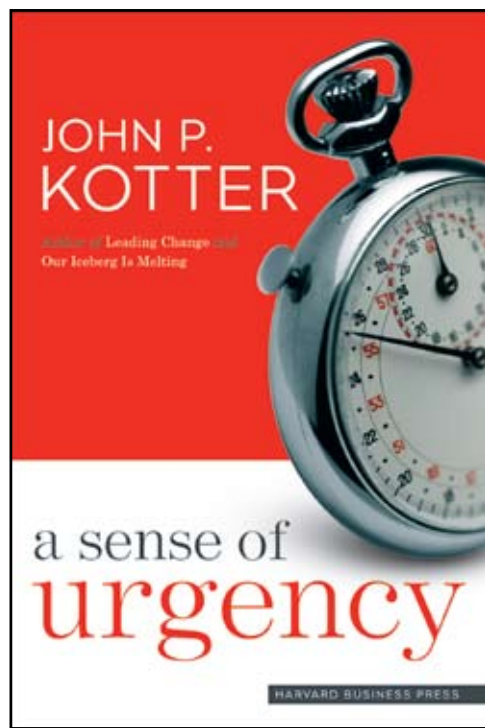


WHEN THE TIME IS NOW

.....
 A Sense of Urgency

By John P. Kotter
 (Harvard Business Press, 128 pp. \$22)

Reviewed by Paul Flynn



In May 1961, President Kennedy challenged the nation to send a man to the moon and return him safely to earth before the end of the decade. Thus began the space race, and we were already behind. Sputnik, he determined, must not be the defining victory of our age.

The moon was an aggressive goal, to be sure. And we would not get there with business as usual. We would have to change to win, and win we must. Kennedy conveyed a sense of urgency that many others maintained to complete the challenge in spectacular fashion.

Urgency propels us. Urgency is critical to affect real change. So says John Kotter in his new book, *A Sense of Urgency*. Kotter would know—just the other day my teenage daughter asked, “Like, who is the Konosuke Matsushita Professor of Leadership Emeritus at Harvard Business School anyhow?” Imagine my surprise to learn that it’s none other than the very same John Kotter.

That fact, and his string of successful books on change and leadership makes him uniquely qualified to teach us a thing or two about affecting change in business.

In previous books (*Leading Change*, *Our Iceberg Is Melting*), Kotter laid out eight steps critical for change. But even when many of these eight steps are followed and there is a great desire for change, Kotter estimates that as much as 70 percent of needed change never occurs in business today.

Why? A lot of people suffer when needed change falls by the wayside. Why is it so hard to change an organization? Kotter shows that a lack of urgency is the main culprit. It is the

most critical of his eight steps as well as the toughest.

So what is urgency? How will we recognize it? It isn't exhausting activity or running about from meeting to meeting. It is focused effort driven by a determination to win. It accomplishes something important every day, and it eliminates unimportant tasks so that it might better focus on the truly important.

"A real sense of urgency is rare," says Kotter, "much rarer than people seem to think. Yet it is invaluable in a world that won't stand still." One reason it's so rare is that it is not our natural state. Urgency is something that has to be created and recreated when it wanes. And it has to be spread to others.

One person within an organization will not be enough to make change happen, but that person can spread a sense of urgency and begin to build a movement for change. Urgency, sustained among as many people as possible, is critical for change.

Urgency is, most specifically, not panic. A real sense of urgency is not overwhelmed by threats. It sees the opportunities. People with a sense of urgency move decisively to capitalize on opportunity. They marshal resources, they focus attention, they build alliances, they spread urgency, and they act to win. They don't get caught in the quagmire of overbooked schedules and bureaucracy. They cut through it. They know that they must change. Complacency is the opposite of urgency and its biggest enemy.

When JFK inspired the nation to go to the moon, he appealed not to our heads but to our hearts. He connected with our natural aspirations. Urgency is created with an appeal to the heart, to the human person. We commit ourselves to ideas, not to facts from a dry business case. A sense of urgency is

deeply rooted in our humanity, and, as such, it can be very powerful.

