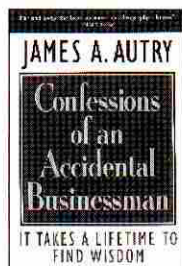## CONFESSIONS OF AN ACCIDENTAL BUSINESSMAN
BY JAMES A. AUTRY

In *Confessions of an Accidental Businessman: It Takes a Lifetime to Find Wisdom*, James A. Autry has written a business autobiography that is quite different from the usual management genre. For one, it is brutally honest. Autry does not sugarcoat anything, including his own shortcomings and ethical dilemmas.

Autry is a former *Fortune* 500 executive, author of four books, a poet, and a consultant.

The major message of this book—reflected in the subtitle—is that it takes a lifetime to find wisdom. But his other important message is that who we ultimately become in business can't be separated from all the other events of our life—no matter how seemingly small.

When Autry's father abandoned him and his mother, it colored everything that followed. As a result, his mother moved to a federal housing project where they spent a number of impoverished years. Autry knows that he brings a very different mind-set to management than a CEO friend of his who grew up wealthy. He urges readers to pay attention to all of life's experiences, especially relationships, and to recognize and examine how all of them are connected.

Autry believes that when you are in touch with the richness of your varied life experiences and are able to discern the patterns, you will have a deeper sense of knowledge than any that you could get from formal business training. And then he says we should manage from that "true self" even when we find it in conflict with "the way things are done."

Autry is a bit of a maverick, but, then, in one of his former incarnations he was a jet fighter pilot. In the military, he learned how organizations can operate with two, often separate mind-sets: one is concerned with theory and structure—with doing things right; the other is concerned with direct operations—with ensuring that the right things get done. Put another way, when you lay your life on the line every day, you don't worry so much about rules. That lesson also carries over into civilian life. Autry also learned that there are managers that somehow unleash the power of the human spirit by using the organization's "regulations" to enable people rather than to restrict them. He says, "Those managers are the ones we come to call leaders."

Autry weaves fascinating anecdotes about his life into the fabric that became his management style. He confesses at the beginning of the book that he didn't start out to become president of the Meredith Corporation's Magazine Group, a $500 million operation with more than 900 employees. In fact, all he ever wanted to do was become a newspaperman and make $50 a week. No wonder he thinks of himself as an accidental businessman.

In rising through the ranks of the publishing industry—from copy boy to senior management—he learned lessons in sometimes unexpected places and ways. Those are illuminated in chapters with such titles as "In Which It Becomes Clear That Business Ethics Often Has Strange Definitions," or "Staying on Course and Making Big Changes—at the Same Time." In the last chapter, he gives 10 of what he terms the "main things I know about leadership." Here they are in abbreviated form:
- All growth and most good things come from paying attention.
- Use every experience.
- Never think employees are "labor" or a commodity.
- Avoid the tyranny of technocracy.
- Abandon career planning and income plans.
- Avoid building a resume by taking jobs just because they will look good on the CV.
- Expect the unexpected and be ready to embrace change.
- Take the work seriously, but don't take yourself so seriously.
- Do not use short-term solutions for long-term problems.

Just as Autry's approach is different from other business autobiographies, so, too, is the way he organizes the material. Chapter one is a chronological overview of his life in business, chapter two is a chronological overview of his life in management, and chapter three is the first of what he calls "thematic" chapters, which show how certain themes operated throughout his careers. From then on, the chapters alternate between chronological and thematic.

Another unusual aspect of this book is that Autry inserts his own poems within and between chapters. In speaking to a business group, he has used his poetry to inspire and instruct managers. He acknowledges that "instruct" may seem an unusual function for a poem, but it's through his poetry that he tries to "give voice to and honor the emotions we feel about our work."

Bottom line: This honest, from-the-heart book is about overcoming barriers and learning how to just "be" in business and in life.

Confessions of an Accidental Businessman by James A. Autry. 250 pp. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler. 415/288-0260. $24.95.
Circle 245 on reader service card.

THE STIRRING OF THE SOUL IN THE WORKPLACE
BY ALAN BRISKIN

Alan Briskin describes *The Stirring of the Soul in the Workplace* as a reality check on management and the workplace; where we have been, where we are, and where we may be going. He says it is a response to the dehumanizing effects of the Industrial Revolution, bottom line thinking, and a disillusioned workforce.

