The Key to Corporate Success

The Creativity Infusion: How Managers Can Start and Sustain Creativity and Innovation, by R. Donald Gamache and Robert L. Kuhn.
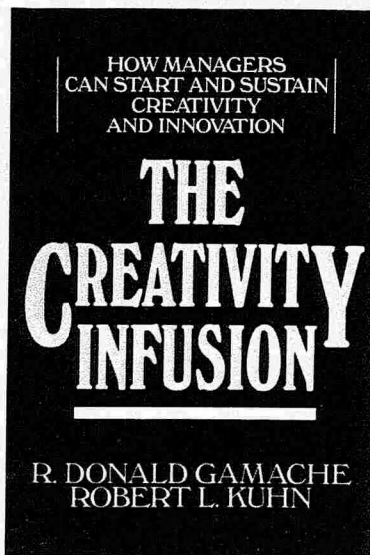
If your company isn't changing to keep pace with a changing market, it's doomed. Without a generous dose of creativity and innovation, even *Fortune* 500 status won't guarantee your business long-term success. "It's only matter of time before its relevance to the world ceases to exist," warn authors Donald Gamache and Robert Kuhn in *The Creativity Infusion*.

"Change is never easy, and doing something new always requires change," they say. "Getting through the tough parts requires commitment and often courage." But if your company's attitude is "We'll do anything new, as long as it's exactly like what we're doing," then you're in trouble.

Why aren't companies creative? The reasons include fear of failure or disappointment, comfort in the known, short-sightedness, and plain old ignorance. Many companies really don't know what creativity is, let alone how to promote it, say the authors. Even companies that are trying to be innovative often thwart their own efforts. For example, if they ask for new ideas in the same old ways, overfamiliarity and lack of perspective may not give them what they want.

"After a while each individual's information becomes homogenized as he or she is assimilated into the culture. Soon the employees begin talking company jargon or shorthand, often replete with alphabet-soup code letters. . . . Unfortunately, rather than aggressively going outside to seek new inputs, many organizations develop an 'NIH'—not-invented-here—culture. . . . The attitude is 'We're paying you guys to come up with new ideas, so why should we spend additional monies outside?' "

Most leaders don't consciously stifle creativity, but they've never learned how to promote "fresh thinking and acting," say Gamache and Kuhn. "Executives are trained, bred, and encouraged to make good decisions. And good decisions are based on solid information. So executives tend to want to make good decisions based on good information, and if that information can be taken to the third decimal point, that's even better.

"Such precision is the antithesis of what creativity, innovation, new products, and new business opportunities are all about. New ideas start as very sketchy, fuzzy, loose, and amorphous—full of unknowns. Expecting the typical executive to entertain all this ambiguity is asking a lot. Consequently, managers make knee-jerk judgments on nearly everything, rather than tolerate new, untested ideas."

Lack of humor can also bring potentially lucrative ideas to a screeching halt. "Humor is not peripheral to creative environments," the authors write. "Rather than being a luxury, humor is an essential component of a creative atmosphere. It allows people to say 'stupid' things that turn out not to be so stupid. It allows the tentative presenter of an off-the-wall-idea to disguise it as a joke."

Sections in each chapter titled "Views From the Real World" offer perspectives from 10 executives of such companies as Gillette, ITT, and Union Carbide. One general manager says that creativity is stifled by rigid cultures, risk aversion, lack of hands-on experience, and lack of patience.

"Most people will shake their heads up and down when the subject of doing new things comes up," writes Union Carbide's Mark Spivak. "They say, 'Yes, risk is high. Yes, it takes a long time. You've got to kiss a lot of frogs to find the prince.' Seldom will you find anybody disagreeing. But in short order, the actions commonly implemented include a limited number of projects, a slap on the wrist for failure, and the complaint, 'Where are the new products?' "

Chapter 2, subtitled "Curses of Magic Ideas and Big Fallacies," looks at false sightings of creativity at work—cases in which organizations create "protective smoke screens" behind which to hide. This occurs when a high-level executive decides that "something" should be done about such-and-such, but "totally abandons any responsibility for or interest in the quest and provides no focus for the search efforts." Or the company grasps onto a little-seen idea that entails low risk and requires little or no investment.

