## Acknowledgments

I have been beyond fortunate to have had countless colleagues and advisers who influenced my professional and intellectual growth throughout my life. Although it is impossible to acknowledge the hundreds of executives who have been interviewed, the number of faculty and professional colleagues who have fostered my growth, and the innumerable students with whom I have had the pleasure to work, I want to recognize a few consequential individuals who have helped bring this book to life.

First, thanks go to members of the University of Virginia Darden Business School community who have been deeply involved, including a number of students who have conducted research, provided input, and read excerpts to ensure clarity: Ellen Regan, Stephen Mann, Adrian Viesca Trevino, Kirstin DeCecca, Mark Pohl, Kate Maxwell, Kyle Wyper, and Wilkerson Anthony. Sarah Young, an undergraduate research assistant at UVA, has been especially helpful conducting research, reviewing and checking figures, references, and images. I have worked with Sarah for nearly two years and she is an extraordinary talent.

## Acknowledgments

Second, I thank the friends, colleagues, CMOs, and CEOs who have provided insight along the way. Although too numerous to cite, there are certain individuals who repeatedly shared their unique insight: Scott Brinker, Marsha Collier, Steven Cook, Christine DeYoung, Caren Fleit, Brian Hansberry, Bob Huth, Antonio Lucio, Tamara McCleary, Gene Morphis, Drew Neisser, Scott Vaughan, Greg Welch, Dan White, and FD Wilder.

Third, I thank the individuals who were formative early in my career—whose lessons still matter: Jeff Vicek (the absolute best economics professor), Rick Thompson (the perfect summer intern and first boss), and Deb Henretta (the best early-career mentor one could want). I was fortunate to start at Procter and Gamble and to learn what strategic growth engineering was all about from dozens of excellent leaders.

Fourth, I want to express special gratitude to the number of scholars who have inspired me throughout my second career as a professor: Ken Bernhardt, Robin Coulter, John Deighton, Peter Golder, Mark Houston, Bernie Jaworski, Kevin Keller, Kay Lemon, Leigh McAlister, Chris Moorman, Linda Price, and Rebecca Slotegraaf. And gratitude also to my co-authors, from whom I have learned much: Ali Besharat, Paul Farris, Hui Feng, Saim Kashmiri, Ryan Krause, Don Lehmann, Neil Morgan, Lopo Rego, and Matt Semadeni. Of special note is Bob Lusch, a giant of a scholar and an even better man. It was his encouragement to pursue a PhD and his guidance throughout the process that enabled me to fulfill a lifelong dream.

Finally, endless gratitude goes to Chris Puto—my lifelong mentor and friend who is the most patient and kind person you will ever meet (and absolutely the best editor around)—and to my parents, Carol Ann and Robert Whitler. I learned to *love* learning from my mother. To this day, my mother always has a book in her hands or is playing some sort of game. Her passion for knowledge and intellectual growth has always been inspirational and contagious. From my father, I learned that success is earned the hard way. His focus on setting goals and measuring performance, the dedication and hours that he

## Acknowledgments

put in, and his kindness to all people throughout the journey served as a tremendous model. And to my sister, Janis, who has endured more of life's challenges than anybody should. She has taught me to fight, to never give up, and to never stop smiling—no matter what.

I am deeply indebted to the people who have not only provided input on this project but also have inspired and supported me along the way.

## Positioning for Advantage