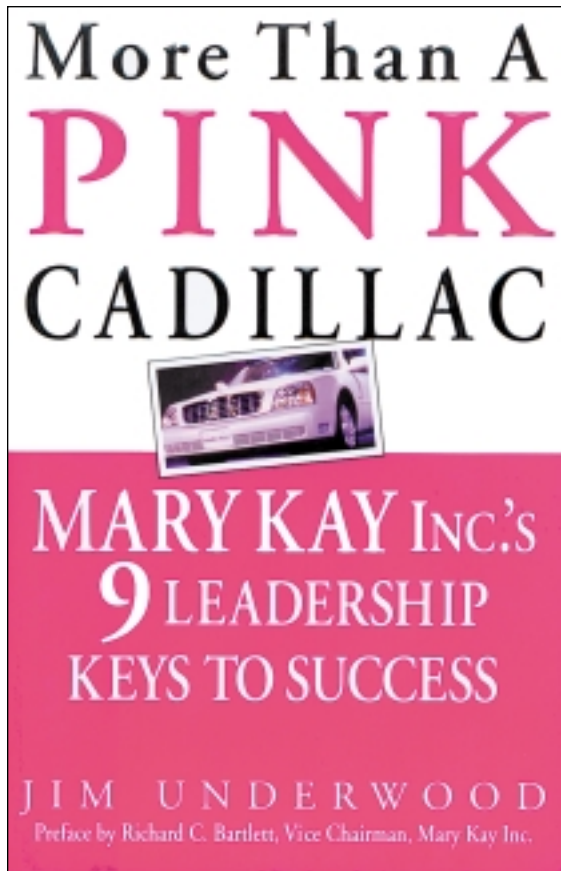


BOOKS



More Than a Pink Cadillac

Mary Kay Inc.'s Nine Leadership Keys to Success

By Jim Underwood

Reviewed by Josephine Rossi

Most people want to care about their work. At the end of the day, they want to know that they did more than punch a timecard; they want to feel that they accomplished something. If you agree, then the latest biography about the Mary Kay Ash cosmetic empire is for you. In *More Than a Pink Cadillac*, author Jim Underwood strikes an emotional chord with his portrayal of a lucrative organization that also enriches lives. Geared for both established and aspiring leaders, the book describes Mary Kay's philosophy that success in business depends on choices and values. Those leaders who value their workers' best interests and

make ethical management decisions will reap the greatest long-term rewards. After all, that's what helped turn Mary Kay's US\$5000 investment into a billion-dollar global company.

But don't let the pink cover fool you; this isn't a biography of the late founder, or a thorough company history. Rather, it is a leadership primer guided by nine keys that have generated prolonged success for Mary Kay Inc. Underwood advocates these secrets by his persuasive illustration of Mary Kay's "do unto others" management approach. Sure, the ideas may not be new to leadership publications, but *More Than a Pink Cadillac* certainly de-

ON THE NIGHT STAND

By Godfrey Parkin




I am currently enjoying Alan Axelrod's *Elizabeth I, CEO*. As with Margot Morrell's *Shackleton's Way*, this book has plenty of great quotable anecdotes that illustrate established management principles. New insights

are rare, but the context is so fascinating that the somewhat contrived analytical framework doesn't matter. At a time when many European kings ruled by fear, Queen Elizabeth's management style was enlightened, and highly effective. She encouraged dialogue and teamwork, fostered fairness and tolerance of diversity, nurtured talent and creativity, and communicated a clear vision for the future of her enterprise.

In a more sobering vein, Robert Kaplan's wonderfully written *Warrior Politics* draws on historical figures such as Machiavelli and Tiberius to make its case: As the world gets smaller, national ideologies become less defensible and compromise becomes more effective than confrontation.

My interest in the Web's impact on organizational development leads me to read futurists such as Kevin Kelly's *New Rules for the New Economy*, which I revisit often. But I may never finish *Netocracy* by Alexander Bard and Jan Söderqvist. Its premise is that networked information, and those who control it, will disintermediate organizational structures. So far so good: e-learning is already evidence of that. But will the Internet-empowered really dominate a new social hierarchy in which both the nation state and capitalism are irrelevant? The ultra-wired Swedes find this digital divide-and-conquer appealing. But if 92 percent of the world can't even get email, how will the netocrats control them digitally?

Maybe the answer is in the next chapter....

Godfrey Parkin is president of MindRise, an e-learning developer, and is one of ASTD's Answer Geeks  www.learningcircuits.org; gparkin@mindrise.com.

livers an in-depth look at how inspired employees make productive employees.

I'd imagine that there are a few skeptics out there who think the company is nothing more than housewives selling mascara, and Underwood doesn't make much of that criticism. But the book is so well researched that he doesn't need to. The facts speak for themselves.

Underwood unwittingly began his investigation of Mary Kay more than 10 years ago when he and a friend from graduate school started a business renting and installing office furniture. Mary Kay was one of their first clients. As an unnoticed observer, he witnessed firsthand how the founder and her employees put her unconventional management style into action. Intrigued and impressed, he then gained unprecedented access to the company to write this book.

When Mary Kay Ash started the Dallas-based company in 1963, she had a mission: to enrich women's lives. And it's still the company's motto. Once you understand that, it's not a surprise to read the ways she set out to complete her purpose. Her nine keys to corporate success are the main focus of the book, and, despite going against common business practice, none of them are bizarre. For example, Mary Kay believed in a different way to tackle the problem of worker motivation. While most companies may offer money incentives to do this, Mary Kay believed in recognizing the worker's effort and achievement in a public way. That's where the Cadillacs come into play. It's not the value of the car that's appealing; it's that they are a conspicuous way to reward accomplishment. Underwood claims that the pink Cadillac "represents a victory of will over doubt" and is a way for peers to see the results of hard work. For many saleswomen in the company, the pink caddy is also a tangible triumph over adversity and discouragement.

Another way the company tries to fos-

ter an enriching and productive working environment is through its adherence to a value system. Underwood firmly believes that one large reason companies deteriorate over time is that their leaders "fail to remember what got them to the top in the first place." Mind you, he isn't saying that an organization needs to be steeped in traditions, but rather it should be committed to the practices that made it successful. That's where Mary Kay Inc. is strong. It still cultivates the same caring and stimulating atmosphere it did in the 1960s. Before Mary Kay died, a Corporate Heritage Department was created in 2000 to ensure that the history and principles of the company wouldn't be forgotten. They also continue with a care list, just as Mary Kay herself once did. Each week, executive members personally contact employees during times of personal crisis to offer comfort and encouragement.

Admittedly, Mary Kay's rags-to-riches story may seem hokey, especially in the wake of corporate scandals, layoffs, and dwindling pay checks. Underwood paints a flowery portrait of the company and its employees with barely a mention of the dark periods. But Underwood rightly points out that no single key is the fix to management woes. What makes Mary Kay Inc. successful is that it's able to incorporate its practices into a unique business culture. That culture, in turn, creates and keeps talented and motivated employees who are eager to produce.

More Than a Pink Cadillac: Mary Kay Inc.'s Nine Leadership Keys to Success by Jim Underwood. New York: McGraw-Hill, Trade. 204 pp. US\$21.95

Circle 290 on reader service card.

Josephine Rossi is an associate editor of T+D. Send books for possible review to T+D, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043. Email books@astd.org.