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## Power Skills: Building Top-Level Relationships for Bottom-Line Results

James P. Masciarelli (*Nimbus Press, Gloucester; 2000; ISBN 0-9677-1111-8*) \$29.95

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You read a book and then, out of respect for the Book Reviews editor, you try to provide the bibliographic information that's required, one bit of which is the price. The price is nowhere on the dust jacket or in the book itself. There is a touch of irony here. The book is about relationships and how five Power Skills systematically and sympathetically used have a wonderful and permanent effect on the bottom line. One of the relationships is of course the relationship with customers and prospects, and there is quite a bit said about how that relationship should be maintained. Being clear about costs is essential to good customer relationships. You get the picture.

Nonetheless, this is a good book. If you have the eight or ten hours it will take to read it, you'll be well repaid for your investment of time. It is not poorly written, that's not what takes the time. It is just that every so often Masciarelli throws in a worksheet or a questionnaire.

You might not finish the worksheet or answer all the questions, but you start thinking. And, of course, everyone knows how thinking gets in the way of more easily measured activity.

What the author has done is highlight the relationships that need to be controlled for a continually healthy bottom line—relationships with investors, customers, employees, suppliers, and the community in general. Having done this, he then discusses five so-called Power Skills. The designations are interesting. Sometimes it takes an effort to come around to his meaning. The five power skills are:

- *Positioning*: the top-of-the-mind image you wish to maintain with each of the five groups with which you have relationships.

- *Hunting*: the process by which you identify and access the people with the ideas, information and influence that can benefit you and your job.

- *Coaching*: the process of helping others to increase their skills—perhaps not the meaning we're used to when we think of locker room harangues or helping a distracted youngster prepare for a college entrance exam. Masciarelli dis-

cusses three kinds of coaching: coaching to help solve a problem, coaching to help improve performance, and coaching to help achieve a personal transformation. The discussions are thorough.

- *Leading*: motivating others to work with you to get the things done that you want done.

- *Farming*: cultivating and fertilizing the relationship that you have established.

Masciarelli makes no bones about the fact that power is what's required to make things happen or not happen. When the idea is first presented, it comes as something of a shock. He is a bit cold-blooded about it, as he is about manipulating relationships to achieve desired ends. But what he is after is organizations that from top to bottom apply the five skills in all their relationships. For this I judge him to be a bit of a romantic. But he is amply qualified to write this book, and his recital of those qualifications and experience—successful executive recruiter/management consultant/venture capitalist/company director—are an interesting and important part of the story he tells.

Masciarelli provides an outline for a positioning statement—greeting, hook, client base, value added, close. It comes at

the wrong place because you stop reading and start fiddling with it for five or ten minutes. If you are used to the Evelyn Wood's speed reading techniques, this will be a very frustrating book. You'll even stop reading to fight with it on occasion. His model of Personal Leadership in Chapter 7 slowed me down for a while as I took his model apart and put it back together again. Yet, he encourages this kind of dialogue.

The last chapter in the book discusses technology and Power Skills—knowledge management and relationship management and available software—in a rational sort of way but is per force the weakest chapter in the book.

I hope that there is a second edition pretty soon. Not that there are a lot of typos to be fixed. I ran across only four. However, the way the current volume is laid out will cause some readers to miss a great deal. There is a preface and an introduction that contain interesting and important insights and information. They are by the author, not a favor from a friend, so I read them; otherwise I would not have. They set the stage nicely and deserve more prominence.

There are also a couple of ads for his current firm that can be done without. They are a jarring interruption to the flow of the book. And there are a couple of other sour notes. He calls people being coached "coachees." And at one point, when he is talking about limiting the number of people with whom to develop important relationships, he coins the phrase "nifty fifty." I wish he hadn't. That designation kind of cheapens things when it keeps occurring.

On balance, this is an easy book to read if you don't mind that it interrupts itself once in a while. Its table of contents and index make it easy to find things, and it is well laid out and easy on the eyes, a rarity these days. If you want to live with a book for a while, this one is worth getting acquainted with.

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