

Books

Putting Chaos in Your Order

Unconventional Wisdom: Irreverent Solutions for Tough Problems at Work, by Thomas L. Quick.

Tom Quick is a rebel: He seems to think he can have his cake and eat it too, that he can pull out all the stops, and that he can manage without having to walk around. Well, why not? If the rest of us wouldn't spend so much time doing the things we think we're supposed to be doing, maybe we'd get more done.

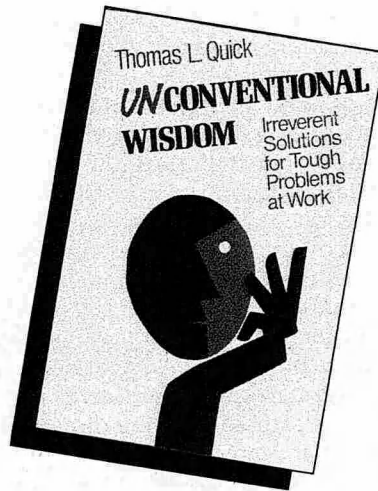
The unconventional author of *Unconventional Wisdom* says the first step toward his evolution as a rebel was letting go of the certainty in his life and moving toward a more ambiguous existence.

"As a young salesman and manager," he explains in the preface, "I'm certain I was not alone in seeking certainties in whatever I did. After all, the more certain you are about something or someone, the better your decision, the more self-assured your actions. But certainty, I found as I grew older, brings with it a kind of captivity. If it's this, it certainly can't be that. If it's black, it can't be white. We in America are especially drawn to certainty. . . ."

Being certain about something means limiting one's options—eliminating choices. Quick argues that the key to freedom is not certainty, but choice: "The more choices you have, the freer you are. However, the more choices you have, the more ambiguous your situation may be. I've discovered that you simply cannot have freedom without ambiguity."

He calls the "either-or" that characterizes many managerial decisions "a trap, because you have only two boxes in which the whole world must fit." Sometimes, he says, reality is best defined by "both-and."

In 25 lively essays, Quick promotes some other controversial



themes, which he claims are his secrets to managerial success. For instance, that a little chaos in your order is desirable, that some favoritism in your leadership is to your benefit, that laziness—smart laziness—is a managerial virtue.

"Lazy people are more likely to concentrate on achievement. Perhaps even more to the point, they focus on achieving what is important to achieve. They are rarities in our society, which admires busyness. They know the difference between being efficient and being effective. Peter Drucker has been known to draw the distinction as follows: being efficient means doing things right, and being effective means doing the right things. I refer to efficiency as the input and effectiveness as the output. Since lazy people can't trumpet their activity, they must emphasize results. Very healthy."

His secret to time management echoes the laziness theme. Despite many managers' perceptions that thinking time is unproductive time, Quick says we all need to take time to think creatively—"blue-sky time" to let our thoughts roam. He doesn't perceive thinking as a luxury, but as an essential part of every manager's job.

"A lot of people do a lot of rationalizing about thinking; one would guess that they fear it, and,

in fact, it can be hard work. . . . The reluctance to be creative probably flows both from never having been trained to be so and from a fear of unstructured time and activity."

Time management, to Quick, doesn't mean imposing external controls on people who can't seem to get a handle on their time or their lives. "People who are skillful in controlling time measure their output rather than their input. They feel success not by how much they can cram into their schedules but by how much they can accomplish. The ends are what count. Everything else falls into place—a subordinate place. Time needs not be the enemy, as people often express. Time need be only what you make it. It is, if nothing else, simply a medium."

His time-management strategy, which is perhaps more intuitive than rational, includes these points:

- Develop a fairly accurate perception of the passage of time. Approximate the time in your head before consulting your watch.
- Assign a time value to each task. Build in extra, non-negotiable time in which to complete tasks, and carry your schedule around with you—on paper and in your head. Then you won't allow yourself to become overcommitted, people will love you because you always come through on time, and you'll find your life more pleasant when you're not always worrying about "delivering" on time.
- Limit distractions, and become ruthless about what you want to finish.
- Negotiate deadlines. Does "right away" mean tomorrow or do you really have until next Wednesday?
- Go with your energy curves. If you're a morning person, organize your day so that you do your thinking in the morning and the more monotonous tasks in the afternoon.
- Be good to yourself. Set achievable goals and give yourself small, frequent rewards.

