meaningful to them to hear from a fellow traveler in pointed, unvarnished terms.

Amp It Up adds the next 10 years when I served as CEO of ServiceNow and Snowflake. The book is a Snowflake production, and any proceeds will be used for charitable purposes. As before, I feel a responsibility to share experiences that from many accounts can help leaders of all sorts. A book is an efficient and scalable method to do just that. I could not possibly accommodate the constant onslaught of requests for speaking engagements, meetings and events while I hold down a demanding day job as CEO of Snowflake. I do some of that with business schools and VC firms as well, but the book has to serve a broader audience.

I wrote an article on LinkedIn with the same "Amp It Up" title in 2018 which received many views and comments, so we decided to expand it and turn that into a book. The key *Amp It Up* message is that organizations have significant room up on performance by eliminating the slack that tends to amply exist in organizations. Things can get done better and faster by amping up the urgency, energy, pace and focus. It doesn't require new talent, fancy consultants or strategy changes. You literally can start this today. Every meeting, e-mail, interaction and moment is an opportunity to amp it up.

What do you see as the keys to a successful transformation of an organization and how critical is the right leadership mindset to driving true change?

The right leadership is the only way to successfully transform an organization. Becoming a high functioning organization is within most people's reach but you need to amp up your mind set. Insist and demand that we aim higher, move faster, develop clear mission posture and awareness, and narrow the focus on what matters. There are many other aspects so consider this as a journey you would embark on. While I have done a few of these, I am still on the journey every day myself.

Will you discuss your 5 steps to rapid growth and meaningful change?

Amp It Up tees up these principles:

Raise Your Standards: Too often, our daily existence feels like going through the motions, checking boxes, getting things off our desk. Good enough has become the standard. It sucks the life out of organizations. It doesn't take that much more mental energy to raise the bar. Expect and demand that we're excited and thrilled about what we're doing. The standard is not "passable." It should be what the late Steve Jobs called "insanely great." Try applying that standard on a daily basis.

Align Your People: The lack of alignment in organizations is everywhere because it doesn't just happen by osmosis. Humans are not known for pulling on the same oar in the same direction. If you've ever seen five-year-olds playing soccer, you know what that looks like. A lack of alignment results in friction, low productivity, marginal progress, and becomes exponentially more pronounced as organizations grow in numbers.

Narrow Your Focus: Most organizations don't have much orientation. They try to progress with a million things to do, a mile wide and an inch deep. It feels like swimming in glue, moving like molasses. Narrow the plane of attack. Instead of moving in parallel, sequence the priority. Figure out what needs to happen first, now, and what doesn't at all. Park everything else on the backburner. Take things off people's plates instead of putting more stuff on. The energy and pace will pick up immediately.

Pick Up The Pace: Absent leadership, people will move at a glacial pace. Ever seen the inside of a California DMV? There is no purpose, no direction, no urgency. Almost everybody has room up on tempo because they naturally slow down to a trickle. Start compressing time frames. Question and challenge timelines at every turn. It's actually quite easy because most people do not know why they are timelining things a certain way. They are after comfort, not purpose.

Transform Your Strategy: Most of *Amp It Up* is execution-centric but there obviously is a strategic vector as well. The issue is that execution comes first. You cannot transform strategy without optimizing execution because it is impossible to know what is ailing. Why transform strategy when you are merely a lousy executer? You will become a much better strategist as you become a better operator because it will sort and magnify the issues properly. Most problems tend to be execution-related but humans prefer to tweak strategy instead, especially in places like Silicon Valley where strategy talk is some kind of high-minded parlor game. You can go far with world-class execution whereas you will go nowhere without it, no matter how brilliant your strategy.

Amp It Up expands on these principles and uses the examples and learning at Data Domain, ServiceNow and Snowflake to illustrate the ideas.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

I describe my management focus as "mission-driven." The mission creates constant focus and context to everything we do, and helps us avoid and fight off inevitable distractions, things that do not have sufficient or any mission relevance. Having a clear, compelling and credible mission is an absolute requirement. Everything else flows from there. Without it, you become a rudderless ship.

A relentless pursuit of whatever the task or mission at hand is. There are no silver bullets or quick fixes. It's hard to stop somebody who is completely resolved and committed to making things happen. I learned early on that dogged persistence can carry you a long way. Planning and organization can massively amplify a committed mission posture. Goals drive behavior and are powerful in their own right. Not having goals makes you rudderless.

Did you always know that you had an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build your own company?

