

COB Review by Terry Kinnear

Title: "Edgewalkers: People and Organizations That Take Risks, Build Bridges, and Break New Ground"

Author: Judi Neal

Publisher: Praeger

Publication: 2006

Length: 188 pages

Price: \$39.95

Reading time: 5 hours

Reading rating: 7 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

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

"Edgewalkers" is much more than your typical leadership book. While Judi Neal addresses the qualities of leaders as edgewalkers, she also tends to other matters of importance related to organizational health. Among other things, these include functional and dysfunctional roles in organizations, especially at they relate to the special leaders she addresses.

Attention to the organization level of analysis, organizational change, and the development necessary to nurture edgewalking qualities on the individual level contribute to the meaningfulness of this book.

"Edgewalkers" is primarily about individuals who ". . . have a strong spiritual life and are also very grounded and effective in the everyday material world." They are regarded as persons capable of anticipating the future, identifying creative solutions to difficult problems, and facilitating integration across diverse groups in the workplace.

In addition to identifying the characteristics of edgewalkers, Neal tends to how their qualities may be developed. She also discusses how they might thrive while being different than most others in a traditional organization.

"Edgewalkers" offers a chapter on organizations which truly ". . . value the development of human potential and see that as an inherent part of their mission and purpose." This includes appreciation for all employees' physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well being.

Finally, this book is rich beyond the text; it includes suggested readings, insightful Web sites, and other resources. Among other topics, the appendices include questions we may ask ourselves about our own qualities, those recognized in edgewalkers.

The world has been increasingly turbulent for decades and the need for extraordinary leaders in all types of organizations is not debatable. Organizational failure and corporate difficulties are rampant; edgewalkers and their organizations are those who will bridge the current state of affairs to the future. This book articulates attributes that enable this to happen.

A primary strength of this book, beyond its message, is the foundation upon which it is developed. The author's wide-ranging personal experiences, case studies, and meaningful interactions with leaders from a variety of professions account for much of the substance. The inclusion of these and numerous quotes adds credence and clarity to the discussion. Steve Jobs' 2005 Stanford University Commencement Address, for example, serves to illustrate her concept of an edgewalker.

This book does not offer a simplistic quick-fix solution or developmental scheme for leadership, but it does give us a realistic sense of what is needed and this is presented as quite doable. As such, it is a very practical book. It is straightforward, focused, conversational in parts, and relies considerably on stories to illustrate difficult material.

For example, Igor Sikorsky, founder of Sikorsky Aircraft and instrumental to the development of the helicopter, is used to explain the nature of edgewalking. Although a scientist, he had the capability of "soaring beyond facts"; he was not only regarded as technically competent and grounded in the world of business, but also a deeply spiritual man.

In conclusion, Judi Neal's book is extraordinarily insightful for professionals in the world of work. It enables us to take stock of who we are and the nature of our organizations, including those people of importance and dysfunction around us. The contributions of her work are not only for people who aspire to be edgewalkers, but also for those who should appreciate this concept and shore up their organizations with appropriate personnel.

Terry Kinnear is associate professor of management in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. His current professional interests included virtually all topics addressing the well being of people in the workplace. For previously reviewed books, visit the Internet at www.wcu.edu/cob/bookreviews.