



Oh, and One More Thing...

The Sixth in a series of An Executive Summary for Busy Managers.

A good friend and a dedicated reader of our series recommended that I include The One Thing You Need to Know... about Great Managing, Great Leading, and Sustained Individual Success by Marcus Buckingham in our executive summary series. I thought that was a great idea since I enjoyed his other book, First Break All the Rules. Well, I can say that I could not have been more wrong. Maybe I was not paying enough attention to the first book, but this current book lost all credibility right from the outset.

Got your coffee? Good... away we go!

Have you ever heard of the bait and switch? Well this book is a classic example. I know what you are thinking... you can't judge a book by its cover. Well you certainly cannot judge a book by a title either. The title is so tempting. I only have to learn one thing to make all of it so much easier. Then again, if it was really one thing would it be written in a 300 page book?

I will tell you right now that there is no one thing in One Thing. There are about one million things. On top of that, each of those one million things is said over and over again. It is perhaps the most repetitive book I have ever read. It is perhaps the most repetitive book I have ever read (that's a joke). If you did not understand it the first time then you have a few more chances to get it. Perhaps Buckingham had a page quota because he says things many times that are not difficult to grasp the first time. One Thing is about three times as repetitive as this paragraph.

How does a person sell 1,600 packages of deodorant in one month working at Walgreens? I don't know; but Buckingham tells a story of a woman who did it. He does not tell you the one thing that helped her to sell them to customers though.

One of the first points that Buckingham makes is that he failed in a management role. He claims that he knows how to do research and even get things completed, but he does not know how to manage and lead people. Why would someone who writes an authoritative book on managing and leading tell you that he is incapable of implementing his research? It certainly is not to instill confidence in the reader. Are you going to hop into a Range Rover on an African safari with a guy who tells you that he is a mapmaker but gets lost anytime he tries to go somewhere?

The first real thought provoking idea in this book is the idea of discovering what is unique about each person and then capitalizing upon their special skill set. It is postulated that a manager should do this in order to make his or her group perform well. Buckingham also talks about managers not expecting to change people but instead, to just capitalize on their strengths. This is a little disconcerting to me. I can understand that it is easier to manage someone who enjoys and is good at their task. However, as



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moving ideas forward

a manager shouldn't we also try to grow a person beyond their comfort zone? Of course an individual's primary work role should be within their forte'. But, once you have them moving in a positive direction, it is extremely important that you continue to challenge people with tasks on the periphery of their capability. Think about this for a moment. You spend over 2,000 hours per year at work. It would be a pretty sad state if in that time you did not learn how to do something new. Your people deserve the same consideration.

The second thing that Buckingham talks about is how a leader can be more effective. A leader has the exact opposite task of a manager. Instead of uniqueness, a leader must discover what is universal and capitalize on it. The thought is that a leader should define a common goal for all the people below him to follow. The goal should be crystal clear so that everyone understands the direction in which the organization is moving. It is not the leader's responsibility to define how to achieve the goal, rather just to define that it is out there for all to see. The funny thing is that Buckingham and all the other authors that he quotes talk about "Neutron Jack" in a questionable light. Isn't that in fact exactly what Jack Welch did when he made it clear to GE that they will be first or second in a market area or else they will not compete? Some may question whether this was a goal or a threat but either way, it was pretty universal, pretty clear and pretty effective. I guess it is tough to excel as a leader when it takes 300 pages to get this point across.

This brings me to another annoying aspect of this book. Buckingham has almost as much text in quotations as he has original thoughts. He quotes all of the classic authors as well as the new-age management gurus. He retells stories about companies like Walgreens and Best Buy. The short anecdotes are perhaps the most engaging part of the book since they describe ideas that have been proven in the real world. It is these anecdotes that are really the only cause for reading this book.

First Break All the Rules might be a better place to start with Buckingham. You do have to get past the defiant title that appeals to the next generation of managers. Once you get into the book though it does offer many ideas and tactics that you can readily employ the next morning in the workplace. The best of the topics is asking yourself if your employees know exactly what is expected of them. Again, we come back to a common thread. Do your people have clearly defined and measurable tasks?

Just my opinion and we all know what "they" say about opinions...

Thanks

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