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BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

Puttin' Cologne on the Rickshaw: A Guide to Dysfunctional Management and the Evil Workplace Environments They Create
William Bouffard
William Bouffard
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Four Stars (out of Five)

The quirky title of William Bouffard's book, a quip he credits to a colleague who had a way of skewering employers and their companies, is indicative of the absurdities the author showcases in this wickedly funny diatribe about the contemporary workplace.

Having spent more than forty years working in various positions for numerous companies, Bouffard spares no one in his freewheeling commentary. Everyone in the workforce should be able to relate to his book because, he writes, "all organizations have their own brand of dysfunctionality."

Bouffard aims his arrows at just about every aspect of the workplace. He rails against rudeness, bullying by sociopathic bosses, the practice of studying product defects when a product is already in the market (yet failing to implement measures that would have prevented those defects in the first place), the negative impact of office politics on teamwork and communication, and much more.

At times the business behavior Bouffard describes may seem so outrageously exaggerated as to be a caricature of how a company operates. Were it not for the scrupulous research the author conducted—and the fact that he cites a multitude of sources in over three hundred footnoted references, facts, and quotes—his book might be nothing more than personal invective.

Bouffard begins a number of chapters by referencing other works, such as articles, books, and even Dilbert cartoons. Then he relates them directly to each chapter's content. For example, in the chapter entitled "Animal Farm," the author offers a quick synopsis of George Orwell's 1945 classic novel which, he writes, was "a satire on a dystopian government where pigs have taken over a farm and rule the other animals." Later he writes, "The story is also about consolidation of power in the hands of a few and their evil behaviors. It shows how these evil behaviors actually become the farm's cultural atmosphere. It's the same in the workplace;

management behaviors that are subversive and oppressive make the working class completely subservient to the ruling class."

Through much of the book, Bouffard adopts a tone of righteous indignation, possibly leading one to believe that no workplace could ever live up to his lofty expectations. While his take on the work environment does seem almost entirely negative, Bouffard uses his epilogue to shine at least a small ray of hope on the doom and gloom of working for a company. His solution is not complicated: "I think the answer is to establish an environment where everyone feels they're part of an organization that respects them and their opinions, while recognizing their personal goals, needs, and problems." Unfortunately, Bouffard doesn't believe "the sociopaths" occupying the executive suite understand what it means to be equitable.

While some readers may tire of Bouffard's vitriol, *Puttin' Cologne on the Rickshaw* is an entertaining read for everyone who suspects there must be a better way to run a business.

Barry Silverstein