Midcourse "corrections" are another means of derailing creative ideas. "Sometimes a dedicated and effective program is launched with seemingly everything going for it. Criteria have been established, promising opportunity areas found, and specific implementation vehicles identified for moving the company into the new possibilities. At this point, the Klaxon horn sounds loudly and the CEO's voice comes down into the engine room with the order, 'Reverse engines.' "

Other creativity stoppers or derailers include
■ long, formal boardroom tables
■ portraits of every CEO since time began
■ "we've always done it this way" comments
■ short-term views versus long-term visions
■ no easy way in place to try out and abandon ideas
■ overprotectiveness toward ideas
■ lack of a champion
■ musical-chairs management
■ goals that are overly optimistic or unrealistic.

Chapter 3 looks at cases in which creativity starts, but dribbles out, for one reason or another. "Perhaps one way of putting new product or business development into perspective is to view a company as a bucket with a hole in it. The hole can vary in size, and the rate of leakage will depend on the size of the hole. . . . Clearly, then, for an organization to survive, there must be a flow of new ideas and products into the top of the bucket that at least meets the rate of leakage."

Several chapters look at the characteristics of a supportive culture and ways to build a high-quality, cohesive management team. The authors compare the process of generating new ideas with the nurturing of an infant.

"By analogy, a new idea is like a baby because it clearly cannot feed or defend itself. To achieve maturity, it needs someone's commitment of love, patience, and time. We know that babies cannot be judged against adults. Yet we forget that new ideas cannot be judged against the standards of an existing operating business. If the culture of an organization is going to provide a fertile nursery for the growth of promising 'idea babies,' the leader must clearly communicate his or her ability both to tolerate some rational degree of ambiguity and to appreciate the creativity that produces it."

So what can companies do to foster creativity? They can
■ recognize the value of risk
■ encourage vision and leadership
■ eliminate creativity stoppers
■ offer financial incentives
■ tolerate small risks
■ eliminate the fear of failure.

The authors claim that the two most critical elements in generating new growth opportunities are focus and commitment. But before you can generate growth, they caution, you must establish the right criteria for achieving those goals—criteria that balance both vision and realism. "Companies that don't have such a set of guiding criteria, and the focus that emerges from them, can easily flounder into irrelevance and ultimately disappear

in spite of all their frenzied activities and the dollars and time wasted in shotgun searches for magic ideas."

What do criteria do? "Criteria build a team and begin to generate commitment from that team. In addition, they serve as a screening mechanism, allowing decisions to be made on the basis of something other than intuition or politics." Criteria also remind people of their original goals and directions and serve as a productivity gauge in specific areas.

Two key questions to keep in mind when setting criteria: "How big?" and "How soon?"

"Flights of fancy must not push the size criterion beyond what an organization can realistically finance and handle."
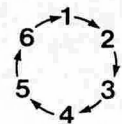
Another tip: Use "phantom ideas" to flush out hidden motivations, biases, and objections that can kill a project, even after much time and money have been spent.

Here's how: The leader presents an idea to the group and gives each person just five seconds to make a go/no-go decision. Then the people are asked to figure out why they voted as they did. "This process will surface reasons, comments, and insights that have not been expressed before during the event," say Gamache and Kuhn. "Typically, from this exercise, the group will also become more aware of some of [its] deeper cultural motives."

The Creativity Infusion offers practical advice and programs for managers who want to build creativity and innovation into their corporate cultures. Many of the ideas set forth seem to be based largely on ideas promoted by INNOTECH Corporation, a consulting firm of which Gamache is a founder, and on the lessons the quoted companies set forth.

One INNOTECH vice-president, Oswald Simpson, believes that "creative and innovative individuals exist in almost any organization. . .but, recognizing the severe constraints placed upon their ideas and visions, they are far more likely to leave to find a more fertile arena than to spend their time, effort, and energies battling a system that is

working against them."

The writing in *The Creativity Infusion* is clear and the message insightful. There is a fair amount of overlap between chapters; essentially, the message is that creativity is desirable and that companies must continue to find ways to promote it. One addition might be a few illustrations to lighten up the pages.

Overall, the book presents many helpful ideas for

■ uncovering new opportunities for continued growth
■ fostering original thinking in employees and consultants
■ developing, evaluating, and selling innovative ideas
■ facilitating creative sessions
■ pinpointing elements of corporate culture that may resist change.

The authors have written and contributed to many business publications. Gamache is a consultant with INNOTECH. Kuhn is an independent investment banker and corporate strategist.

