

Giraffes of Technology: The Making of the Twenty-First Century Leader

John Curry

Hubert Glover

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It is not uncommon for authors of leadership books to rely on metaphors in an attempt to set their works apart in a crowded category. Hubert Glover and coauthor John Curry manage to employ a unique metaphor here that is meaningful, memorable, and a little offbeat: the giraffe.

Glover became intrigued with giraffes when he noticed their prominence in African art. As he researched the animal, he recognized certain characteristics that he could relate to leadership, and that became the basis for his book, *Giraffes of Technology*. The authors use the metaphor to the fullest by devoting each of six chapters to qualities he says represent “leadership traits that CEOs and managers must embrace over the next decade.”

The first chapter addresses how the giraffe can act as a “lookout post” for others. The giraffe, Glover writes, has “the ability to see further down the plains than most with a keen focus on long-term (rather than short-term) problems as well as opportunities.” While the giraffe is using its physical capability to watch for predators—in particular, lions—Glover discusses the trait in human terms, suggesting that “leaders now need to serve as sturdy lookout posts for herds.”

The author cites Google and business magnate Warren Buffett as two examples, discussing how each demonstrates that “anything is possible through lookout-post leadership.” Google’s values, states Glover, influence the long-term vision of the provider of Internet-related services. For example, the company encourages its engineers to spend twenty percent of their time exploring forward-thinking ideas. Meanwhile, Buffett is “a renaissance man,” asserts Glover, who sees new value in old systems such as freight trains, which “move raw material and other products across the nation in a less expensive and more environmentally friendly way.”

Subsequent chapters explore other traits of giraffes as Glover smoothly draws comparisons between the world’s tallest land-living animal and human leaders. He relates the giraffe’s gentle nature, for example, to a humanistic, egalitarian leadership style. The animal’s desire to always move forward compares to a leader like Jeff Bezos who, writes Glover, “embraced a commitment to nurture his dream through to a concrete reality, risking most of his money and other resources to launch Amazon.com.” The giraffe’s predator, the lion, is present in the business world in the form of a colleague who may endanger a person’s leadership.

While Glover uses Google, Amazon, and other technology companies as examples, *Giraffes of Technology* should be useful to leaders in any business that employs technology.

The power of the giraffe metaphor, frequent use of pertinent examples, and a striking cover overcome a few of the book’s minor shortcomings. A table of contents and an index would have been helpful, and on occasion, the giraffe metaphor feels just a bit overworked. But these are small criticisms.

Glover and Curry write in an informal narrative style, relating Glover’s own management experiences as well as telling

stories about other leaders. The author's understanding of both how the giraffe functions and how human leaders operate enables him to draw comparisons that are intriguing and relevant. The result is a book that approaches the subject of leadership in a refreshingly innovative way.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (May 16, 2013)

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