

The Closer

Shaz Kahng

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The Closer is an inspiring and fun take on women in business, with plenty of ceiling smashing along the way.

Shaz Kahng's fast-paced, sports-focused *The Closer* is timely and refreshing, a novel that exposes the difficulties that women face in industries that are dominated by men.

Vivien Lee (named for the movie star) is a thoroughly likable lead. She is a highly accomplished first-generation Korean American who takes on the sports industry, though it is dominated by men. Leaving her fiancé, friends, and home behind, Vivien leaves New York City for Portland to become the first woman president of women's apparel at Smart Sports.

With equal parts trepidation and naïveté, she believes her integrity and work ethic will win over her male counterparts. Instead, she encounters two-faced coworkers and must deflect chauvinistic comments and condescending attitudes. Such moments reflect the real-world difficulties that women face as leaders of businesses.

The Closer moves quickly between its events, problems, and resolutions, rarely resting too long on any particular problem. Vivien finds fast solutions thanks to friends, her mentor, and a few genuine coworkers.

Even faced with manipulation and outright lies, Vivien typically picks the higher road, following her dad's advice: "Be great and be good." Still, she isn't a saint; she occasionally loses her temper, plays into the game, or even takes revenge.

The story takes some inspiring turns, including Vivien's participation in a Wharton-founded secret club, the Ceiling Smashers, which functions as a place to maintain alliances with other women in business. Anecdotes about women's experiences at those meetings read as realistic and give credence to the bonds of sisterhood highlighted throughout.

Character relationships are developed with depth and emotion. Many of the novel's tragedies are glossed over quickly, though, including deaths, breakups, and accidents, which impedes the narrative's momentum. Characters are made to cope with tragedies rather than dealing with them, resulting in unrealistic pictures of reactions like grief.

Sports analogies, jargon, and quotes are used throughout, giving the story a unique, entertaining quality. They serve as an alternative way to work through workplace problems and successes. Kahng's is a fresh approach to stories about CEOs and business dealings. Those not well versed in sports will have no trouble following along; everything is concisely contextualized, from named athletes, including Michael Jordan, to terms like "the Sunday punch."

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JENNIFER MILLER (August 9, 2017)

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