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MANAGING BOOKS: IDEAS: BEST BOOKS OF 2007

Print Edition - Section Front

## **It was the year of the storyteller**

by HARVEY SCHACHTER

Roger Martin, dean of the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, had some impressive coaching when he prepared to write his latest book, *The Opposable Mind*.

*Tipping Point* author Malcolm Gladwell convened a talented group of writers and editors, including James Surowiecki, who wrote *The Wisdom of the Crowds*, to meet with him and give advice on structuring the book.

While Mr. Martin's previous book, *The Responsibility Virus*, was reasonably easy to read, it lacked the sharpness, vitality, and story-telling prowess that he has managed in his latest book.

He's not alone in this focus. While business books have always contained anecdotes and case studies, a number of this year's better books followed the style of New Yorker writers, such as Mr. Gladwell and Mr. Surowiecki. Through these, the lessons would only arrive after first starting in, say, Athens in the time of Socrates, stopping for a time to make a connection to an obscure 12th century battle, and then mentioning some arcane anecdote from modern-day Arizona - all stitched together by the new research of some brilliant academic who has spent a lifetime studying the topic we have plunged into.

It's quixotic, but an oddly magnetic style, and growing: Linear businessmen and plodding academics are learning to tell stories to make their point.

In preparing to choose the best books of the year, I was worried that, as a writer, I might be easy prey for these more writerly writers, choosing style over substance. But I finally decided that, as someone who plowed through about 100 business books this year, I wasn't any different from others in preferring those that included both style and substance.

In that vein, it's fitting that topping my top 10 of the year was a book about getting your ideas to stick.

### **1. Made to Stick**

Why some ideas survive and others die

By Chip Heath and Dan Heath,

Random House, \$30

Chip Heath is a professor of organizational behaviour, entranced by urban legends, and his brother Dan Heath develops new-media textbooks. Both are intrigued by why some ideas survive and others die, and their powerful book follows the six-point formula they highlight: Simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credibility, emotions and stories. They tackle each of those points in depth, with wide-ranging, sticky examples and advice, using the New Yorker style. Success in business requires getting your ideas to stick, whether through marketing messages or communications with staff and associates. This book will help you to communicate better, and will be a joy to read.

## 2. What Got You Here Won't Get You There

By Marshall Goldsmith,  
Hyperion, \$29.95

When an executive who has rocketed through the ranks to near the top of the corporate ladder suddenly stalls, many top companies turn to executive coach Marshall Goldsmith to help the individual resume his or her ascent. Usually, the problem is one aspect of behaviour that helped to power the ascent but now is counterproductive. In this book, Mr. Goldsmith explains the 20 destructive behaviours that can trip managers up - most of us will squirm over at least a few - and then relates how to straighten ourselves out, using the same process he applies in his coaching, including soliciting honest feedback from colleagues, apologizing to them for past behaviour, and asking them to join us in a caravan of change by tackling one of their own flaws as well.

## 3. Influencer

The power to change anything  
By Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler,  
McGraw-Hill, \$29.95

Business is about change. Life is about change. But getting others to make change can be difficult, and most of us stumble. This fascinating book mixes storytelling in New Yorker style with rich advice, looking at the secrets of remarkable change-makers in African villages, a California residential therapy programs, and the Thai battle against AIDS, as well as the social learning research of Albert Bandura. If they can succeed in their Herculean change challenges, so can you, by following the prescriptions drawn from their work by the authors - Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler - who gave us a previous best seller, *Crucial Conversations*.

## 4. The Future of Management

By Gary Hamel,  
Harvard Business School Press, \$31.95

Modern management has given us much as a society. But it also limits our freedom and squanders vast quantities of human imagination and initiative. London Business School professor Gary Hamel, in this book, shows how we can do better, by drawing from other areas of life where serendipity and empowerment are allowed to prosper, and following the examples of some maverick managers in companies such as Whole Foods Market Inc., W.L. Gore & Associates Inc. and Google Inc.

