



Human Nature: The Politics of Achievement

J.E. Gilchrist

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“Human nature is a major part of leadership success but is often glossed over in books on leadership,” J. E. Gilchrist writes. He explains that people can—and should—learn from each other’s mistakes. “Knowing how things can go horribly wrong can help forearm those just starting out. This book is particularly for them,” he writes.

Gilchrist’s first book, *Human Nature*, is a guide to help young professionals avoid the kind of mistakes that come from inexperience. It is a collection of essays, some of which cover the author’s own career, and others that discuss a wide variety of books read by the author.

In the book’s first section, “My Unexpected Career,” Gilchrist shares the many and varied jobs he held during his working life. He hadn’t expected to have any of these jobs; in fact, he never adopted a true career path, but he was successful nonetheless. Gilchrist is now a semi-retired consultant. For those who wonder which avenue they should pursue, he explains, “Growing up, maturity, is all about setting your sights lower, more in line with reality.” It’s a sobering lesson, but one that most people entering the workforce will eventually need to learn.

In section two, the author offers commentary in six categories: “What Makes a Leader?” “What Worked for Me,” “Intrapersonal Concerns,” “Systemic Concerns,” “Health & Education,” and “Systemic Delights.” The unrelated categories seem to have been selected on the whim of the author, rather than any particular rationale.

Typically, each essay is a discussion of a specific topic and often references a book that influenced the author in his thinking. “Trust,” for example, uses Stephen Covey Jr.’s book, *The Speed of Trust*, as a launching pad for a discussion that relies heavily on the book’s message but is interlaced with the author’s personal experience and opinion.

Because each essay is self-contained, the reader can move from one section to another and freely browse the content.

One of the biggest downfalls of *Human Nature* is the difficulty of navigating the book. There is an overabundance of content, and little in the way of organization to hold the work together. It is sometimes difficult to follow Gilchrist’s train of thought, and at times, it seems as if he has written for cathartic purposes rather than to a general audience. Nonetheless, for readers who are willing to work to ferret out advice based on decades of experience, *Human Nature* may provide some leadership guidance of value.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (May 18, 2010)

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