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Quick also covers such topics as delegating and stroking employees to achieve maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

"Ask. And listen. Watch for signs of uncertainty and hesitation. Be alert also to unrealistic expectations that may suggest the employee is compensating for his or her doubt. Don't let the employee leave your office without your having a sense of the self-confidence he or she is feeling about doing the task."

He draws frequently on the conventional wisdom on management and motivation—from traditionalists Herzberg, Maslow, McGregor, and Skinner, to contemporaries Bennis, Drucker, Peters, and Waterman. But his true wisdom comes from being "out there" himself. He's seen what works and what doesn't and can separate the psychobabble from the good stuff, even the thoughts and theories that never made the who's-who lists.

In *Unconventional Wisdom*, Quick allows himself plenty of personal indulgences. But in the second half of the book, he goes further and begins to say what's really on his mind. In many ways, he seems angry, or at least frustrated, that management-development and management-training practices in America aren't more effective—that they don't do what they should be doing and need to be doing. Two telling chapter titles are "Training Is Too Important To Be Left to Trainers" and "Why Management Development Doesn't Develop."

"Management is usually presented in bits and pieces," he writes. "Trainees may see management, unfortunately, as a series of discrete acts that may have little or nothing to do with one another. We throw what I call skills packages at managers—a day of delegation, two days of interpersonal relations, a half day of communication, an hour or two of how to appraise, and so on. Management development begins to resemble a jigsaw puzzle,

and, back on the job, few managers find the time to put it all together."

"One answer to the relative failure of many management-development programs is to provide trainees with a context, an umbrella, a system," he continues. "The recent history is that management often expects trainers to take the initiative in suggesting and designing programs that will equip managers to deal with the new challenges. Trainers, however, traditionally have seen themselves in a reactive staff role, taking directions from management."

He recommends that managers and trainers make three important changes in the way they view training and the roles of trainers:

- Trainers must see themselves as helping to run the business.
- Trainers must get out of the classroom.
- Trainers and managers must emphasize results.

Quick—a "Theory Y" type of person who basically believes that people like to work—offers a fresh and unconventional perspective on facing many of the conventional HRD challenges: managing time, motivating employees, creating partnerships, relating to others as equals, selling persuasively, knowing what's really happening in organizations, and more. Refreshingly, his ideas do not fit into neat little theoretical boxes and step-by-step how-tos.

For the most part, Quick advocates simplicity, as in uncomplicated and direct. He favors simplicity in writing, in training, in managing, and in understanding and motivating people. That's hard. And unpopular. To his lament, simple does not seem to be what American managers find natural or comfortable.

Referring to Quick's Expectancy Theory (discussed in his other books), one of his friends told him, "Call it something like Super-practicon Managerial Success

Analyzer, invent a grid. . . develop an interactive videodisc, print lots of handouts, charge several thousand dollars for it, and you'll do better." Perhaps he would. And to all those managers out there managing by walking around, Quick would probably say, "Sit down!"

Unconventional Wisdom includes reflections from Quick's other books, his thoughts on HRD theories and practices, and his experiences. He discusses how he organizes his life and how he writes—from notes, from stream of consciousness. He hops around a lot, but he's just sharing himself. Readers with some experience will enjoy his irreverent style and may well find themselves chuckling and nodding in agreement. Followers of his other books and his thinking will not be disappointed in this book.

Quick has written 18 books and is executive director of Resource Strategies Institute, where he writes and edits two monthly newsletters.

Unconventional Wisdom: Irreverent Solutions for Tough Problems at Work. 174 pp. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 415/433-17467, \$19.95. Circle 180 on reader service card.

Lurching Toward Cohesiveness

Teamwork: We Have Met the Enemy and They Are Us, by Matt M. Starcevich and Steven J. Stowell.

Does any end justify the means? If your goal is to get to the other side of the swamp without falling into the jaws of the alligators, will you sacrifice a few team members to save yourself? C'mon, tell the truth.

