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Best Practices—Best Preachers?

Andrew Ruppel, Feature Editor

Competition among (and within!) consulting firms and individual consultants has certainly heated up. Thus, it is not surprising that firms are striving to increase their visibility to existing and to potential clients. Guru-status consultants, such as Tom Peters and Michael Porter, have been successful in their self-promotion with a stream of popular management books and appearances in the lecture circuit. Also putting consultants in the spotlight, albeit in a somewhat negative one, was the 1997 book, *Dangerous Company*, by two award-winning journalists, James O'Shea and Charles Madigan. Some consulting firms are responding with books aimed at appealing positively to practicing managers and CEOs. Here are several such books.



Best practices:
Building your business with customer-focused solutions.

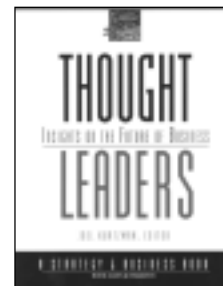
R. Hiebeler,
T.B. Kelly, &
C. Ketteman
Arthur Andersen

Simon & Schuster,
1998, 240 pages.

www.SimonSays.com

COMPILED BY THREE TOP-LEVEL Arthur Andersen managers, this volume provides highlight examples from AA's client base. (Even more are provided in their web site, www.arthurandersen.com/bestpractices.) Six of the eight chapters deal with marketing; the first two address the need for benchmarking and the way to carry out an audit. Each of the last six chapters follows the same format: sub-processes (what we used to call steps) are listed and the worthy efforts of a selected company are described for each. Several companies show up more than once as 'best practice-ers'—Federal Express, American Express, Lexus, Disney, and Peapod. The latter is an on-line grocery store operating in major cities. Each chapter ends with a Best Practice Agenda and a diagnostic question list. Here's an example from the chapter on market research: "Can you succinctly explain the benefits your company realizes from grouping customers as it does?" Elaboration on Arthur Andersen's scheme for clas-

sifying business processes can be found within their web site's section dealing with global best practices. Like many aspects of marketing, the steps . . . oops . . . the sub-processes outlined reflect straightforward, common business sense. The trick, of course, is to convert them into actual practice, which the authors feel will be made easier by giving proven examples. But clear evidence that a given best practice is *the* best is not given. The criterion for judging 'best' seems to be that it works. Hence, 'pragmatic practices' might be a better name, but one with far less marketability however. According to their web site, Arthur Andersen plans two more 'best practice' books—one on information technology and one on electronic commerce. (I doubt they will be drawing upon Anderson Consulting's client files for this now that the two firms are at legal loggerheads.)



Thought leaders:
Insights on the future of business.

Edited by Joel
Kurtzman.
Booz-Allen &
Hamilton.

Jossey-Bass, 1998,
167 pages.

www.josseybass.com

DRAWN FROM THE PAGES OF *Strategy & Business*, a 'house-journal' for Booz-Allen & Hamilton, this is a collection of 12 inter-



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views (conducted between 1995-97) with individuals having a clear interest and competence in thinking about strategy. Five are CEOs, six are academics, and one is a corporate economist. Geographically, three are Asian, three are European, and the remaining six hail from the U.S. There is an introduction by Booz-Allen's president. How insightful are these people? My bias favors the CEOs. Minoru Makihara, president of Mitsubishi, reveals that the fabled keiretsu structure is transforming, in part due to globalization forces and opportunities. Rhone-Poulenc CEO Jean-Rene Fourtou favors greater interchange among functional specialists within the corporate hierarchy and so has required that discipline specialists within R-P hold annual meetings to discuss discipline developments. Stan Shih, CEO of Acer computers, speaks of "global brand, local touch."

These interviews, along with other articles, can be found at www.strategy-business.com, a site linked to Booz-Allen's www.bah.com. It is interesting to note that recent issues are including a "Best Practice" section. It is also interesting to note that Booz-Allen has partnered with the *Financial Times* of London to sponsor a Global Business Book Awards program. One can go to www.gbba.com to see the winners for 1995 and 1996, along with the contenders for 1997. Entrants need not deal solely with global (i.e., international) business. The aims of the award program are to recognize innovative contributions and to promote worldwide readership of outstanding business books.



Straight from the CEO
 Edited by William Dauphinais and Colin Price.
 Price Waterhouse.
 Simon Schuster,
 1998, 318 pages.
www.SimonSays.com

COMPRISED OF 30 ESSAYS plus three interviews, this collection of CEO viewpoints covers six broad themes: globalization, radical change, leadership, culture, innovation & creativity, and customer relationships. Very

few of the essays offer advice that one hasn't heard before and it is astonishing how earnest some of the authors are in the language they use to offer it.

More useful are the introductions to each section written by the editors. Readers will nevertheless appreciate the diversity of backgrounds of the CEO contributors who range from the now almost-legendary Percy Barnevik to the head of the UN's High Commission for Refugees, Sadako Ogata—who, by the way, offers some solid criteria for judging global professionals. Almost two-thirds of the contributors are affiliated with non-US enterprises—not surprising since they come from Price-Waterhouse's client list. The CEO's are mainly from large public companies, e.g., Royal Dutch Shell, Chase Manhattan. One academic sneaks into the book: Glen Urban from the MIT Sloan School. He writes from his role as dean and as one interested in the innovation process. He talks about how the school is repositioning itself among the plethora of MBA programs. The best parts of this book deal with globalization. Overall, it would have been a **best practice** to use all interviews (assuming good interviewers) rather than pieces written (not always by the CEO, I suspect) for corporate image enhancement.



Perspectives on strategy from the Boston Consulting Group.
 Edited by Carl W. Stern & George Stalk, Jr.
 John Wiley & Sons,
 1998, 319 pages.
www.wiley.com

CONTAINS 75 PIECES ON THE NATURE, development and practice of business strategy, drawn from BCG's *Perspectives* series and from *Harvard Business Review* articles. BCG, of course, is well known for its matrix approach and the associated catch phrase "cash cow." Other insightful concepts used by this firm are: "experience curves" and "time-based management." Mr. Stern is the newly named president and CEO of BCG and Stalk is a senior vice president of the

firm. In addition to articles on strategy, this collection also includes social commentary. Interested readers may wish to peruse their web site: www.bcg.com.



Value-based knowledge management: Creating the 21st century company.
 René Tissen, Daniel Andriessen, and Frank L. Deprez

KPMG
 Addison Wesley Longman, 1998.
<http://kpmg.interact.nl>

MERGE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY jargon with consulting-speak and this is what one can get. *Value-Based Knowledge Management* provides conventional text, coupled with sidebars of focused illustrations and examples of best practices. The package also includes two CD-ROMs; one is a summary of the material, the other is a diagnostic aid. The authors are from KPMG's Amsterdam office and they exploit [*belabor?*] the point that the world is moving from the Industrial Economy to the Knowledge Economy. One of the greatest challenges, they say, for companies in the Knowledge Economy is distinguishing between ordinary knowledge and "value-adding knowledge." Value-adding knowledge includes operational and strategic aspects. Operational knowledge is the knowledge required to "create & produce" while strategic knowledge is required to "sense & respond." Companies are implementing knowledge-sharing processes—using Intranets, for example—in a desire to integrate these knowledge categories into a single environment.

Beyond the Knowledge Economy, according to the authors, is the Quantum Economy. Already on the horizon, the Quantum Economy is bringing new challenges and new opportunities while gaining momentum as the "high end" segment of the Knowledge Economy. *Value-Based Knowledge Management* examines the way quantum computing technology [*whatever that is*] will play a vital role in world economic developments. ■