

RESOURCES REVIEWS

Reviews by career services and staffing professionals



Career Development

The Wall Street Journal Guide to Building Your Career.

Jennifer Merritt. 2012. Crown Business. www.crownbusiness.com. 200 pp. \$15.

With so many career guides out there repeating similar messages, it can sometimes be difficult to know which ones to recommend to our students and young alumni. *The Wall Street Journal Guide to Building Your Career* is well worth the read for any young person who is serious about building a career. The book is straightforward, with each chapter broken down into sections full of helpful and practical information gathered from industry experts, career coaches, and people who have climbed the career ladder.

Jennifer Merritt defines the difference between a job and a career, focusing on the career decision-

making process and how to make informed choices—something many don't always take the time to consider before committing to a major and/or career path. Examples of the range of career paths within various fields are offered to give the reader a sense of the breadth of possibilities available when exploring career options. One chapter emphasizes the importance of internships and shows readers how to make sure they are meaningful and how to get the most out of them. Also included is a great list of internship do's and don'ts.

What I like the most about this book is not only the great advice about landing your first job, but also the gold mine of information regarding the crucial first year on the job and how to navigate the work environment to succeed and build a career. Topics covered include paying your dues, learning the office rules, common frustrations, building a relationship with the boss, getting and using

feedback to your advantage, and the importance of finding the right mentor—all explained in a manner that will resonate with Generation Y.

Though primarily intended for the soon-to-be or new professional, this book also offers advice that is relevant for the mid-careerist as well. For instance, Chapter Five focuses on moving up the career ladder and provides detailed advice on how to get promoted. There is advice on how to set oneself apart and information on “career boosters,” such as being active in industry and professional associations, volunteering, using alumni networks, earning required certifications early, and becoming an expert and sharing that expertise by presenting and/or writing.

The final chapter focuses on the next job and all that goes into making the move to a new company: cleaning up your image on social media (as needed), updating your resume, writing cover letters,

using your professional network of contacts, getting your references in order, and preparing for and navigating the interview process.

The Wall Street Journal Guide to Building Your Career is a must-read for anyone who aspires to build a meaningful career.

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Job-Search Strategies

Cracking the New Job Market: The 7 Rules for Getting Hired in Any Economy.

R. William Holland. 2012.
American Management Association.
www.amanet.org. 238 pp. \$17.95.

According to the author, “this is not just another job-search and career-management book.” I’m sorry to say that, actually, it is.

On the positive side, the author emphasizes the need to “demonstrate your value”—a job-search (and job-retention) lesson that many candidates need to hear time and again. In addition, candidates are given step-by-step ideas and specific advice to tailor resumes, cover letters, and interviews. The chapter on negotiating is an excellent reminder of how to position oneself between the time of job offer and acceptance. The dreamers among us may cringe at the “Career Choice Is More Than Following Your Passion” section, but career choice *is* complex. One must consider a myriad of factors, including passion, which may be a lifestyle choice where work is secondary. The power of serendipity is acknowledged as a factor often overlooked and noted as a force for many in terms of career choice.

While a full chapter is devoted to technology/social media, I was dismayed not to see mention of Skype and similar tools, and was surprised at the references to MySpace and

Flickr as viable job-search resources. The section suggesting job seekers use the Yellow Pages needed more explanation and examples to be of real value.

The assumption that “the most desirable” option in terms of a new job is a lateral move or an “inside promotion” at the job seeker’s current place of employment was odd. Standard interviewing advice not to drink alcohol was followed by, “but if you do, limit your intake to wine at a maximum of two servings.” This could be taken as an official OK to drink during an interview, regardless of personal tolerance levels.

Lastly, it’s difficult to ignore the comment regarding career services: “‘Placement centers’...have been slow on the uptake in providing services to their alumni.” While not one to shy away from an honest critique, I find it difficult to believe this claim—especially given the economy in recent years—amidst the conversations with colleagues around the country about increased alumni outreach.

Overall, this book offers some hits and some misses, but could be considered worthwhile for the chapters on demonstrating your value and negotiation.


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Professional Development

The Best in Us: People, Profit, and the Remaking of Modern Leadership.

Cleveland W. Stevens Jr. 2012.
Beaufort books. www.beaufortbooks.com. 381 pp. \$26.95.


The Best in Us is first and foremost a book on leadership. The central concept of the book is what Cleveland Stevens calls



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“transformative leadership,” which is a commitment to the development of an organization’s people, including its leaders, as a principal goal that in turn leads to success within the organization. Stevens sees his audience as “anyone who would like to see greater levels of excellence in their lives in general.” This book boldly promises to offer the opportunity to find the best in us.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I dives deep into the theory behind transformative leadership juxtaposed with transactional or exchange-based leadership. Part II focuses on the personal transformation necessary to become a true leader. Stevens does not attempt to condense leadership to a list of characteristics or simplistic action steps. Instead, he outlines a process of growth by first transforming one’s mindset from reactionary to “consciously causing

life." He calls for us to lead, not manage, our lives. Stevens shows that we must first focus on our individual growth before we are able to help others grow.

To provide clarity to his viewpoint, Stevens presents helpful distinctions, such as transactional vs. transformational leadership, leading vs. managing, team vs. functional group, throughout the book. He adds a personal element through stories of others who have gone through the process of transformative leadership.

The topic of organizational leadership is dealt with primarily in Part III. Stevens stresses two aspects that must shape the effective organization: the centrality of "achieving excellence at every level" and "being founded in love rather than fear." With this in mind, he discusses characteristics of successful organizations and emphasizes the importance of growth, teamwork, creativity, accountability, and vision.

The Best in Us offers a provocative and interesting take on both individual and organizational leadership.

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**Making Yourself Indispensable:
The Power of Personal
Accountability.**

Mark Samuel. 2012. *Portfolio/Penguin*. www.penguin.com. 223 pp. \$25.95.

Making Yourself Indispensable: The Power of Personal Accountability provides the reader with a mindset and roadmap on how to become invaluable in personal and professional relationships. An overall premise of the book is that people are capable of achieving more with their lives, and will experience greater satisfaction if they learn to manage themselves



more effectively in the face of change and any obstacles they confront.

The accountability and victim loop models presented offer a clear picture of the paths people follow when faced with challenging situations. A person who assumes responsibility for his or her actions relies on self-reflection and uses the experience to learn instead of blaming others. While that person may initially feel like a victim, the ability to quickly identify the problem and seek out solutions becomes essential to managing the situation.

Throughout the book, the author uses real-life stories of people who have successfully dealt with challenges. For example, a plant manager consistently blamed others for his department's lack of productivity. When he allowed himself to think about the situation differently and alter his communication and management style, he was able to bring energy and motivation to his team and turn around performance. Moving away

from a "me-" to a "we-centered approach," being willing to adapt to change, and learning to value others were all key to his success.

Readers are encouraged to play an interactive role in learning how to become indispensable. In addition to the easy-to-understand models and common sense advice, a variety of exercises encourage people to reflect on their own lives and choices they make. Learning how to identify unproductive behavior patterns combined with finding new approaches for managing perception can keep one from staying locked into the past and repeating the same mistakes.

While there is no guarantee for success in today's turbulent organizational environment, Mark Samuel offers fresh ideas to help people stay focused on priorities, foster trust in their relationships, and develop the courage to take ownership for the change they seek. ■

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