When it comes right down to it, most people, departments, and organizations have trouble with teamwork, say authors Matt Starcevich and Steven Stowell of the Center for Creative Leadership. It seems that community and

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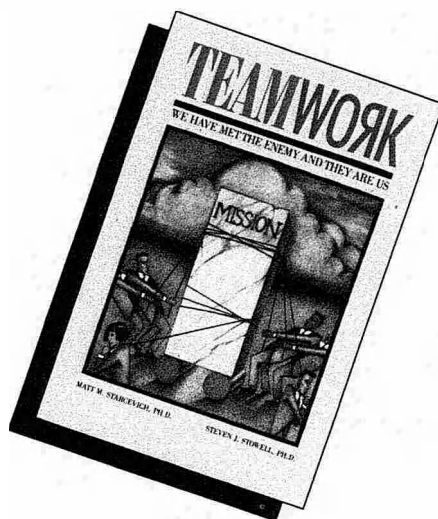
cohesiveness do not come naturally or even by accident in today's high-pressure world. The process of building high-performance teams—where all members consider the good of the group and the ultimate goal—must be deliberate and dynamic.

In this aptly titled book, Starceвич and Stowell explore the inner dimensions of how groups become teams and how group dynamics can be managed to build teamwork.

They take the reader on vicarious outdoor adventures (based on a real-life, three-day, experiential-learning exercise). For example, teams must cross an acid-filled pond while being pursued by escaped death-row convicts, rescue a child from a dangerous cave, construct a life raft with limited resources, trek across the "Trail of Tears," and more. During or after each experience, a facilitator helps team members recognize and overcome their team-resistant afflictions, such as destructive or over-charged competitiveness, individualism, over-inflated egos, personal greed, and technology that allows people to isolate themselves and "do their own thing." Realizing the impact of such afflictions on the quality of teamwork, the authors contend, is the first step toward building more effective teams.

Why do new teams struggle? According to Starceвич and Stowell, there are at least four inhibitors to teamwork:

■ **Task fixation and process blindness.** "In a new group that is fixated totally on task success, individuals focus on their own needs to the exclusion of the needs of others. There is no support, recognition that individual differences are a potential benefit, deferring of egos, brainstorming, seeking commitment, or flexibility. However subtle or covert, a selfish competition is justified as necessary to expediently achieve the goal."



■ **Power struggles.** "Who's in and who's out is a conflict [that] often exists as a part of the dominant-individual struggle. . . . The 'outs' resent the 'ins' and will resist their ideas, sabotage their plans, or simply refuse to be fully functioning members of the team." Cliques, groups within groups, and us-versus-them factions develop. "Disagreements over ideas are positioned as win-lose alternatives. Accepting my ideas means rejecting yours."

■ **Fight versus flight behaviors.** Regardless of the behavior—"unwillingness to listen to others, fear of speaking up or fighting for a position, low trust in other members, taking the task too lightly, little group planning, non-involvement, silence as preferable to vulnerability"—the result is the same.

"The team loses resources, energy, and creativity. Decisions are made and plans are implemented with less than total group input and support," resulting in dissatisfaction and frustration among members, which may cause the group to perish.

■ **Stereotyping.** "Stereotypes serve as blinders and keep the group from using all the resources available. . . . More often than not, females are given a secondary role,

not allowed to perform physical tasks like lifting others, and listened to only as a last resort. A more subtle stereotyping occurs when physical size is equated with strength, balance, and athletic agility. The largest male is often forced into the position of lifting, carrying, or pulling others. . . ."

Effective teams, the authors say, "work at building spirit and commitment; they talk about how they are doing, and they are willing to invest time and money to protect and enhance the basic team fabric and integrity. In a team, people care about each other and are concerned about how their actions and attitudes affect each other."

Most effective teams are led by strong managers or strong leaders. Strong team leaders are able to influence a group, even though they may lack official organizational authority. Strong managers and leaders share several distinctive characteristics:

■ "They perceive their work group as a team that depends upon cooperation among its members.

■ "They listen intently to their team members.

■ "They are sensitive to the team members' needs and actively encourage each member's participation."