The Creativity Infusion: How Managers Can Start and Sustain Creativity and Innovation. 210 pp. New York, NY: **Harper & Row**, 800/242-7737, $24.95.
*Circle **180** on reader service card.*

To Thine Own Self Be True

Beyond the Magic Circle: the Role of Intimacy in Business, by Brian R. Smith and Myrna M. Milani.

What does your company do to show that it cares about you as an individual? Does it reward good work with traditional perks, such as free parking, a key to the executive bathroom, and a bigger salary or benefits package? How about occasional elbow rubbings with New-Age management gurus?

Seems like enough, but what? You say you're not satisfied? You'd rather be able to talk heart-to-heart with the boss? You're longing to feel understood? You'd gladly trade in the cushy office furniture for

some real communication or a chance to do something in a new way?

You should read *Beyond the Magic Circle: the Role of Intimacy in Business.* No, this is not a book about awareness encounters of the third kind, interoffice hanky panky, or chumming up with your boss and co-workers. It's a book for people who sense that something is missing from their jobs and are willing to "risk intimate introspection and revelation" by taking an honest look at themselves and by learning to develop meaningful work relationships.

Remember Shakespeare's admonition in *Hamlet*, "To thine own self be true"? If we believe that, authors Brian Smith and Myrna Milani ask, then why do so many people put up with work environments that violate their personal values and beliefs? Don't they see their own hypocrisy? Why do they spend their days feeling like rats on a treadmill, going along just to get along? Because it's reinforced in the

system, that's why.

"Everything in the corporate setting, from the layout of the parking lots and restrooms to the chain of command, reinforces the established view," the authors write. "Rank-and-file advancement depends almost exclusively on one's ability to play the game according to the rules laid down by one's superiors."

But what happens when you tire of playing the game and the system no longer meets your needs? Smith and Milani offer four choices:
■ Accept the situation, including your feelings.
■ Accept the situation, but change your feelings.
■ Make some change within the environment.
■ Terminate the relationship.

Sometimes your desires for change don't pan out. Remember Winston Smith in George Orwell's *1984*? Big Brother's assurances that "Ignorance Is Strength, Freedom Is Slavery, War Is Peace," weren't enough for Winston. He wanted to be valued, he wanted his opinion to

BEYOND THE MAGIC CIRCLE

THE ROLE OF INTIMACY IN BUSINESS

Brian R. Smith/Myrna M. Milani
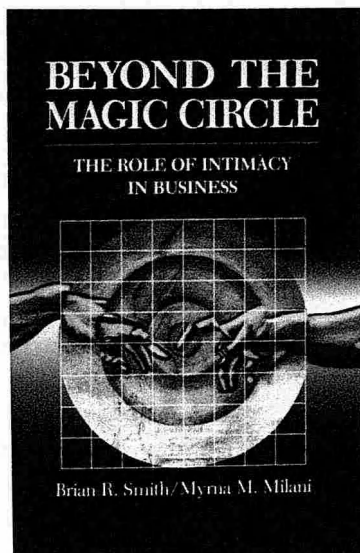
matter, he wanted enough information to form his own opinions, and he wanted freedom of expression. However, his fears of being turned into an "unperson" by the Thought Police for entertaining unpopular thoughts immobilized him. He lacked the freedom and the power

either to accept or reject his conditions and could only endure his plight in tormented silence.

Smith and Milani effectively compare the surreal city of Oceania to the "magic circle mentality of the corporate structure," with the CEO as Big Brother and the "accepted way of doing things" as the Thought Police.

One survey estimates that 26 million American workers harbor significantly negative feelings about their jobs. That's a lot of misappropriated energy! Other sources claim that 75 percent of surveyed high-school juniors and seniors say they've learned from their parents about the stark realities of corporate life and will opt instead for self-employment.

Like Orwell's Winston, some people try to change the system. "Executives bounce from position to position seeking meaning in a meaningless system, become unpersons in the old corporations and potential messiahs of the new, but rarely if ever change anything."

Deep in their hearts, people don't want to feel that they're running on an endless treadmill or that Big Brother is controlling their every move. Smith and Milani acknowledge the universal appeal of smaller, more intimate environments. Intimacy conveys feelings of being valued and cared about—that your presence and efforts make a difference.

Despite this foreboding tone, *Beyond the Magic Circle* is not hopelessly depressing, but affirmingly optimistic, without being touchy-feely (for those of you who are squirming).

