



Riding the High-Tech Track

Succeeding in High Tech— Marlene Shigekawa

The High-Tech Career Book—Betsy Collard

To flesh out a definition of authoritarian corporate culture in her book, *Succeeding in High Tech: A Guide to Building Your Career*, Marlene Shigekawa introduces the following vignette contributed by a training manager:

"There was a lot of backbiting among executives, particularly my boss, the V.P. of Human Resources, and the V.P. of Marketing. Since the training function was new to the company, it took a backseat to marketing. The perception was that marketing brought in the 'bucks' for the company. The same conference room was used for both training workshops and customer sales demonstrations. We both also shared a storage room.

"After suggesting that training materials should be stored elsewhere, they chose to solve the real estate problem by changing the lock and not giving me the key. I felt like a schoolboy being slapped on the wrist."

Shigekawa later makes the point that in such a corporate culture, "the individual worker conforms out of compliance rather than a sense of culture identification."

Succeeding in High Tech is as much about how to identify with the corporate culture of your choice—she explains bureaucratic, supportive, and entrepreneurial-innovative corporate

cultures, in addition to the authoritarian—as it is about high-tech careers. This approach is both a strength and a weakness for the book: a strength because corporate culture indeed should be considered by any job seeker; a weakness because, among the readers drawn by the book's title, many already will be familiar with—and possibly sated by—the current literature on corporate culture.

The book market has been saturated by the rhetoric of the "one-minute-search-for-mega-royalties" crowd to the point where any business writer, however well intentioned—and Shigekawa obviously is—risks losing readers for whom that rhetoric has become stale jargon. You can hear the crackling of synapses as authors strain to improve upon the language employed by the originators of the last decade's most popular business books. Entrepreneurial, corporate culture, excellence, team building, managing change, strategic management, and competitiveness: these terms have been used so often that they, like the air we breathe, are taken for granted—and ignored by the reader. Surveying the second- and third-generation crops of business books step-fathered by Toffler, Drucker, Peters, Waterman, Naisbett, and the like, one finds that, to borrow from Gertrude Stein, "there is no there there."

Shigekawa's contribution to the lingo, I believe, is the term *mini-entrepreneur*, which she defines as, "Top performers within excellent high-tech environments." (Top performers in poor high-tech environments presumably would be known as "nega-prenuers.") But she most often is content to repeat received wisdom: "The culture shock of moving from a traditionally run company to one managed like excellent companies so much in the news these days can be awesome." Culture shock, excellent companies, in the news, awesome: a good editor would have excised this sentence, entirely composed as it is of the hackneyed.

The trouble is that, although Shigekawa carefully defines her terms and comprehensively describes how to cope with various corporate cultures, there are too many sentences such as the above. The result for the reader is like eating cotton candy: one

remembers reading something, but one doesn't remember what it was.

The flip side

Fortunately, and without having to digest too much fluff, it is possible to find succinct advice on the high-tech job market. Betsy Collard's *The High-Tech Career Book* sticks to its subject and penetrates the meaning of industry jargon and mystique.

The book's chapters include delineation of high-tech job requirements and responsibilities, the identification of career paths, dissection of corporate structures, and comparisons of various departments within high-tech companies. Collard's average reader begins at the high-school level and proceeds upward through the educational scale. The book also contains enough information for older readers considering a switch into high-tech and wondering how they can sell their current skills in the new industry.

Collard's emphasis is on the practical, evidenced by her inclusion of typical want ads, organizational charts for functional job descriptions, and glossaries of industry terms. The director of employment services at the Resource Center for Women in Palo Alto, California—in the heart of Silicon Valley—Collard employs a conversational style that is ideal for sharing expertise in a complex field.

It may be too early to tell, but if large numbers of concise books like Collard's begin to appear, then we may experience a sea change in the practicality of the business books available for our consumption. Such a trend should only be encouraged.

Succeeding in High Tech: A Guide to Building Your Career. 294 pp. \$29.95. New York: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.** **Circle No. 180 on Reader Service Card.**

The High-Tech Career Book. \$12.95. Los Altos, California: **William Kaufmann, Inc.** **Circle No. 181 on Reader Service Card.**

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