Being skilled at both managing and leading, the authors claim, involves learning to process the behavior of a team. That happens through clarifying the team's objectives, focusing members' efforts, and maximizing cooperation. Ultimately, the focus should not be on getting the team to win, but on getting the individual members to communicate. Some approaches to achieving team-oriented communication:

■ Be descriptive, not accusing.

■ Communicate a desire to collaborate in defining what you perceive as mutual problems and in seeking solutions.

■ Be empathetic and supportive.

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- Communicate conjecturally, not in black-or-white terms.
- Use appeals—ask the other team members for ideas.
- Neutralize emotional attachment to the issues.

The experiential-learning method outlined in *Teamwork* purports to help teach people good managerial and leadership skills. "The participant experiences firsthand the processing of others' behaviors, observes the results, evaluates the successes and the failures, and determines the effectiveness of his [or] her own behavior."

One leader, after watching her team fail dismally at getting its members onto Shark Island to save themselves from the gnashing teeth of the hypothetical beasts, explains:

"Out here and in our own organizations back home, our raw energy and drive will carry us through some tasks. However, in other situations and when it is a close call, there is no question that teamwork will make all the difference in the world, in terms of achieving the final objective and personal job satisfaction.

"In my opinion, organizations are not just designed to achieve physical success. They are there to serve human needs, to be an outlet for self-expression, and to offer a sense of community and affiliation to members of the team. . . . Teams are an important part of our lives, and it is rare that we are able to sit back and take a look at how we function and operate as a team."

Also taking a look at the competing drives of organizations, people, and teams—both to succeed as well as to be cautious and to avoid losses—are a few friendly farm animals. From behind the scenes, Cleo and Napoleon the horses, Farmer Mossback's labrador retriever Guido, and Short Ribs the pig observe the incongruent behavior of humans and liken it to life down on the farm.

"The difficulty with these two

competing forces is that they are subtle. You can see this yourself by watching the animals play or work here on the ranch. Sometimes we feel like taking a risk and living dangerously. Other times we prefer to curl up in our security straw blankets of life and hold back. . . .

"We can unconsciously drift back and forth between these two drives much like the almost imperceptible movement of the teeter-totter when the Mossback children try to bring it into balance. The movement is sometimes very gradual, perhaps noticeable only to those who are observing and not actually on the teeter-totter or wrapped up in the task or problem."

The experiential-learning activities, the authors imply, allow participants to get off the teeter-totter and to see for themselves how both sides work. "The content of each activity is to serve as a metaphor for how the team functions in the real world. Pushing the team beyond a simple discussion of the activity into the similarities that exist between the behavior exhibited and how the team solves problems, the inclusion or exclusion of team members, how decision are made, what roles members assume in team projects, communication patterns, etc., moves the discussion into the SO WHAT area."

"The events are a means to an end—improved teamwork through better cooperation, communication, support, use of resources, better group processes, clearer direction, or changes in the style of leadership."

Teamwork is a simple but persuasive book, and the authors display creativity, imagination, and intuitiveness in their writing. Stretched a bit too far are the transitions between their advice as organization-management experts, the life-based outdoor adventures and the facilitator's comments, and the sage musings of four-legged animals that can talk. However, the authors are

talking about "creative" leadership, and the important message in this slim volume comes through clearly.

Managers, executives, and consultants who are charged with developing teamwork models, creating new teams, or changing the way existing teams operate will find this book insightful.

Teamwork: We Have Met the Enemy and They Are Us. 147 pp. Bartlesville, OK: The Center for Management and Organization Effectiveness, 918/333-6609, \$19.95. Circle 181 on reader service card.

Getting From Here to There

Breakthrough Thinking: Why We Must Change the Way We Solve Problems and the Seven Principles To Achieve This, by Gerald Nadler and Shozo Hibino.

What's your biggest organizational concern? Rising health-care costs, declining test scores, a tricky product design, plummeting market shares, interoffice politics, a bleak fiscal outlook? So what are you doing about it? How will you proceed?