"The militaristic male-dominated business scene offers a virtual vacuum relative to almost all forms of intimacy," say the authors. "And because most people think of intimacy as primarily a physical expression, the touchy-feely courses seem the most logical solution to the problem."

However, both extremes can be too narrow in scope, and Smith and Milani try to strike a balance by getting managers to recognize that different people manifest intimacy in different ways. In some cases, lack of intimacy is a sign of the times, and workers end up feeling displaced because they have less contact with other people.

"The computer represents the epitome of the displacement process: the inanimate worker and the inanimate excuse all rolled into one compact pile of hardware and software. Now the XYZ manager needn't walk all the way down to production to get the latest reports; he can send the request via his terminal and they can send the necessary data to him via theirs."

In other cases, people misinterpret intimate communications and respond to them negatively or awkwardly because they fail to recognize that intimacy exists on three levels—physical, intellectual, and emotional. The success or failure of intimate communications often depends on how people choose to accept or interpret situations, say the authors.

"Each of us perceives ourselves in relationship to others, seeing our function and skills in any given situation as greater or lesser than those around us. And how we interpret the meaning of this relationship determines our emotional response to it."

Smith and Milani give concrete examples of organizations that made or missed making intimate connections with employees during times of transition. In one example, more than 100,000 Ford employees lost their jobs in a massive restructuring effort. Ford management "made a major effort to communicate to those left how much the company valued their presence rather than the typical business message, 'You could be next.' " Before-and-after employee-attitude checks revealed adjectives that switched from "combative" to "loving."

In a converse example, GM spent billions of dollars automating plant equipment, but "with little or no meaningful consideration for the workers' intimate needs or fears." Still clinging to the "militaristic pyramid builders' view," management was shocked when the troops didn't dutifully follow the CEO's command to "charge" into the age of automation.

Unlike Ford, say the authors, "GM chose to see its workers as the limiting factor, the weakest link, rather than the basic unit of its success."

If an organization can be considered a pyramid, the authors continue, with each layer closely dependent on the one below it, logic says that we should value and seek to reward the levels below us more than we do those above us. When organizations focus only on the corporate structure (the monument) and not on the employees (the monument builders), the very support system of the structure is in jeopardy.

Intimate organizations, according to Smith and Milani, support and reward the rank and file—if not through fat salaries and perks, then through time, training, or an attitude of commitment and concern for people's feelings.

Beyond the Magic Circle presents 10 basic principles that examine the role and value of intimacy in busi-

ness and how it affects our views.

Among the principles (which also serve as chapter headings):

■ "The amount of process is inversely proportional to the amount of purpose."
■ "To be of benefit, the amount of technology must be proportional to the amount of intimacy."
■ "The success of any business is directly related to the quality of its communications."
■ "Different is different: it is neither wrong nor better."
■ "The perception of the quality of one's work is directly related to the intimacy of the work environment."
■ "As intimacy increases in a business, the amount of choice granted and accepted on all levels must increase proportionately."

This is not a how-to book. It is also not necessarily comfortable to read, because the authors confront thoughts and feelings that many of us try to ignore or bury. Smith and Milani acknowledge the inadequacies and inconsistencies in many work environments, but they also force us to examine our own responsibilities. For example, they won't accept the "victim" excuse for staying in a dead-end job.

"Although you may play victim and see yourself as placed here by some force or forces (parents, God) beyond your control, the fact remains that your reality always results from your immediate feelings about yourself and always stands amenable to immediate change according to your wishes."

If you hate the color purple because a co-worker who makes you crazy often wears it, it's your responsibility to confront or ignore the situation. And if your view of reality (or a desirable reality) doesn't mesh with your company's reality, then it's not the company's fault that you're sticking around.

"Whenever a discrepancy between the quality image of the person and that of the work occurs, frustration results. This often proves so incongruent that these individuals consciously or subconsciously find some way to get out of that situation: They quit, transfer, or get fired.

"People who see themselves as

quality people produce quality work—if the system will allow and accept it. People may possess the ability and desire to produce the perfect machine, for example, but if [the system] gives them inferior materials, out-of-spec parts, poor tools, or insufficient time, they can't manifest quality." Intimate connections in the workplace can help align such discrepancies, say the authors.