The book is based on the 20 years

that Briskin spent as an organizational consultant. He specializes in strategic planning, change management, retreat design, and the development of learning organizations. He also worked with disturbed adolescents in residential homes and with inmates in a state correctional institution.

In those confined spaces, says Briskin, the darker aspects of the soul were free to flare up. Those experiences led Briskin to answer this question: How can organizations better reflect the whole human being? *The Stirring of the Soul in the Workplace* is the answer to that question.

The book asserts that many of the qualities that we associate with soul—meaning, memory, beauty, divinity—are "fundamental aids for navigating the future." Briskin eloquently suggests that soul and self are inextricably linked to who we are both inside and outside of the workplace.

"We cannot leave behind who we are when we are inside organizations any more than we can shut out the organization when we are alone. We carry inside us all the time both the organization in our mind and the person we think we are. When there is a fit, we sense harmony and balance. When these two worlds collide, however, the individual feels torn and alone."

Instead of sacrificing the well-being of the human soul for the goals of the organization, Briskin says that we must meld the two. We must be willing to shift between what organizations want of people and what humans need and desire.

This book does not offer a cure-all to organizational ills, nor does it promote a management fad or, God forbid, a new paradigm. Instead, Briskin calls his book a "retreat" for those who feel the need to reflect on the modern workplace.

In part 1, Briskin explores the idea of soul. What is it? How do we think about it? What is its relevance today? He says that "soul is an interaction of the many different parts of ourselves, both an upper world of conscious intention and an underworld of feelings, fantasies, and imagination."

Briskin's book discusses the psychological, sociological, and spiritual aspects of the soul. He tells anec-

dotes, stories, and vignettes to support those larger themes. At times, the narratives are illuminating, but sometimes they are distracting.

For example, he refers to ancient Greek, Hebrew, and Gnostic concepts of soul and mingles them with a tale of a manager's evaluation gone awry. It's an interesting juxtaposition, yet it may leave the reader feeling lost.

Part 2, "Chasing the Dream of Order," addresses the challenges to the soul in past organizational practices and in today's workplace. Chapter 4 is about how the industrialized workplace dominates individual human experience.

Part 3, "Journeying Toward Meaning, Coherence, and Wholeness," looks at our roles within the organization. In this section, Briskin asks how we can take up an organizational role without having to split apart the outer and inner worlds of experience.

The book is "about our trials as individuals to account for ourselves." The journey of the soul, says Briskin, is indirect, circular, and metaphorical, imbued with a richness and confusion evoking our deepest longings and most profound fears.

Bottom line: Briskin addresses complex and often ambiguous aspects of the soul. He also asks how we can nourish our souls without sacrificing the goals of the workplace.

The Stirring of the Soul in the Workplace, by Alan Briskin. 288 pp. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 415/433-1740. $27.95.

Circle 246 on reader service card.

A SIMPLER WAY
BY MARGARET J. WHEATLEY AND MYRON KELLNER-ROGERS
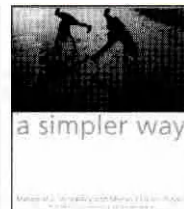
Organizations are often referred to as "environments." *A Simpler Way* portrays them more as "habitats"— worthy of being inhabited, and rooted in nature and human nature. The authors, Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers, are partners in the consulting firm Kellner-Rogers & Wheat-

ley and leaders of the Berkana Institute, a not-for-profit educational and research foundation seeking to discover new organizational forms.

Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers offer perspectives from which readers can form their own beliefs about organizations, how they mimic nature, and how they intertwine with people's lives.

The book's main underlying idea is that life is always moving toward organization and that, ultimately, organizations affirm life. The book's premise is that we are all affected by the organizations we have created. The authors pose the question: How could we organize human endeavor if we were to develop different understandings of how life organizes itself? Then, they invite readers to explore the ideas in the book and answer the question for themselves.

A snapshot of the table of contents gives one a feel for the book's spirit and approach:
- An invitation
- *Poetics* by A.R. Ammons
- Organizing as Play
- Self
- Selves Organizing
- Emerging Organization
- Motions of Coherence.

The book has many arresting black-and-white photos, many by well-know photographers. Their reproduction is poor. Still, they contribute to the book's lyrical quality.