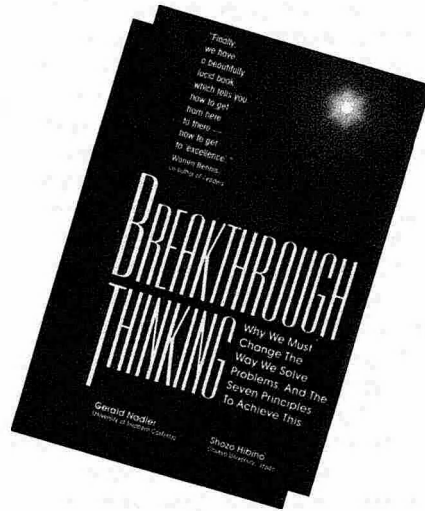
"How do intuitive and creative people and organizations solve their problems?" *Breakthrough Thinking* asks. Sure, they adopt policies on achieving a sense of mission, developing teamwork, adapting to change, being the best they can be, and bringing out the best in others. But do they just do without thinking? Do they have a process for reacting to problems or proacting toward solutions?

Most organizations, say Gerald Nadler and Shozo Hibino, attack problems in overly analytical and haphazard fashions. Why? Because the people in those organizations have never learned how to make decisions and solve problems logically and systematically. The authors believe that America's loss in productivity, slump in educational progress, and basic complacency

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when it comes to leadership boils down to incorrect decision-making and problem-solving techniques. Compounding the situation is an inability to convert vast amounts of available information and resources into useable, timely, and effective solutions to specific problems.

"Countless people today... are shackling their own potential for success. They repeat the outmoded problem-solving methods of the past, accumulating mountains of data, realizing too late their uselessness in solving the problem at hand. Or they seek to use solutions that someone else has found successful for his or her own, inherently different situation. Otherwise intelligent people take the same self-limiting thinking approaches every time—without real-



izing they are stuck in time-worn ruts on the road to mediocrity." *Breakthrough Thinking* promotes an innovative way of think-

ing about problems. It offers not a description, but a prescription for "comprehensive reasoning," based on a seven-principle system. The system combines specific principles with practical applications, mental techniques, and tools designed to help people develop proactive, positive approaches to solving problems at all levels.

In Part Two, "Increasing Your Personal Effectiveness," the authors outline the rationale for the seven principles and how to apply them:

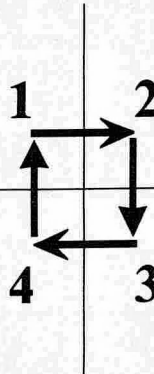
- **Regard each problem as unique.** "The most successful problem solvers do not begin by trying to find out what has worked for someone else; they don't try to clone someone else's solution and impose it on a different situation."
- **Focus on the larger purpose.**

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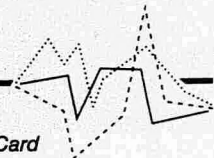
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"Defining the purposes of working on a problem [ensures] that you will apply your efforts in areas where you can have the greatest impact."

■ **Have an ideal target solution—a "solution after next."** "Successful problem solvers use a target solution as an effective guide in developing details of what others consider breakthroughs."

■ **Isolate the problem, and define the solution in terms of a larger system.** "Every problem can be seen as part of a systems matrix. You take the ingredients in a problem, alter them, replace them, supplement them, or realign them, and produce a solution."

■ **Limit what you know about a problem.** Don't take the "pack-rat" approach to information gathering. "Knowing too much about a prob-

lem initially can prevent you from seeing some excellent alternative solutions."

■ **Seek many sources of information.** "Every good idea starts with one person. A single person with insight can galvanize a committee's thinking, avert a corporate fiasco, or shift a government agency or even Congress onto a fruitful course."

■ **Update, improve, and redefine your target.** "A sequence of purpose-directed solutions is a bridge to a better future."

Applying the first two principles—uniqueness and purposefulness—the authors say, is critical to every solution. "If you don't accept the fact that each problem is unique and approach it in that spirit by always questioning the purpose of its solution, you will greatly

diminish, if not altogether eliminate, the possibility of a breakthrough in your thinking."

One particular breakthrough application presented in Chapter 7 is a systems matrix for plotting and correlating pieces of information. The matrix is a two-dimensional grid, much like a tic-tac-toe grid, on which you plot the elements of a problem, such as time, scores, behaviors, and conditions. The matrix can be expanded and modified to correlate information and relationships.

