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IAN MANN REVIEWS | Better humaning in a world gone digital crazy

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We Are Still Human [and work shouldn't suck!] by Brad Shorkend & Andy Golding

In this column, I have reviewed numerous books on the toll bad workplaces take on the people who go there to earn the money they need to live. (See 'Dying for a Paycheck' by Jeffery Pfeffer)

While there are many books on enhancing aspects of work or the workplace, Shorkend and Golding's book, 'Still Human', is an unusually valuable contribution. Firstly, it is a great read – it is humorous and engaging. This is important because so many people tell me that they find business books difficult to finish (and judging from the pristine state of books on their bookshelves, difficult to start!)

The second reason why this book is valuable is that it is a comprehensive guide to the practical business of improving your workplace to improve profitability. It presents 12 essential practices that together will improve the working lives of your people. The '12 essentials' are discrete elements that reinforce each other and that will produce a company that is "behaving awesomely", but perhaps more importantly, doesn't require using all twelve to see meaningful improvement.

There is an unspoken presupposition that if you are making money you can afford to focus on your employees and give them perks. Until then 'we all need to put our noses to the grindstone' and get work done. This raises an important issue. You cannot work in that position, any more than you can work diligently and enthusiastically if your job or workplace makes you miserable.

Add to this the proven fact that if your company were a "great place to work" you would be more profitable. A fund investing almost exclusively for companies on the 'Best Companies to Work For' list, produced a 26% better return than the overall S&P index during the same period!

As AI and machines become more able to do what only humans could do in the past, there is an inclination that we must drive humans more, so they can compete. Just as chasing happiness doesn't make you happy, neither does driving humans make you more productive. Chasing challenging and important goals makes you happy, as does a stimulating and engaging workplace make you more productive.

The opening 'essential' is "Awakedness". This is the polar opposite of the 19th century belief that if we build it, they will buy it. With the abundance of everything around us today, that is far from a truth. "Awakedness" is being "switched on and tuned in, and adjusting to suit." It is remaining relevant, a fundamental requirement for every business. Take your eye off relevancy, and you are fated to go the way of many iconic stores and brands.

At the company level, Google, for example, identified a pain point for their staff around their 3-month maternity leave. Employees felt they needed more time with their new born. When Google extended the leave by a third, they experienced a 50% increase in the retention of new mothers, and attracted more desirable staff.

The "Shared Purpose" essential opens with the quote from Saint-Exupery: If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work... but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

A shared purpose is the contribution your company is there to make, and that will elicit positive feelings from staff. When the purpose is 'increasing shareholder value', it neither elicits positive feelings nor does it increase shareholder value. A shared purpose should try to tick these boxes: Elicit joy, get people to connect, inspire exploration, generate pride and impact society.

Each chapter ends with a brief guide for the leader and with "un-fiddle-with ables" (don't mess about with these.) For this essential, two of the six are: Don't rush it! and Don't rush it! And also don't stop the process until there is buy-in from all.

"Recognition" is a pivotal essential. There is no end of evidence that people who are recognized for what they achieve or contribute do more, and that those who aren't recognized are deflated. Recognition comes in many forms but when done well, it sends the clear message that "I see you and I value your contribution and the effort you have put in."



According to a 2014 CareerBuilder report, 65% of people who intend to leave their jobs cite 'not feeling valued' as one of their primary reasons. The authors point out that the elation of a salary increase is short-lived. Effective recognition must be timely – as soon after the action as possible. It must also be explicit so there is no doubt about what you appreciate. It must be authentic not generic or contrived. And for impact, tie it to what you know will push that employee's hot buttons.

"People often say motivation doesn't last; well neither does bathing – that's why we recommend it daily." (Zig Ziglar)

The "Innovation with intent" essential is essential mainly because it is so misunderstood. Firstly, innovation must be understood as the combination of ideation plus implementation. Great ideas are not in short supply, implementing them is. Innovation is not an event, nor can it be: rather it is the constant process of coming up with new ideas and making them a reality. It is the fearless activity that includes false starts and missed turns, but just keeps on. The great companies of the world rarely did what had never been thought of before, rather they did what others had thought of, but never did.

The intention of the book is to guide leaders at all levels to making their companies "awesome". "Awesome" workplaces attract the best people, and when they join, they stay, and they are proud of the company. And of course, these people make the company hugely successful.

There are 12 essentials, but you don't have to, nor can you do, all at once. As Sean Fitzpatrick, a New Zealand Rugby Captain said (another of the tens of great quotes in the book!) "Success is modest improvement, consistently done."

Even if you are an avid reader of business books, read this book. It is a succinct collection of important leadership ideas, thoughtfully presented in an engaging manner. If you are not an avid reader of business books, that is even more reason to read this one.

Readability **Light -+--- Serious**
Insights **High +---- Low**
Practical **High +---- Low**

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