Kotter's book reads easily. Like all great teachers, he tells stories to illustrate his points. The insights he offers in *A Sense of Urgency* will be greatly appreciated by anyone wondering how to launch a revolution at work. You can read it without having read his previous books, but it will probably propel you to seek them out—perhaps with a sense of... well, you know.

I give it five cups of coffee.

Paul Flynn is senior manager performance improvement at BBDO Detroit; paul.flynn@bbdodetroit.com.

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BOOKS //

New in November

T+D weighs in on three new titles that cover career stages and creating organization-wide strategy.

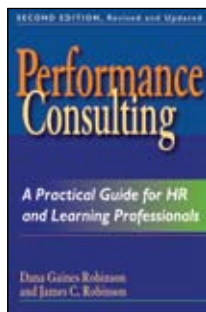
Performance Consulting: A Practical Guide for HR and Learning Professionals

By Dana Gaines Robinson and James C. Robinson

(Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 268 pp., \$29.95)

“Performance consulting is a process in which a client and consultant partner to accomplish the strategic outcome of optimizing workplace performance in support of business goals.”

In this second edition of their 1995 original, Dana and James Robinson expand the timeless theory of perfor-



mance consulting to include its current tools, models, and framework.

The book’s opening serves as a transition from the first edition by describing the mental model for performance consulting. The authors then explain the science behind performance consulting, including innovative tools and models to measure and assess business and performance “shoulds,” the “is,” and causes and solutions. Finally, the second edition takes performance consulting beyond concept and analysis to its art form, by depicting real-life examples in which this art has been perfected.

The authors integrate practical elements into their book with real-time exercises; tangible examples; summarizing learning points; a glossary of terms; a list of books and association resources; and downloadable tools, checklists, and graphics.

Anne Pace

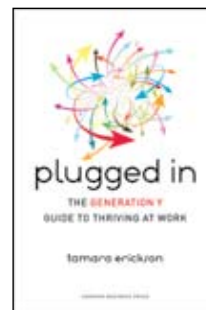
Plugged In: The Generation Y Guide to Thriving at Work

By Tamara Erickson

(Harvard Business Press, 270 pp., \$16.95)

In last year’s *Retire Retirement*, Tamara Erickson sliced away at antiquated notions of life-after-work, redefining the career stage boomers today cannot ignore. In *Plugged In*, the author once again sets out to demolish generalizations and set the record straight on the gifts, drivers, and unique perspectives of the next generation entering the workforce. More importantly, however, she delivers a collection of useful career facts, concepts, and tools for the young and the plugged-in.

Erickson’s voice, while authoritative, is like that of a friend and equal, as she first encourages Gen Y readers to search themselves to uncover the experiences, know-how, and passions that make them valuable assets in today’s



business climate, and that will serve them well as they grow into the leaders of the near-future.

Erickson avoids being overly pedantic in introducing career goals and common challenges to embrace and overcome. The overview of the multiple generations in the workforce was well-organized and a good read overall. She offers solid advice on how Gen Y workers can successfully navigate their newly acquired roles, through mastering communication and a set of practical soft skills.

Juana Llorens

Working Longer: New Strategies for Managing, Training, and Retaining Older Employees

By William J. Rothwell, Harvey L. Sterns, Diane Spokus, and Joel M. Reaser
(AMACOM, 244 pp., \$29.95)

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By 2012, workers 55 and older will make up 19 percent of the workforce—up 5 percent from just a decade ago—according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The current U.S. workforce is aging quickly, and employers have to learn how to handle the impending shortage of skills and knowledge. One critical step is to think of older employees as prize assets to an organization.

Written by experts in the field of workforce education and management of older workers, *Working Longer* is a practical, how-to manual for recruiters, managers, and trainers on how to sustain



and retain their middle-aged and older employees. Based on best practices and research, the book is divided into three sections, respectively entitled, introduction, which is background on the subject at hand; design, which is an overview on learning and development programs; and managing organizational knowledge, which advises employers on making an action plan.

Each section is divided into chapters on relevant, crucial topics such as human resource challenges, health and safety needs, using creativity to engage workers, measuring skills acquisition, and training programs. Peppered throughout the book are helpful case studies, evaluation quizzes, charts, and graphs.

Aparna Nancherla

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