Beyond the Magic Circle isn't a book for just anyone. If you hate corporate bureaucracy but can't live without the accompanying executive privileges, perhaps the best you can do is to look for a different race with different rats, advise Smith and Milani.

"Indeed, for those who prefer victimization and fear to accepting either intimacy or choice, the average American power pyramid provides a most secure haven. In such a habitat, people may safely bitch and moan, get their raises and promotions, [and] retire and find new causes to fuel their bitching

and moaning until they die."

But for those of you who are willing to move "beyond the secure, self-perpetuating circle of traditional business beliefs into a realm where the individual becomes the cause rather than the result of the work experience," this book is rich with insight.

Through case studies, thoughtful research, and a liberal-arts perspective, Smith and Milani share their views on a topic that is sure to get more play in the years ahead. They also contribute humorous-in-hindsight vignettes from their own work lives (in third-person perspective that skirts gratuity).

Employees may learn how to examine their levels of intimacy with themselves and with others. Managers may gain insight into becoming more human-centered bosses. And executives may open their eyes to the exponential value of "connecting" with their employees and customers.

Smith is an engineer, a business consultant, a teacher, and the

author of numerous business-oriented books and articles. Milani is a veterinarian who also writes about the intimate relationship between humans and animals.

Beyond the Magic Circle: the Role of Intimacy in Business. Unity, NH: **Fainshaw Press**, 603/542-7227, $12.50. Also available is a $6 workbook called *The Power of Choice.* **Circle 181** *on reader service card.*

Distinguishing Dimensions

The Facilitator's Handbook, by John Heron.

In today's environment of experiential learning, an effective facilitator must be flexible and adaptable in making educational decisions.

In *The Facilitator's Handbook,* John Heron defines "facilitator" as a person whose occupational role is to help people learn in an experiential group. He defines "experiential" as an environment in which "learning takes place through an active

and aware involvement of the whole person—as a spiritual, thinking, feeling, choosing, energetically and physically embodied being."

Experiential learning, he says, can take place in many group contexts: traditional therapy, sensitivity training, interpersonal-skills training, management training, social-action training, group or personal-growth encounters, and personal or professional development.

"The effective facilitator, who wants to provide conditions for the development of autonomous learning," Heron writes, "is one who can move swiftly and elegantly, as the context requires, between three political modes: making decisions for learners, making decisions with learners, and delegating decisions to learners."

Effective facilitation, he says, incorporates those conditions into six main dimensions of facilitation. Separate chapters define and distinguish planning, meaning, confronting, feeling, structuring, and valuing.

Within the meaning dimension, for example, Heron discusses four types of understanding:
■ conceptual understanding of concepts, statements, or propositions
■ imaginal understanding of forms, processes, and symbolic representations
■ practical understanding, such as how to act or perform a skill
■ experiential understanding by encounter, by acquaintance, or by entering into a state of being.

According to Heron's research, each of the six facilitation dimensions also falls into three modes of facilitation—hierarchical ("you/I" statements), cooperative ("us/we" statements), and autonomous ("all of us/the group" statements). Different groups will have different objectives, he says, and thus the facilitator must be prepared to choose with authority the intervention style or approach that best suits the group's particular needs.

Heron describes all possible choices. Take the planning dimension, for example: In the hierarchical mode of operation, "You choose *for* the group; you direct the planning of the group's learning, deciding unilaterally on the content."

In the cooperative mode, "Decisions are collaborative; you have abandoned any right to final unilateral control. But you press strongly the claims of your own point of view. Where you and the group differ strongly, you seek compromise rather than unilateral surrender."

And in the autonomous mode, "You are getting out of the way, affirming the group's need to do its own planning and to sort out issues of power and control in deciding what to do. . . ." In this mode, Heron continues, the group sometimes "makes a mature claim for independence, rooted in skill and knowledge; or it tries to seize its power when it is not ripe enough. It is wise to support and confront the former and resist and confront the latter."

The result of Heron's extensive categorizing of facilitation styles is twofold. On one hand, he presents the full "epistemology," with the in-

tent that facilitators tailor that knowledge to specific groups, environments, and situations. On the other hand, readers may get lost in his unending definitions and lists.

In places, Heron's writing is almost poetic. His introduction of the stages of a group dynamic begins: "There is a cyclical flow of energy, as through the four seasons of the year from the time of the winter solstice." But just as the reader is getting into the prose, Heron interrupts the flow with another list. Though some lists do move "swiftly" (to use his words), few move "elegantly," and the information starts to read like index cards strung together.

