

Book Review : *The IT Leader's Manual*

Sébastien Giroux
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Reviewed by Mark Northway FInstAM, BA(Hons).

It is always refreshing to see books which acknowledge awkward professional truths, and even better to see someone not only confronting them, but offering suggested approaches to improve engagement and – ultimately – effectiveness.

Here we have a book which claims to (xii) "...help you reach the executive board.." and provide tips to "...find or groom the right person."

In *The IT Leader's Manual*, Sébastien Giroux attempts to analyse perceptions of IT as a function, of IT managers and IT staff, and offers strategies for improvement. The premise of the book is applauded, but unfortunately the book quickly loses its way. The first problem is identifying what is the book trying to achieve: being boss of IT; a manager; a leader; getting a seat in the boardroom; advancing a career; breaking a glass ceiling? All are different, and the lack of focus shows.

In an effort to address all these aims, the writer has attempted to identify a new type of leader – a Neo Classic Leader. The writer suggests that the "Business success secret ingredient is "...called luck" (p117). While this section of the book covers some interesting general management theories (culture, perception and influence), it draws more on classic approaches than offering anything ground breaking. Suggesting within the book that 12-15 principles (yes, really – see p86) are established, and that these are printed on posters and mugs underlines that the writer has overlooked the work of Deming and many others in recommending the elimination of slogans and exhortations. The tip given on that same page is "Establish a list of principles. Enforce them." Scary.

And so it goes on. There are tips liberally distributed throughout the book – p119 "Behave as though you are already an executive" (then immediately adding "Don't overdo it); "Make yourself look like what you want to be. Dress the part.". After a short story of someone who noted when the boss went to the toilet so they went at the same time "to make an impression", the tip is "Engineer your own chance encounter with the people that matter".

On suppliers, they are "a slippery thing to manage". Tips for dealing with them include "Develop true win-win situations with your suppliers" (p112); "Develop normal human relationships with your suppliers." (p33), then on the same page "Start negotiations with a contract template from your organisation. Reject a contract template from the supplier." Hardly the soundest advice for relationship building.

Ethical and natural relationship building? Not a bit of it: Tip on p22 "Build your own stakeholder map...keep it at home to avoid an accidental leak.". "Your boss's emails are priority.". Find out "Who is close to the CEO? Who is in line for succession ?"

Communication (p42) is dismissed as "Seemingly a rather new buzz word,..." and – p13 – "...doesn't solve any problems,...". On both counts, really?

Some parts are unintentionally hilarious - p106 has as a serious tip: "Don't join exit interviews for your staff." Then adding "...especially if you are involved in the reason for the departure."

At the end of the book (p172), to "Be the accomplished leader you aspire to be..." all you need to do is "Just follow the framework, build your own action plan and execute it..." Which is rather a classic simplistic IT-style response to a rather more complex set of issues! Unfortunately, this book does more to confirm negative perceptions of IT than it does in anything else.

Mark Northway FInstAM., BA(Hons).

*Mark Northway is Director and Courses Co-ordinator at Deltic Training.
Tel: 01263 711811 www.deltic-training.co.uk*

