

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

## Report on **Business**

### BEST OF 2009: This year's pick was an easy choice

Many years as I looked back over the books I had read, I found it difficult to choose the best one of the year. This year, however, it was easy. One book - *Who* - stood out as the one I recommended the most, spontaneously, in conversation. It focuses on an important issue - hiring - that managers, usually overrating their abilities, often mess up. Indeed, it begins with the premise that a manager's No. 1 problem is figuring out who to hire. There were many other books that addressed equally important issues, and some that also looked at the same issue as my top pick. But *Who* excelled on many levels, and, for that reason, is my choice as the best management and business book of 2009.

#### 1. **Who**

By Geoff Smart and Randy Street (Ballantine)

Written by two consultants, *Who* is exceedingly practical, steering us right on this issue we so often get wrong.

It lays out the steps to improve your hiring, with actual questions to use - sensible queries that probe a candidate's record in a tough-minded way. It also links each interview with the ultimate reference checks, indeed warning candidates in the wording of the questions that you will be following up - so sticking to the truth would be smart.

It also passes along red flags to look for. It's clear and easy to read. And even if you don't buy the whole system the authors propose, you will benefit from the book just by adding a few of their questions to your recruiting approach.

#### 2. **Managing**

By Henry Mintzberg (Berrett-Koehler)

It's sprawling and somewhat academic, but McGill University professor Henry Mintzberg is a fine writer, with a penchant for humour that keeps his ruminations and scholarly probing interesting. It's not practical in the sense of offering five handy steps to do anything in particular, but it is practical in the sense that it deals with ideas on how to manage, clarifies the daily struggles that managers face, and opens your eyes to elements of the managerial role you may not have thought through. Prof. Mintzberg's chapter on the 13 inescapable conundrums of management is vital for each one of us to confront in our own lives. The book is rich with musings about management from an inveterate iconoclast who routinely appears on lists of top thinkers about business.

### **3. The MoneyMakers**

By Anne-Marie Fink (Crown)

This was one of several books this year heralding contrarian messages for business leaders to consider. And it was the best, even though, as with the others, it invariably offers up things we essentially know but aren't giving enough weight to. Ms. Fink, a Wall Street veteran, distills the process by which she selects winning companies for her clients into 11 rules, noting those will also be useful to managers in business, because they offer guidance on how to make your company successful. They include recognizing that problems are like cockroaches (there's always more than one of them); the importance of avoiding the trap of profitless growth; the dangers of being a customer fanatic; and a warning that the traditional thinking on productivity and employee satisfaction is backward.

### **4. Winston Churchill, CEO**

By Alan Axelrod (Sterling)

This biography is a fascinating look at leadership through its examination of Britain's indomitable wartime prime minister. It revolves around 25 lessons for leaders and, while many of those lessons are well-known, they take on extra substance through reading about the ups-and-downs of this remarkable man, his fighting spirit, and, most of all, his gift with words. It makes you think of what great leadership is - and inspires you to do better - while offering a history lesson.

### **5. The Four Conversations**

By Jeffrey and Laurie Ford (Berrett-Koehler)

This book will help you to be more effective in the many daily conversations that determine your success. By understanding which of the four classifications your conversations fall into - initiative, understanding, performance or closure - and, just as importantly, what conversations are called for in the various situations you encounter during a working day, you are more likely to gain the collaboration you need.

### **6. How The Mighty Fall**

By Jim Collins (Harper-Collins)

The latest effort by the esteemed business researcher didn't match *Good To Great* or *Built To Last* with its revelations. But it's still an important and insightful book, telling leaders how their companies - no matter how powerful today - could fall, and why some companies managed to rebound when they hit the skids. As always with Mr. Collins, there are lots of pungent examples from his technique of studying comparable companies - in this case, 11 firms that had, at one point, been very successful but then faltered, along with competitors that didn't stumble.

### **7. What Would Google Do?**

By Jeff Jarvis (Collins Business)

Mr. Jarvis, a new-media expert, offers a lengthy and provocative essay on what we can learn from Google's success. It's primarily in terms of addressing the online world but also, more generally, in our other business practices, since Google has been innovative with such features as giving employees 20 per cent of the week to pursue their own projects. And it has succeeded without ever really having a business plan. The main message: In today's world, Internet links are vital to success and we have to adapt to that new reality.

## **8. The Design Of Business**

By Roger Martin (Harvard Business Press)

Mr. Martin, dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, pushes the notion of design thinking as the next competitive advantage. Over the past half decade, we have been deluged with books on innovation, and this adds to the canon by piecing together the elements managers need to institute in their company to ensure they have a culture of innovation, as well as the personal requirements to be innovative thinkers. It's a thoughtful, academic work for the popular market, laced with illustrative stories, primarily of Canadian companies.

## **9. Igniting The Third Factor**

By Peter Jensen (Performance Coaching)

Mr. Jensen, who has coached Canadian Olympians and studied top sports coaches, outlines a five-step model for working with others to help them achieve higher performance. The advice is tangible and practical, and buttressed by stories from the many athletes Mr. Jensen and his interviewees have assisted to success.

## **10. Fool's Gold**

By Gillian Tett (Free Press)

The Financial Times journalist takes us behind the scenes at J.P. Morgan, where a brilliant and talented derivatives team came up with a clever moneymaking idea that was later perverted into the financial folly that recently walloped the global economy. She offers a clear, smoothly written insider's account of what these financial instruments were, how they changed over time and why they led to catastrophe.