

Book Review for 1/18/04 by Bruce Berger

Title: "Building Trust at the Speed of Change"

Author: Edward M. Marshall

Publisher: AMACOM

Length: 216 pages

Reading time: 6-7 hours

Reading rating: 9 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 4 ( 1 = average, 4 = outstanding)

A recent conversation with a new consulting client's operations manager, Ken, went like this:

Q: Ken, what is your top challenge?

A: Consistent performance at the highest level so we can hit our quarterly goals. Things change so fast it's hard to keep up.

Q: What prevents you from achieving that?

A: Many of our people - leaders and staff - get embroiled in conflict, turf wars and ego battles. Some teams don't trust others even though we have embraced the latest "TQ team philosophy."

I heard his plea as he rambled on about how difficult it is to get your arms around trust. Being touchy-feely is not his style nor that of many other leaders, the CEO is bottom line results-oriented, and there is very little time in the day to spend on messaging egos or "feel good" training.

Edward M. Marshall provides a solution for Ken and other leaders and business owners in "Building Trust at the Speed of Change" when they have had enough pain.

The author's central premise is that if you want rapid change to work in your favor, more productivity, total quality, unrivaled customer service and high performance, the Kents and their CEOs of the world must truly and unapologetically learn how to move from a transaction-based to a relationship-based organization by using trust as a common ground.

When workplace culture systemically supports and emphasizes trust and relationships and when leaders listen to people's hearts speak, incredible energy is unleashed. Only then will a relationship-based workplace be created to banish fear and distrust, focus more on the customer and build a work culture that will sustain that energy overtime. Hence, the author appropriately subtitled the book, "The Power of the Relationship-Based Corporation."

The first half of the book lays the groundwork for Mr. Marshall's step-by-step process for creating a relation-based organization. The chapter titled, "Trust as the Common Ground"

is particularly introspective and will force the reader to re-examine their own perception of trust and all it embodies. You might be surprised at what you find in there!

The second half provides the bang-for-the-buck. The author draws on his 20-year career as an organizational development and change management consultant and provides illustrative vignettes based on real clients. He introduces the "Collaborative Methods" process of culture-first change. Specific tools and methods are provided to assist in its implementation and increase the probability of success.

The last three chapters focus on the change principles of character, will and discipline and how they apply to both leadership and culture change. Obstacles and prescriptive interventions are set forth.

When Fortune 500s buy into this type of culture transformation you can bet its not too terribly touchy-feely. Mr. Marshall makes a compelling case that it is the only choice left that will bring about the desired result.

This work appears to be the sequel to an earlier book, " Transforming the Way We Work: The Power of the Collaborative Workplace," by the same publisher. A more philosophical tome, it explained the then "new" management approach wending its way into the lexicon of leadership texts - collaboration. However, studies demonstrated that most organizations were not successful with a culture of collaboration. It was hard to implement but when it was many leaders felt threatened. The missing ingredient? First, build a Relationship-Based culture of trust. Mr. Marshall now demonstrates how to do it.

Beyond all doubt, Mr. Marshall correctly diagnosis the disease and prescribes strange-tasting yet powerful medicine for the leadership to swallow. If they decide to take it the tyranny of the urgent and the paradigms of the past fall as their organization, their people, their culture will transcend to the highest level of trust . . . and performance.

Bruce Berger is an Assistant Professor of Business Law in the College of Business at Western Carolina University and is president of a performance improvement consulting firm.