## 5. X-Teams

By Deborah Ancona and Henrik Bresman,  
Harvard Business School Press, \$36.95

Traditionally, the focus in building better teams has been on internal dynamics, but the research that led up to this book by academics Deborah Ancona and Henrik Bresman found that wasn't enough. You have to pay as much attention to external dynamics, making sure the team reaches beyond its ranks to co-ordinate with, and learn from, outsiders with a stake in the effort. The book changes what we know about teams and, although a bit plodding and laden with jargon, it's worth the effort to read.

## 6. Know-How

The 8 skills that separate people who perform from those who don't  
By Ram Charan,  
Crown Business, \$36.95

Ram Charan spends his days jetting around the globe, meeting with senior executives to offer advice. In this book, he distils that wisdom into eight skills that he argues separates people who perform from those who don't.

The skills are cleverly defined, although some are variants of what we already know, but probably more importantly the book offers us Mr. Charan's incisive and detailed thoughts on these vital aspects of business -- how to make the know-how work for us.

#### 7. The Opposable Mind

By Roger L. Martin,

Harvard Business School Press, \$29.95

Roger Martin and the management school he heads have been championing integrative thinking, and in this book he illuminates how to improve our ability to bring diverse, often apparently opposing, streams of thinking together into innovative new ideas. The book also appeals because it's a rare one from a major U.S. publisher that offers many Canadian examples, as Mr. Martin takes us into the opposable minds of business leaders such as Isadore Sharp of Four Seasons Hotels, Bob Young of Red Hat, and Moses Znaimer of CITY-TV.

#### 8. Wikinomics

How mass collaboration changes everything

By Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams,

Portfolio, \$32.50

Collaboration has always been important for success but these days it is taking place on a wider canvas as companies use the Internet to reach out beyond their own doors and across the globe. Toronto-based technology guru Don Tapscott and his colleague Anthony Williams say that, 20 years from now, we'll look back on this as an era when we entered a new age, and they deftly chronicle the pioneers, delineating eight interrelated categories, such as Prosumers, the New Alexandrians, and the Wiki Workplace.

#### 9. Go Put Your Strengths To Work: 6 powerful steps to achieve outstanding performance

By Marcus Buckingham,

Free Press, \$32.99

Too often, aided and abetted by our bosses, we focus on our weaknesses, trying to correct them. Maybe that makes sense when they derail your progress, as with the high-flying executives Mr. Goldsmith counsels. But former Gallup researcher Marcus Buckingham argues we will be more successful - and so will our companies - if we focus on enhancing and taking advantage of everyone's strengths. This book helps you to persuade your boss to let that happen.

#### 10. Payback

By James P. Andrew and Harold L. Sirkin,

Harvard Business School Press, \$37.95

Most innovation books focus on generating ideas but this one argues there are plenty of good ones around and the challenge is to pick, and commercialize, ones that will make money - a payback. It's written in crisp, consultant style by James Andrew and Harold Sirkin of Boston Consulting Co., offering a useful schema for overseeing the financial side of your company's innovation portfolio.

#### HONOURABLE MENTIONS

There were about another 10 books that I considered for this list, but I'll cite five for honourable mention:

*Seven Rules for Designing More Innovative Conferences* (Idea Factory) by Ottawa's Ed Bernacki is a short, simple and plain book that offers some terrific and long-needed ideas for improving conferences.

*The Strategy Paradox* (Currency) by Mississauga's Michael Raynor tells us to expect good strategy to fail at times and explains how to organize accordingly.

Caroline Van Hasselt offers a solid biography of technology dynamo Ted Rogers in *High Wire Act* (John Wiley).

*Human Sigma* (Gallup Press) by John Fleming and Jim Asplund - which, like the next book on this list, I'll review in coming weeks - shows how to improve your company by focusing on customer and employee engagement.

Two of the best names in leadership literature, Noel Tichy and Warren Bennis, combine for a look at how leaders make great decisions in *Judgment* (Portfolio).