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Review of Recent Literature:

Career Development Books We Recommend

by Donna K. Weninger

At the 2005 SOA Annual Meeting the presentation “Review of Recent Literature” was given by Faisal Siddiqi and myself. The books discussed were categorized by the five focus topics of the Management and Personal Development Section: People Management, Business Management, Career Development, Communication Skills and Interpersonal Skills. Following is a brief synopsis of the books we highly recommend.

People Management

“The Finer Points of Leadership—The Fifty Basic Laws that will Make People Want to Perform Better For You” by Michael Feiner. The book offers 50 insightful laws covering everything from managing tough bosses and difficult subordinates, to dealing with uncooperative colleagues, to overcoming resistance to corporate change. As the former chief people officer at PepsiCo, and now a management professor at the Columbia University School of Business, Feiner shares his solutions from his years of handling unexpected crises, mediating between warring corporate factions, and taking care of all the people problems that pop up on a routine basis in companies all over the world. Feiner's approach is based on common sense and practicality, and his book is full of examples that managers everywhere will identify with and relate to.

“The Manager's Guide to Performance Reviews” by Robert Bacal. For both managers and employees, performance reviews are too often viewed as negative and disciplinary. This book helps managers instead make reviews both positive and proactive. It provides a step-by-step process for administering an effective

performance review, one that will meet the organization's needs for employee appraisal while giving employees an honest sense of how they are performing and where they could improve. Also examined are various approaches to performance reviews including different forms and techniques.

“Fish!: A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results” by Stephen Ludin. This fictional tale is set in Seattle's Pike Place Fish Market and centers around a fish monger helping a female executive that is currently struggling in her new position. The book has three key points that if followed will boost morale and improve results: choose your attitude, make their day and be present. This is a very quick read as it is only 112 pages and is very light hearted. Ludin followed the original book with “Fish! Sticks: A Remarkable Way to Adapt to Changing Times and Keep Your Work Fresh and Fish! Tales: Real-Life Stories to Help You Transform your Workplace and Your Life.”

Business Management

“Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't” by James Collins. This book explores the way good organizations can be turned into ones that produce great, sustained results. Through rigorous research, Collins and his 21-person team settled on 11 companies that had achieved good-to-great transitions—including Fannie Mae, Gillette, Walgreens and Wells Fargo. The book details the common traits necessary for a company to make the leap from good to great. Surprisingly, making the transition from good to great doesn't require a high-profile CEO, the latest technology, innovative change management or even a fine-tuned business strategy. At the heart of



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With the references to goals embedded in the system, it is easy to measure progress made toward each goal and whether it has been accomplished.

those rare and truly great companies was a corporate culture that rigorously found and promoted disciplined people to think and act in a disciplined manner. Collins is also the author of "Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies."

"Profitable Growth is Everyone's Business: 10 Tools You Can Use Monday Morning" by Ram Charan. This book provides the building blocks and tools that can put a business on the path to sustained, profitable growth. For many, growth is about home runs—the big bold idea, the next new thing, the product that will revolutionize the marketplace. While obviously attractive and lucrative, home runs don't happen every day and frequently come in cycles. A surer and more consistent path to profitable revenue growth is through singles and doubles—small day-to-day wins and adaptation to changes in the marketplace that build the foundation for substantially increasing revenues. Inherent in this way of thinking is the revolutionary idea that growth is everyone's business—not solely the concern of the sales force or top management.

Career Development

"Managerially Speaking: A Common Sense Approach to Business Leadership" by Marcel Gingras. Based on years of working at a major insurance company and his personal consulting business, Marcel Gingras has prepared a book on best practices to manage a business. The book is a guide on the practical aspects of implementing a cohesive strategy to help with the human resources side of any organization. The book goes over why organizations fail to realize their full potential, dealing with communication challenges, time management, teamwork, having a vision and empowering staff.

"The Actuarial Career Planner" prepared by the Management and Personal Development Section for members of the Society of Actuaries. This book is a working guide to help individuals realize that they have to plan their own careers as no one else will do it for them. It provides a step-by-step guide on how to set your

goals, get feedback from your family, friends, and peers, and how to manage your career for particular milestones and long-term growth.

Communication Skills

"Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High" by Kerry Patterson. "Crucial" conversations are exchanges at work or at home that we dread having, but know we cannot avoid. When stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong, you have three choices: avoid a crucial conversation and suffer the consequences, handle the conversation badly and suffer the consequences, or read *Crucial Conversations* and discover how to communicate best when it matters most. This wise and witty guide gives you the tools you need to step up to life's most difficult and important conversations, say what's on your mind, and achieve positive outcomes that will amaze you.

"Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & in Life, One Conversation at a Time" by Susan Scott. Scott believes that interpersonal difficulties—at work and at home—are a direct result of our inability to communicate well. "Fierce Conversations" outlines an easy to follow method for conducting these exchanges more dynamically and ultimately more effectively, thereby improving relationships "one conversation at a time." The basic method consists of asking the following seven questions and statements: 1. What is the most important thing we should be talking about? 2. Describe the issue. 3. How is this currently impacting you and others? 4. If nothing changes, what are the implications? 5. How have you helped create this issue? 6. What is the ideal outcome?

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7. What is the most potent step you can take to begin to resolve this issue?

Interpersonal Skills

“Women Don’t Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide” by Linda Babcock. The book asks many questions including: Why do most women see a negotiation as an automatic fight instead of a chance to get what they deserve? Why are women afraid to ask for what they want in the workplace? And, perhaps most importantly, why don’t women feel entitled to ask for it? The author cites numerous studies indicating that women are socialized to feel pushy and overbearing if they pursue their ideal situation when it spells potential conflict with employers or co-workers. The authors also use anecdotal evidence to support their claim that women are taught to feel like every negotiation is a monumental threat to a personal relationship, rather than a fact of business life (the view held by most men, they say). It is important to note this book is not just for women, as pointed out in the following excerpt from the book: “As a society, as managers and coworkers and clients and friends, we all need to examine our responses to women when they behave in ways more typically thought of as ‘masculine.’ Managers, in particular, need to recognize that stereotypes can influence how they evaluate people without their knowing it. They need to take strong steps to prevent this from happening when women are performing jobs that have traditionally been performed by men or when the proportion of women doing a particular job is very small.”

“Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers and Nexters in Your Workplace” by Ron Zemke. This book is intended to help bridge the gap or, more accurately, gaps between people of different ages who work at your company. What’s so difficult about today’s workplace is that four different groups—the veterans, boomers, Xers, and

nexters—are vying for roles and recognition. Each generation has a common set of views and goals that do not necessarily mesh with the views and goals of other generations. Thus, clashes could potentially arise. The book provides insight into what motivates each generation and teaches methods that can be used to reach across the generation gaps to make today’s diversified work environment more efficient and positive.

Hopefully, the list of books mentioned in the article will inspire you to begin or increase your reading of executive books. One complaint often heard from many busy professionals is they simply don’t have the time to commit to reading. However, many different research projects have proven reading is one of the determining factors for success in life. As a last resort, many Web sites exist that provide a summary of the “hot” new books, thus keeping the executive up-to-date on the latest and greatest while saving precious time.

The Management and Personal Development Section will be sponsoring a similar type session at the 2006 SOA Annual Meeting. Please plan on attending! Additionally, feel free to send me book recommendations as that will certainly make my preparation for the 2006 session more efficient. □

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