



Top business books of 2010

By Richard Pachter, Mcclatchy-Tribune News January 2, 2011

As always, I know I read more biz books than any pedantic autodidact oughta.

But I can't read everything, so this list totally subjective and based on the things I read and reviewed, and not the books I couldn't and didn't. Happy New Year!

Linchpin by Seth Godin (Portfolio). Maybe his best book yet, it's also his most personal. Rather than explain marketing, pontificate about the urgent need to be unique, how to spread ideas or when to quit, the uber-guru and mega-blogger aims his message squarely at the growing ranks of anxious employees who wonder what lies ahead for them and their jobs. Right-brain activity -- creativity -- is the answer, he says, but takes it farther by declaring that to ensure job security, one must imbue his or her work with "art" and make every effort a "gift" rather than a chore. Heady stuff.

Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us by Daniel H. Pink (Putnam). In this ideal companion piece to Godin's tome, Pink examines motivation and finds that the most powerful drives come from within, and are more important to us than material compensation. His findings seem counterintuitive to those of us who have long accepted the Pavlovian doctrine that we work mainly for such "rewards" as salary and other external reinforcements. But harnessing the power of intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic remuneration can be thoroughly satisfying and infinitely more rewarding.

Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard by Chip Heath and Dan Heath (Random House). The authors of "Made To Stick" recount episodes from business,

government, health care, academia and other areas of human interaction where needed change seemed difficult or impossible, yet someone still found ways to get from here to there. Minor moves achieved dramatic results. Now, when business needs to be more nimble than ever, reading this great little book could well be among the most effective small steps one could take.

Leading Outside the Lines: How to Mobilize the Informal Organization, Energize Your Team, and Get Better Results by Jon R. Katzenbach and Zia Khan (John Wiley & Sons). In many organizations, informal structures that bypass established hierarchies are the ones that actually get things done. These loose confederations of doers may respect the authority of those above them on the corporate food chain, but they -- nonetheless -- developed and implemented ways to circumvent and subvert them. Katzenbach and Khan look at the phenomenon and reveal ways that these ad hoc, informal groups can be reliably mobilized and engaged.

The Referral Engine: Teaching Your Business To Market Itself by John Jantsch (Penguin). Jantsch, the Duct Tape Marketing author, identifies humans' inherent need to refer and recommend, and offers some really good nuts-and-bolts suggestions for getting closer to customers and eliciting their kudos. His suggestions apply to a variety of businesses, so whether you proffer products, services -- or any combination thereof -- there's an abundance of ideas for making the

most of, and extending, each client interaction.

The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity by Richard Florida (Random House). Florida's flood of data forms a nice mosaic of snapshots as he explains how the Industrial Revolution and the Great Depression morphed the largely rural, agrarian economy and population of the United States into an urban manufacturing powerhouse. As in his earlier book, "The Rise of the Creative Class," Florida argues effectively (and with stats, naturally) that the country's diversity has been its most powerful, important and, ironically, subtlest strength.

I Live in the Future & Here's How It Works by Nick Bilton (Crown Publishing). Bilton, a talented journalist and lead writer for the New York Times' "Bits" blog, doesn't know everything, nor does he know where everything is headed, but he boasts an excellent sense of culture, context and technology as he smartly surveys the digital landscape. We can cry about wanting things to be as they were, but we really need to use our heads and hearts to learn how to deal with what we have, and get ready for what comes next. Hasn't the future always been like that?

Bury My Heart At Conference Room B: The Unbeatable Impact of Truly Committed Managers by Stan Slap (Portfolio). Slap's avowed goal is encouraging genuine and visceral connections between managers and employees, tying personal values and goals to the daily routine of working together. His text includes individual testimonials from executives who, after a head-slapping moment or two, linked their moral standards to their business ethics and operational methods to great effect. There's also one from Slap

himself, detailing his challenging (to say the least) upbringing, which serves as both an inspiration and an invitation to amateur psychologists to connect

it to his ongoing passions and methodologies.

The Man Who Sold America: The Amazing (but True!) Story of Albert D. Lasker and the Creation of the Advertising Century by Jeffrey Cruikshank and Arthur Schultz (Harvard Business Press). This sprawling, old-fashioned biography of Albert Lasker brings to life an important figure in the world of advertising and politics. Among his accomplishments, according to the authors, is the prominence given to content and copywriting; the consumer-centred ad; modern political advertising; branding commodities; selling previously unmentionable female hygiene products; and more, including the "creation" and popularization of orange juice as a daily morning beverage.

The Art of Choosing by Sheena Iyengar (Grand Central). If you choose to read Columbia University professor Iyengar's fascinating book, you may have a better idea of how humans formulate decisions. We like to be in control but often consciously (or not) defer to parents, authorities or even strangers. We often say one thing, then do something else. Choices we feel strongly about one day may fade into an afterthought with time. Iyengar's frequent digressions and asides are as cogent and interesting as her main points, and certainly as descriptive; an amazing feat for a sightless person. But then, her vision extends far beyond the physical domain.

Program or be Programmed: Ten Commands for a Digital Age by Douglas Rushkoff (OR Books). The author's mission is to raise awareness of the human implications of our technologies -- the context (if you will) of our actions. His Decalogue is a set of rules of conduct. To wit: "Do Not Be 'Always On'; Live in Person; You May Always Choose 'None of the Above'; You Are Never Completely Right; One Size Does Not Fit All; Be Yourself; Do Not Sell Your Friends; Tell the Truth; Share, Don't Steal; and Program or Be Programmed." On the surface they seem pretty obvious, but like their Biblical counterparts, they add up to a wise and ethical way to conduct oneself, in this case, mostly within the online and virtual worlds.

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