The book aims to invoke rather than instruct. It addresses such lofty subjects as life and creativity. And it invites readers to ponder such musings as
- "Everything is in a constant process of discovery."
- "Life is intent on finding what works, not what's right."
- "Life creates more possibilities as it engages with opportunities."

The implied message is that those aphorisms can also apply to organizations.

The book is sprinkled with biological terms—such as *autopoiesis*, which means self-producing—that the authors say have implications for organizations as living, evolving entities. The authors also present perspectives from past and modern philosophers, poets, scientists, and

writers, including Schopenhauer, Ezra Pound, Dante, Darwin, and Annie Dillard.

Toward the book's end, the authors discuss partnerships, how systems behave, and what makes both thrive. The book ends with a quote by T.S. Eliot: "There is only the dance." The authors add, "There is only the dance of coherence, and it is the only dance which brings us joy."
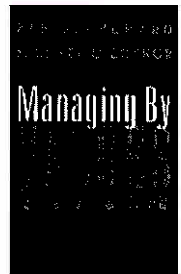**Bottom line:** This book diverts you from everyday tasks to open you to creative new ways of looking at organizations and connecting them to life.

A Simpler Way, by Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers. 135 pp. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler. 415/288-0260. $27.95.
Circle 247 on reader service card.

MANAGING BY VALUES
BY KEN BLANCHARD AND MICHAEL O'CONNOR

Consultant Ken Blanchard, along with his coauthor, Michael O'Connor, has done it again. He's captured in one, thin volume all the salient points of a complicated topic—in this case, managing by values.

Many books have been written recently about the need for an organizational culture whose strategies, processes, and people are managed by a common vision, purpose, and set of values. But most of those books have focused on the what and the why of such an approach and not on the how. Blanchard and O'Connor seek to remedy this by providing a step-by-step guide on how to implement a values-based organizational strategy.

In the introduction, Blanchard credits John Naisbitt with an idea that is at the heart of this book—the Fortunate 500 company. In a 1986 convention speech, Naisbitt said that someday there would be "a list of Fortunate 500 companies, which would be defined by the quality of service available to its customers and the quality of life accessible to its employees."

As the years went by, Blanchard continued to be intrigued with a Fortunate 500 business philosophy, and eventually teamed up with O'Connor, a leader in behavioral research, who had been studying the practical application of values. After working together on their first two "Fortunate 500" projects, they formed the Fortunate Companies Foundation in order to promote managing by values.

This book is written in the simple story format that is the trademark of Blanchard's previous books. But while fictional, the story is based on actual reports by organizations that have benefited from the Fortunate Foundation's approach.

Divided into 10 chapters, the story begins with the main character, Tom Yeoman, president of an auto parts manufacturing company, who is questioning what he has become, his values, and the path his company is on. That same night, he attends a lecture by a fictional presenter on "The Journey of the Fortunate 500," where three acts of life—to achieve, connect, and integrate—are described. The lecture focuses on personal as well as organizational well-being. This well-timed lecture becomes Tom's wake-up call.

From here, Tom hires the presenter as a facilitator to help him with his organization's transformation. But before working with Tom, the facilitator arranges for him to meet with key executives in another fictional firm, Telecom Distributors, that has just undergone a major transformation.

As Tom meets some of the firm's executives, Blanchard and O'Connor use their story-telling technique to identify and synthesize the steps involved in managing by values. They describe three major phases; (chapters 5 through 7) clarifying the mission and values, communicating them, and aligning them.

Those chapters present key principles of managing by values. For example, in the first phase, gaining clarity, one principle is: "In an organization that truly manages by its values, there is only one boss—the company's values." In the second phase, communicating effectively, one principle cited is: "Communicating happens naturally when you make the work environ-

ment safe." And in the third phase, aligning practices, an important principle is: "When aligned around shared values and united in a common purpose, ordinary people accomplish extraordinary results and give their organization a competitive edge."

Lest readers think that the simple, step-by-step blueprint to managing by values is simple to execute, Blanchard and O'Connor have the fictional facilitator say to Tom, "You can't realistically expect consistent and major results from the organization as a whole until around the third year."
Bottom line: This short, to-the-point book tells how companies of all types can strive for a new level of organizational success.

Managing by Values, by Ken Blanchard and Michael O'Connor. 145 pp. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 415/288-0260. $20.
Circle 248 on reader service card.