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# It Pays to Read and Tell

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**T**he Management and Personal Development Section is having our first-ever leadership essay contest, and I encourage you to get inspired and start putting your thoughts into writing. If you are like me, you get inspired by a good book. Or, perhaps a song, a poem, or a quote inspires you. Whatever gets your creative juice going, we hope you share with us the outcome! You may even win a prize for it. More importantly, your work will get published in *The Stepping Stone*.

To get you started, I'd like to share with you some of my favorite business books. These are just a few of the books that I go back to from time to time. Whatever situation or mood you are in, there's certain to be a book for that.

Have you ever wondered why some people get promoted and some don't, and what you could do to get promoted? If so, read *Who Gets Promoted, Who Doesn't, and Why* by Donald Asher. A lot of advice in this book is common sense, but you can never have too much common sense. You will get practical advice such as how to deal with a bad performance review or things to consider when you relocate for a job.

It also gives you food for thought such as "a promotion is not a reward."<sup>1</sup> If you are too valuable where you are, it would be a big cost for the company to replace you. And, "if it costs more to replace you than to hire someone else, they'll hire someone else."<sup>2</sup> You may not be entirely convinced of this theory, but it does make you think, doesn't it?

On the other hand, if you really don't want a promotion and are perfectly happy where you are, read *The Peter Principle* by Laurence Peter and Raymond Hull. This is a humorous book, and I find that there's usually wisdom in humor.

The Peter Principle states that "[i]n a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence."<sup>3</sup> Peter's Corollary states that "[i]n time, every post tends to be occupied by an employee who is incompetent to carry out its duties."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, "work is accomplished by those employees who have not yet reached their level of incompetence."<sup>5</sup>



To support his outlandish assertions, Peter provides many case studies throughout the book. This is by no means a well-researched book, but it's not completely without merit, either. If nothing else, it makes you laugh out loud, especially at the newly invented words such as "tabulatory gigantism" (an obsession to have a bigger desk than your colleagues) and "fileophilia" (a preoccupation with records in order to prevent yourself, and others, from realizing that you are accomplishing nothing of current importance).<sup>6</sup>

If you are in the mood for another humorous book, and are a Dilbert fan, read *The Dilbert Principle* by Scott Adams. While the Peter Principle states that everyone is eventually promoted to his or her level of incompetence, which implies that he or she was once good at something, the Dilbert Principle states that "the most ineffective workers are systematically moved to the place where they can do the least damage: management."<sup>7</sup> Cynical, is it not? But I suppose most of us can relate.

Although most of the book consists of Dilbert cartoons and witty, off-the-wall remarks, the last chapter does provide some serious, practical advice



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for managers. For example, useful activities for a manager include making sure employees learn something new every day and interrupting people “who talk too long without getting to the point.”<sup>8</sup>

If you are in the mood for something less cynical, read *The Progress Principle*.<sup>9</sup> Unlike many other business books, this is the outcome of a research project based on nearly 12,000 diary entries provided by workers from different organizations. What was discovered through this process is what the authors call “Inner Work Life.” The key to a positive inner work life is making progress through small wins. What I like about this book is its empirical nature and its simple, clear presentation of study results. Moreover, in a world full of cynicism and negativity, it's refreshing to read something that gives you hope.

I hope by now, you are in the mood to write! Do you have a book that inspires you? Perhaps an inspiring quote, an interesting article, or a great (or not-so-great) boss inspires you to espouse your own leadership theory. I look forward to hearing your thoughts. ●

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Donald Asher, *Who Gets Promoted, Who Doesn't, and Why* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2007), Page 1.
- <sup>2</sup> Donald Asher, *Who Gets Promoted, Who Doesn't, and Why* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2007), Page 3.
- <sup>3</sup> Laurence J. Peter & Raymond Hull, *The Peter Principle* (New York: Buccaneer Books, 1969), Page 25.
- <sup>4</sup> Laurence J. Peter & Raymond Hull, *The Peter Principle* (New York: Buccaneer Books, 1969), Page 27.
- <sup>5</sup> Laurence J. Peter & Raymond Hull, *The Peter Principle* (New York: Buccaneer Books, 1969), Page 27.
- <sup>6</sup> Laurence J. Peter & Raymond Hull, *The Peter Principle* (New York: Buccaneer Books, 1969), Page 118.
- <sup>7</sup> Scott Adams, *The Dilbert Principle* (New York: Collins Business), Page 14.
- <sup>8</sup> Scott Adams, *The Dilbert Principle* (New York: Collins Business), Pages 321-323.
- <sup>9</sup> Teresa Amabile & Steven Kramer, *The Progress Principle* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press).