Strictly speaking, I am not an entrepreneur because I never started a company. I did join one of our companies, Data Domain, as CEO at an early stage, before it had customers or revenue. I am best described as what they call an "operator" in Silicon Valley – somebody who runs things, as distinct from somebody who starts things (entrepreneurs/founders) or funds things (venture capitalists). I am a builder at heart though – that seems to be my DNA. I am not motivated by rewards or outcomes per se. I am inspired by envisioning and building great things. The reward is in the journey.

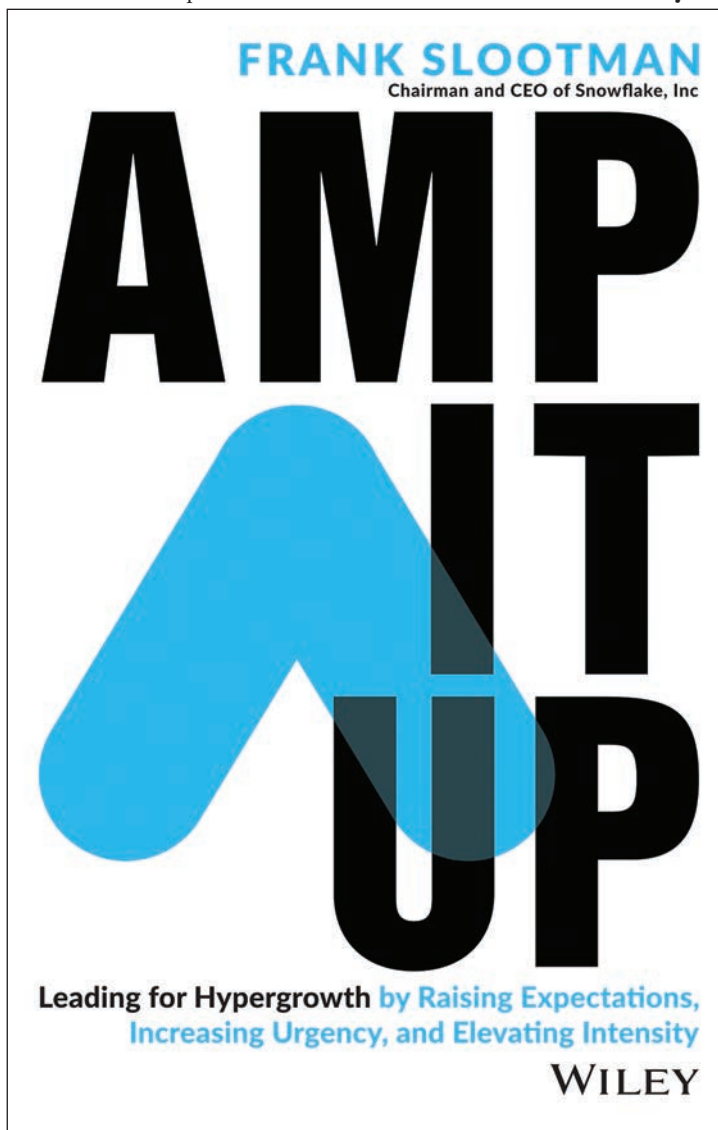
With all that you have accomplished in your career, do you take moments to reflect and celebrate the wins?

I am not much of a congratulator or a celebrator. I don't do victory laps. As in football, we are supposed to score touchdowns, so what is the point of celebrating in the end zone? I am always on to the next play. I was semi-retired for a few years not long ago and I found having all the time in the world to be a quite satisfying experience. But, eventually I ended up back in the arena; it's in my temperament.

When I do reflect on our experiences, it is often when I receive a random text, sometimes late at night on the weekend, from a former employee who wants to express their gratitude for how profoundly the journey has affected them and their families. That's a source of reward we never tire of.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers during this unprecedented time?

I wrote another LinkedIn article called "Amp Up Your Career" which is intended for young people. It has many pointers, but one stands out – I always suggest they are careful about the so-called "elevator" they are about to step into rather than the job description, title, location and compensation. The "elevator" is a metaphor for the company and, like elevators, some companies go up, some go down and some don't move at all and there's not much you can do about it, no matter what your individual merit. So choose wisely; forget the job, they come and go. Instead, pick a good elevator. ●



In terms of personal attributes, you need to develop personal conviction and courage. If you seek approval – try to please and appease – you will be a marginal leader. Popularity is optional. Steve Jobs was quoted as saying that if he wanted to be popular he'd be selling ice cream. Paradoxically, you will be wildly popular when you win, and you will have no friends when you lose. You're no different than a football coach. They want you to win championships – not to be a cool guy or gal to hang out with.

Your life journey took you from a teenage maintenance worker to a groundbreaking leader. What do you attribute to your ability to overcome obstacles and achieve success?