



eLeadership: Proven Techniques for Creating an Environment of Speed and Flexibility in the Digital Economy

Susan Annunzio (*Free Press, New York; 2001; ISBN 0-7432-0438-7*) \$25

REVIEWED BY CURT KAMPMEIER CMC

We come to clients with ideas and sometimes leave some useful ones behind. This book by management consultant Susan Annunzio is so full of good stories about the ideas she leaves behind that it is quick, easy, and fascinating to read. She wrote it to help established companies make the transition to the New Economy, but it's surely about the leadership practices we all need for today's world, no matter what our business. Here, then, is some of what we need to do and help our clients do.

One necessary leadership practice is to regularly examine all our beliefs about what success is, and discard whatever is no longer useful. Because the way of business is changing so rapidly, we must continually ask the tough questions about what we're doing. Which current operating assumptions need to be challenged? What needs to be abandoned?

What new business models need exploration? What must be done to serve customers and employees better? And what new policies and services must be developed to stay competitive?

Another essential leadership practice is getting different generations of people working well together. The future of business is collaboration. Those in their twenties just entering the workforce (Generation Y), and those in their thirties and forties (Generation X), have different values and ambitions than those in their fifties (Baby Boomers). Annunzio offers the best information and advice I've seen on how to work with these very different people to consistently bring out the best in them.

Another basic is remembering that the top 20% of the people produce 80% of the important changes and results, and the bottom 20% will never follow our lead. So it's an essential master practice to identify and use the top 20% to influence the middle 60%, and to diminish the negative and interfering power of the bottom 20%. Annunzio explains clearly how to do that, and why leaders frequently confuse the top 20% with the bottom 20%.

Also necessary is to ask the unaskable and speak the unspeakable. Annunzio reminds us that employees are the ones in an organization who know

what stands in the way of peak performance. We must ask the formerly unasked questions: Why do we do it this way? Why does management say one thing and do another? What are the unwritten rules here that get in the way? And we must respond by insisting that *everyone* speak the unspeakable truths and be prepared for the cleansing benefits of brutal honesty.

Then we must give people indisputable proof that the Industrial Age culture is gone and that one of our vital tasks is creating a more workable environment for the future. That culture change begins by being able to explain our business in one elevator ride. Shame on us if we don't have a corporate vision that is powerful and concise. The future we envision must blatantly break with the bad habits of the past. And we must proclaim it so loud and clear, and so often, that everyone comes to see exactly what we're trying to accomplish.

Then we must personally model the new behavior we need in everything we say and do. Understand we may need a coach. Odds are some of the practices that got us where we are today are not the practices we need to succeed tomorrow.

Another essential leadership practice is monitoring all our methods of communication to make sure they reinforce

the behavior we seek. We use our space and furniture, the color of our walls, our cars, people at all levels, formal and informal meetings, compensation, both simple and high-tech tools, games and contests, formal speeches and writings, and more to send messages to those with whom we work. Do they all align with our strategic objectives and consistently foster the attitudes and behavior we want? If not, we're sending mixed messages that will produce mixed results.

STILL another essential leadership practice is to help people develop their critical thinking skills. In an economy based largely on intangibles, our competitive edge is imagination. To thrive in the 21st century, we must show people how to improve their ability to be creative, to think through problems, to tackle obstacles, to adjust quickly and adroitly, to change paths when necessary, move rapidly to find solutions, and to act. When we nurture and free up people's resourcefulness, and they become more adept at using limited information to work well in an ever-changing environment, where often there are no clear paths to success, we are fostering and getting what is, in the New Economy, heroic behavior.

And it is essential leadership practice to identify and recognize those heroes. It used to be that success stories were about people who followed the rules to get the job done. From those stories came traditions, templates, and formulas. Today there are few formulas, rather more immediate actions based on partial information in an environment that often won't stay still long enough to build traditions and templates. *The* skill for working here is critical thinking. We do well to honor, appreciate, and respect those who use those skills to help us get important things done. And we do well to go beyond the obvious heroes and find those who are not so apparent, and appreciate them, too, in public ways. That recognition also helps to create heroes, and that's a process we want to duplicate. So, let's celebrate the heroes, develop more of them, and try our best to be heroes ourselves by practicing all these important leadership skills.

This book will not go down in history as one of the so-called important books on management. But I tell you, it's more immediately useful than any of those "important" books I've read recently. And much more fun.

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IN SHORT

OTHER NOTABLE BOOKS

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How to Make It Big as a Consultant, Third Edition

William A. Cohen (*Amacom, New York; 2001; ISBN 0-8144-7073-4*) \$17.95

Cohen teaches business at California State University in Los Angeles and has directed the Small Business Institute, there where students have done consulting projects for some 700 small businesses. We expect he uses this very basic and straightforward book to give undergraduate students a quick overview of consulting, and our sources say it suits that purpose quite well. Yet, sophisticated readers could easily handle, and would appreciate, more substance. Contents in 340 pages: what the consulting business is all about, direct and indirect marketing methods, consulting in the public sector, conducting initial interviews, writing proposals, pricing services, contracts, negotiating, planning and scheduling projects, research techniques, solving clients' problems (using the Harvard case study method), ethics, making presentations, using computers and the Internet, how to run a consulting business, sample brochures, interview forms, proposals, contracts, and appendices.

The Consultant's Quick Start Guide: An Action Plan for Your First Year in Business

Elaine Biech (*Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, San Francisco; 2001; ISBN 0-7879-5667-8*) \$19.95

Here's another astute and practical guide from the author of *The Business of Consulting* and *The Consultant's Legal Guide*—a thorough planning manual for starting a consulting business, or for finding what needs fixing in an existing consultancy. It's loaded with questions to stimulate thinking, worksheets to aid planning, and ideas to keep moving forward. If you do it from start to finish, as Biech suggests, you will identify the competencies you can use as a consultant, assess your aptitude for consulting, identify your initial consulting focus, and test your entrepreneurial attitude. Then you'll define your future the way you want it to be, consider whether you can accomplish that in consulting, and identify the changes you need to make. If you haven't quit by then, you'll plan your start-up budget, how to charge for your services, your business name and entity, how to find a top accountant and lawyer, your

banking and insurance needs, and what to check about zoning laws, licenses, and taxes. You'll then write a business plan and decide how to use it. You'll plan your transition into consulting, decide where to locate your office, and how to set it up. Then, you'll plan your marketing—including choosing a niche, checking your competition, identifying prospects, networking, figuring out how to get clients, and writing proposals. Finally, you'll make plans to stay healthy, manage your time, develop good work habits, and balance your life; and you'll write your code of ethics. If you in fact become a consultant or a more adept one, and survive the following year, you'll assess your progress and plan your next steps. This book is well done and useful. All of it.