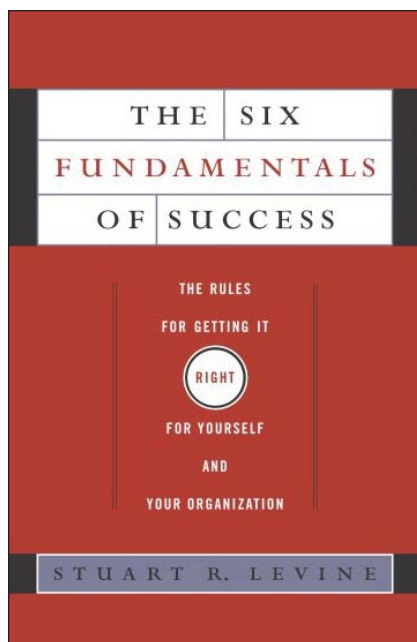


BOOKS



Success 101



The Six Fundamentals of Success: The Rules for Getting It Right for Yourself and Your Organization

By Stuart R. Levine

Reviewed by Geoff Thatcher

Stuart Levine's new book, *The Six Fundamentals of Success*, made me feel like I was enrolled in Success 101 at Faber College (yes, Faber from the movie *Animal House*). While my professor is a genius with incredible experiences to share, he is also hamstrung by an administration (or in this case, an editor) with a strict agenda and no sense of humor.

By "strict agenda," I'm talking about what seems to be the requirement of business publications these days: a small book, less than an inch thick, with short chapters. In fact, the entire book is only 213 pages. With that limited volume, Levine doesn't share much beyond some

of the basics: "Work out, eat right, get enough sleep" and "express anger constructively."

A quick read might be nice for an executive on a commuter jet, but this book left me wanting more. Specifically, I wanted more stories. It is 34 pages before Levine shares a single story to support his important fundamentals. In order to "add value," he exhorts us to "act like an owner," with this anecdote:

One day, a unit team at a *Fortune* 100 company was doing a routine review of paid expenses when someone noticed the company had overpaid a vendor by US\$20. "Most of the team thought it

wasn't worth their time to chase down the mistake," says Levine. "But one person went back and checked the vendor files." He found that the company had also overpaid that vendor by \$100,000 during the previous six months.

That's a great story, but it also reveals another issue with the book: The examples are generic and leave out important details to fully illustrate Levine's points. Throughout the book, we learn about "one major airline executive" or "one publicly traded company." I can appreciate that Levine can't reveal the true details behind every story. But to be effective, those accounts at least need some detail, dialogue, or drama.

The most powerful story in the book comes at the end when Levine—finally—talks about himself. It's a touching story about his experience as a 25-year-old New York state assemblyman who lost reelection in 1974. "I had learned one of life's most important lessons," he says. "We are not what we do."

After reading Levine's bio, I was dying to read more about his personal experiences as CEO of Dale Carnegie and Associates, or working with clients such as Georgia Pacific, Cablevision, Symbol Technologies, and Microsoft. That's because his fundamentals are beyond important; they're critical, and readers require more information about his rationale than he gives. In my view, *Success 101* should not be an elective.

Despite my criticism, *The Six Fundamentals of Success* is, as one Harvard professor says on the back cover, "an important primer." Every new grad or new employee in your organization should check it out. And because it's such a quick read, it's a good refresher for those of us who've been around for a while. For example, I was particularly intrigued by the first fundamental: "Make sure you add value." Too many people (myself included) throw around such phrases as, "we made money on that" and "the margin is good" without

really knowing what they're talking about. To counter that, Levine suggests creating what he calls a "performance dashboard."

"Think of a car's dashboard," he says. "There are gauges and indicators that tell you whether critical functions are working. That information is designed to monitor the car's performance and help you make necessary repairs before the car breaks down. So, Levine suggests designing a "dashboard" to monitor your job performance. He encourages readers to "use it to see if you're getting where you want to be this quarter or this year." That advice is timely, considering there's a growing number of software applications that enable you to do that.

I want to add two other notes of praise. First, I cheer (with all of the vigor of the college football fan that I am) Levine's use of sports metaphors. In my opinion, too many leaders avoid sports metaphors because they're afraid of offending people who either aren't fans or don't participate in sports.

Also, Elisabeth Rendfleisch's simple and sophisticated book design is easy on the eyes. Anyone who thinks modern typesetting isn't an art is sorely mistaken.

Though I applaud Levine's fundamentals and Rendfleisch's design, I can't get over my frustration by what I assume was the editor's agenda: creating a small book on purpose. Unfortunately, the book is so small that there aren't enough great stories to fully support the six crucial fundamentals. For that reason, I give it two and a half cups of coffee.

The Six Fundamentals of Success: The Rules for Getting It Right for Yourself and Your Organization, by Stuart R. Levine. Doubleday/Currency: New York. 213 pp. US\$19.95

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If This, Then....

If you're looking for more motivational career advice, check out these books.

The Feiner Points of Leadership: The 50 Basic Laws That Will Make People Want to Perform Better for You

By Michael Feiner
(Warner Books, 2004, US\$25)

Leadership isn't about how powerful you are; it's about how effectively you manage relationships. And while people aren't born with managing skills, they can be taught to inspire those around them.

Feiner uses his 20 years of experience at Pepsi-Cola as a basis for his 50 laws of leadership. When applied, they help people to respond in positive and desirable ways.

Leverage Your Best, Ditch the Rest: The Coaching Secrets Top Executives Depend On

By Scott Blanchard and Madeleine Homan
(William Morrow, 2004, \$22.95)

Blanchard and Homan share their 14 years of executive coaching and consulting experience to help readers appraise and manage their work environments and talents.

The book begins with a self-assessment questionnaire, then progresses to major life queries. The final section consists of seven leverage points that offer insight into the decision-making process and work and personal life behaviors.

Winning Habits: Four Secrets That Will Change the Rest of Your Life

By Dick Lyles
(Prentice Hall, 2004, \$19.95)

Like many motivational book authors, Lyles teaches his readers through parable. His fictional characters' trials and tribulations reveal the four secrets to a fulfilling life:

- Be first on, last off, and add extra value.
- Never trade results for excuses.
- Solve problems in advance.
- Always make the other people around you look good.