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Business & Economics

Beyond Buzzwords: The New Agenda for Directors CEOs & Executives

Ray Friant
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People in leadership positions aren't likely to read this book or accept the advice it offers, and the author gamely acknowledges this fact in his foreword: "Within their operations, their power is like that of a king. The question is how do you influence a king that is disinclined to listen?"

"Leadership kings" are driven, bright, and charismatic, says Friant, but also domineering and paranoid, unable to recognize signs of trouble or accept help. The author has studied statistical data for years, confirming the reality that he has observed on the job. He says that roughly half of businesses suffer from poor to failing performance. "Executives must learn better ways of approaching their work," he writes, to stop this "drift towards mediocrity."

His recommendations have been tested throughout his forty-year career, which he has committed to revitalizing organizations. Friant has worked in top-level positions, executed successful business "turnarounds," and is now a consultant, author, lecturer, inventor, and coach. His work is domestic and international in scope.

He thinks another audience may be more open to change: "the new crop of managers and executives that are in the pipeline of all organizations of human endeavor. By learning the underlying theory of why organizations deteriorate, developing executives will come to accept the reality that CEOs periodically need assistance."

Two basic behaviors in contemporary culture compromise organizational performance, says Friant: "Our world's current short-term focus obliges and compels most modern CEOs and COOs to concentrate on today's problems to the virtual exclusion of their organization's future." What the author calls "Present Bound Leadership" neglects the study of future trends, a necessary step towards ensuring future success. He suggests hiring a consulting futurist to open this blind spot in leadership vision.

"The second fundamental concept is that within all organizations," Friant asserts, "individuals are doing hundreds of small, counterproductive things that collectively prevent

excellence." Backbiting, self-serving behavior creates "drag" that pervades all levels of employment, frustrating and demoralizing those who work in any size organization for any length of time. Persistent drag erodes employee cooperation and undermines the group cohesiveness that is so essential to success.

Friant favors the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to explain normal human behavior. "If you believe Psychological Type theory, and I do," he writes, "you necessarily believe that people of all sixteen types have a role to play in organization life." This tool helps the reader understand Friant's analyses of typical character traits of key personnel.

Anyone who works in business, volunteers for nonprofit endeavors, or rails against governmental bureaucracy would benefit from reading this book. All have the ability to influence and effect positive change, and Friant asks his readers to open their minds to that possibility.

Margaret Cullison