The authors outline other exercises, activities, and mindsets to help managers apply the seven principles to real-life problems. They especially like one success-oriented mindset borrowed from Walt Disney: think, believe, dream, and dare as you approach a prob-

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lem—in that order.

The philosophy of *Breakthrough Thinking* is consistent with those of the other two books in this column. Nadler and Hibino encourage such nontraditional characteristics in managers as ambiguity, intuition, content versus process, innovation, anti-status quo, and even laziness.

For example, they advise thinking of the breakthrough-thinking system “as the lazy person’s way of avoiding untold time and effort on less-than-satisfactory solutions of problems. It also prepares you to keep pressing for continual change as a way of preventing problems.”

In their research, Nadler and Hibino find that “successful problem solvers are purpose-oriented, tolerate ambiguity, encompass others’ participation, and cope with subjective or soft information. By

contrast, we have also found that 85 to 90 percent of American executives are mentally oriented toward dissecting problems, rejecting ambiguity, encouraging isolated and routine work, and emphasizing techniques and hard data.”

For the most part, even though organizations tinker with data and allocations and interpretations, and occasionally yield some quick-fix psychological results, they still fail at tackling the real problems. The authors point out, for example, “*Science* magazine noted that as the U.S. Congress prepared to pour billions of dollars into fighting a ‘war on drugs,’ no provision was made for strategic planning and design of the antidrug offensive, or even for analysis of why previous programs had largely failed.”

Their advice? “What any [cor-

poration] needs to do is to examine not the thermometer, but the furnace. The furnace is [the] system of producing goods and services. And each element of the system—people, machines, material, product designs, service demands, infrastructure, money—needs to be changed in terms of the whole.”

This book offers many ideas and applications that may be considered breakthrough, but the authors’ inconsistent presentation is less so. The writing is laborious in some sections—the ubiquitous passive voice slows the flow—academic in other sections, and long-winded in others, as Nadler and Hibino reword and restate the seven principles and then wax and wane broadly on diverse topics. Tightening Parts One and Three would quicken the overall pace.

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Nonetheless, for organizations that need, not another fix-it program but a new way of conceptualizing, *Breakthrough Thinking* is strong. Its focus on solutions rather than problems, on doing things right instead of doing the right things, and on spending time and energy figuring out what's really important is valuable.

"Breakthrough Thinking is not a program to be installed in your organization. Many groups decide that something is wrong" and get a program to fix it. "Companies are spending billions of dollars on programs to improve quality, install new or replace old equipment . . . incorporate information systems, and change the organizational culture."

The breakthrough system is a process for involving people with each other in the search for solu-

tions to their common problems, be they in business and management, in education, in politics and international relations, in the warfare on drugs, in basic-skills training, or in the quest for corporate competitiveness and quality.

"Breakthrough Thinking is a way to get out of the rut, or better yet, avoid ruts in the first place."

Nadler is the IBM Professor of Engineering Management at the University of Southern California. Hibino is professor of planning and design at Japan's Chukyo University.

Breakthrough Thinking: Why We Must Change the Way We Solve Problems and the Seven Principles To Achieve This. 350 pp. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing & Communications. This book is available through ASTD Press, Order Code: NABT. \$18 for ASTD national

members; \$20 for nonmembers.
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Additional Reading

Principles of Human Resource Development, by Jerry W. Gilley and Steven A. Eggland. 386 pp. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. This book is available through ASTD Press, Order Code: GIPH. \$33 for ASTD national members; \$35 for nonmembers.

Circle 183 on reader service card:

The Purpose-Driven Organization: Unleashing the Power of Direction and Commitment, by Perry Pascarella and Mark A. Frohman. 177 pp. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 415/433-1767, \$20.95.

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Quality Service Pays: Six Keys to Success, by Henry L. Lefevre. 363 pp. White Plains, NY: Quality Resources. This book is available through ASTD Press, order code LEQS. \$28 for ASTD national members; \$30 for nonmembers.
Circle 185 on reader service card.

Service Wisdom: Creating and Maintaining the Customer Service Edge, by Ron Zemke and Chip Bell. 346 pp. Minneapolis, MN: Lakewood Publications, 612/333-0471, \$19.95
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