Continuing, Heron says that a primary concern for facilitators should be designing courses that do not alienate the participant. He defines four types of alienation:

■ **Alienation of intellect.** "The mental activity in the group gets cut off from emotional and physical realities; interactions between people become excessively cognitive and emotionally dead or indifferent. Talk is all in terms of generalities and the outside world, far removed from personal experience."

■ **Alienation of affect.** "The group gets immersed in a turgid emotional life of shared experience, cut off from the exercise of reflection and thought, and so does not understand or make enough sense of what is going on. Interaction is in terms of immediate felt experience, far removed from more comprehensive perspectives."

■ **Alienation of spirit.** "Groups that pursue purely transpersonal learning objectives may share personal spiritual experiences, but in the process become alienated from adequate intellectual discrimination and also from emotional realities and authentic interpersonal openness."

■ **Alienation of the body.** "Each of the above three kinds of group [dynamics] may in their different ways and to differing degrees become alienated from the body, its energies, sensations, and impulses, especially its need to be owned, identified, and enjoyed as an ex-

THE FACILITATORS' HANDBOOK

John Heron
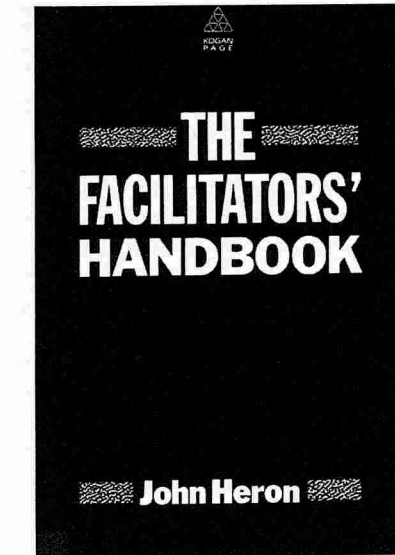
pressive form of the psyche—mind, feelings, and spirit—in space."

Heron says he wrote the book in the spirit of "cooperative inquiry," in which research was conducted *with* people instead of *on* them. Yet the result is that he never actually says, in practical language, how to facilitate or how actual companies or people have done it.

In discussing the basic elements of good facilitation training, Heron recommends four techniques: determining the best method to use, using effective modeling techniques, practicing interventions "until they work," and gathering feedback from participants. But again, how?

Some practitioners may find helpful the sweeping focus of *The Facilitators' Handbook.* But the theoretical nature and "proper" tone may turn away others who favor a more practical orientation. The author does include some tables, figures, and fill-in-the-blank grids that can be adapted to specific situations.

Heron's intent is that the book be used as a "comprehensive educational model" and a reference manual. His purpose is to provide new and experienced facilitators "a broad canvas and a wide palette. . . to stretch your facilitative imagination, to appreciate the great reach and subtlety of the enterprise."

Comprehensive does seem an appropriate descriptor for this book,

though Heron draws predominately on his own research and publications and, to a lesser degree, on limited British research from the 1970s and 1980s. Nonetheless, for the novice trainer or the person who is new to facilitating, Heron's advice and guidelines may be useful.

Heron is an independent consultant and writer, living and working in a research center in Tuscany, Italy.

The Facilitator's Handbook., 150 pp. New York, NY: **Nichols Publishing**, 201/238-4880, $26.50. *Circle 182 on reader service card.*

Additional Reading

Power Presentations on the Business Stage, by Nathalie Donnett. 138 pp. Toronto, Ontario: **Carswell Publications**, 416/291-8421, $29.95. *Circle 183 on reader service card.*

People Smart: Powerful Techniques for Turning Every Encounter Into a Mutual Win, by Tony Alessandra, Michael J. O'Connor, and Janice Alessandra. 356 pp. La Jolla, CA: **Keynote Publishing**, 619/459-4515, $19.95. *Circle 184 on reader service card.*

Marketing To Win, by Frank Sonnenberg. 260 pp. New York, NY: **Harper & Row**, 800/242-7737, $29.95. *Circle 185 on reader service card.*

The Charismatic Leader: Behind the Mystic of Exceptional Leadership, by Jay A. Conger. 211 pp. San Francisco, CA: **Jossey-Bass**, 415/433-1767, $20.95. *Circle 186 on reader service card.*

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