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BUSINESS BOOKS

Two books look at business basics

Two recent books look at the things that business people must know before they start operating outside the box.

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Think far outside the box; do wild, counterintuitive things; look for new, unexpected ways to find customers; recruit employees from Outer Space, market your products and services in unimaginable ways; and build your brand using telepathy and transmutation. Remember: Cutting edge isn't radical enough. Go for bleeding edge, baby!

Yeah, right.

The truth is that nothing has changed as far as business fundamentals are concerned. You still have to run your operations with intelligence and flexibility, do the right things most of the time, watch out for the competition -- oh, and make sure your product or service is wanted and needed.

In jazz, before you can go off into a soaring improvisational solo or a polyrhythmic percussion break, you have to know the melody and feel the beat. Ditto with business.

This pair of current books emphasizes the fundamentals:

Kiss Theory Good Bye: Five Proven Ways to Get Extraordinary Results in Any Company. Gold Pen Publishing. Bob Prosen. 219 pages. \$21.95.

Author Bob Prosen is a veteran executive, consultant and teacher. Despite his book's title, he is not at all averse to theory and does not insist that there is only one right way to do things. What he does say repeatedly is that each commercial endeavor requires clear and relentless leadership, an effective sales effort, operational excellence, strong financial management and customer loyalty.

How these things are accomplished is left open, though he offers plenty of suggestions.

Along the way, the other factors that he values -- such as the acquisition of timely information, discipline and tenacity, honesty, attention to detail and constant oversight -- serve to support every aspect of the behaviors needed to run and grow an enterprise.

Prosen is not a dictator, nor does he advocate management by edict, despite an insistence upon unambiguous leadership and authority. He wisely favors openness and honest communication as a means of empowering employees at every level to act on behalf of the company, and encourages the free exchange of ideas as a means of building loyalty and encouraging accountability. Management is everyone's responsibility, even if you're just managing yourself.

There's a lot to this book, and Prosen's affirmative attitude permeates the text. His sincere enthusiasm for doing things the right way to achieve optimum success is energizing and inspirational without being trite or corny.

Streetwise Small Business Book of Lists: Hundreds of Lists to Help You Reduce Costs, Increase Revenues and Boost Your Profits. Gene Marks. Adams Media Corp. 672 pages. \$19.95.

This heavy volume is an excellent starting point for finding tools to establish and run your business. While it may seem easier to simply type the appropriate search terms into Google, Gene Marks already sifted through the dross, effluvia and ephemera so you can get to the good stuff.

Tax laws, ways to save on rental cars, state-by-state liability laws, important aspects of business plans, how to survive small-claims court, questions to ask -- and not to ask -- during employment interviews, it's all here. While it's certain that you won't need every list all of the time, it's equally likely that you will stumble upon something you didn't know or didn't know you needed to know while thumbing through this thick and rich resource.

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