
Resources for NASA Managers

by W. M. Lawbaugh

Healing the Wounds

by David M. Noer

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993

“Overcoming the Trauma of Layoffs and Revitalizing Downsized Organizations” is the subtitle of this well-designed book. The author’s purpose is twofold: “to explain the nature of layoff survivor sickness and to help both individuals and organizations formulate strategies to fight off this disease.”

“Layoff survivor sickness” is Noer’s term for the widespread and toxic fear, anger and depression that follow massive layoffs from downsizing, restructuring, mergers and reengineering. He documents the “survivor syndrome” from research on atomic bomb survivors, Nazi concentration camp survivors and even survivors in the space shuttle program after the Challenger disaster. He finds “guilt, anxiety and fear” as symptoms.

Healing the Wounds follows roughly the five stages of grieving made popular by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross: denial to anger to bargaining to guilt and depression and finally to letting go and acceptance. The pivotal chapter is nine when Noer urges: “break the codependency chain and empower people.” This new-paradigm behavior was characterized a year before Noer published this book, when Dagwood Bumstead (the prototype of the old employment contract employee) tells Mr. Dithers that he is quitting the corporation to take a job in Blondie’s entrepreneurial catering business. (Two weeks later, however, the comic strip shows Blondie firing Dagwood for eating her profits and Dagwood returning sheepishly to the J.C. Dithers Co.)

Nevertheless, Chapter 9 shows the folly of those who measure their self-worth by their success in the codependent organizational system. “Don’t place your spiritual currency in the organizational vault,” Noer pleads. Instead, he advises, let go of the codependent

relationship with the abusive organization, seek detachment through good work (what Paul Hirsch calls “free agent management” in *Pack Your Own Parachute*, 1987) and try to “connect with a core purpose,” such as the spiritual awakening that comes with completion of a Twelve-Step Program.

David Noer, vice president for training and education the Center for Creative Leadership, says that life after downsizing can be revitalizing for both the individual and the organization if and when codependency yields to autonomy and self-empowerment. If not, the organization is in decline.

To Build the Life You Want, Create the Work You Love

by Marsha Sinetar

New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995

Entrepreneur Marsha Sinetar attempts to bring such corporate terms as reinventing and reengineering down to a personal level. Her purpose is to provoke readers into finding their own “right livelihood,” work done in service to humanity with pure intentions, according to Zen teaching. Or, in Jungian terms, to discover their individual “vocation” or calling to a higher level of life’s work.

Alternating frequently between Eastern and Western holistic definitions of work, Sinetar claims that “our new job security requires healthy entrepreneurial prowess.” In other words, job security depends less upon the employer and more upon the worker’s own self-reliance, creative resources and enthusiastic engagement (what Rollo May calls “creative encounter”) with meaningful work.

To Build the Life You Want is based upon Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of values, the apex of which is “self-actualization,” or, in her terms, “vocational integration.” Her ample quotations and anecdotes come from a wide variety of sources, from Zen

Masters and Whoopi Goldberg to Edward deBono and Louis Lahr, former CEO of 3M. Most of all, she quotes herself, especially an earlier book, *Do What You Love, The Money Will Follow*.

Sinetar, who left a secure job as public school administrator to strike out on her own in business and writing, does have some interesting perspectives. For example, in her final chapter she invites the reader to view “work as art,” with all its attendant risks, trials, discipline and creativity.

“The most productive entrepreneurs I know *gain* energy by managing it,” she says in another chapter. Instead of heavy lunches she recommends physical workouts, yoga, massage, meditation, breathing exercises or fruit juices for better health and vitality. “Vitality also translates into widened opportunities: People like to be around us when we’re centered and enthused.”

Much of this book is based upon common sense, but it is practical. Each chapter ends with “A Summary Strategy” with thought-provoking questions and exercises that could keep you busy for hours. Lively anecdotes, crisp interviews and bountiful suggestions for deeper reading add to the enjoyment of this little (200 pages) book.

Being Digital

by Nicholas Negroponte

New York: Vintage Books, 1996

Nicholas Negroponte is founding director of the Media Lab at M.I.T. and a frequent contributor to *Wired* magazine, where portions of this book appeared first.

The author distinguishes between being digital (all-at-onceness, connected, now) and being analog (one thing at a time, fragmented, left-brained). He is decidedly pro-technology and insists that “many electronic games teach kids strategies and demand planning skills that they will use later in life.”

Although *Being Digital* is available on tape AudioBooks and on CD, both in abridged forms, it is somewhat ironic it is published in “atoms,” on paper,

not in cyberspace. The author admits he does not like to read, owing mainly to his dyslexia.

Nevertheless, he has produced one of the clearest, most interesting guides to the cyberworld he helped to create. He explains bits, bytes and bandwidth, data compression, high-definition TV, and some of the myths and half-truths surrounding each. Yet, while he discusses multimedia with competence, he admits his only use of the Internet is for electronic mail, not for research or data storage.

Perhaps the most interesting parts of *Being Digital* are Negroponte’s fearless predictions of the digital future. He has already been proven correct in his assessment of foiled attempts to regulate and censor the Internet. Consider these prognostications:

- “I am convinced that by the year 2000 Americans will spend more time on the Internet . . . than watching television.”
- CD-ROMs are “the Beta of the 90s,” bound for extinction. “The fax machine . . . is a step backward.”
- “The value of information about information can be greater than the value of information itself.” Witness *TV Guide*. Information in the future will be customized and personalized to interface well with the consumer.
- “Digital life will include very little real-time broadcast” except for sports and elections.
- “In future media there will be more pay-per-view,” not less, unless you prefer advertising.
- “The notion of an instruction manual is obsolete . . . nothing short of perverse.”
- “The middle ground between work and play will be enlarged dramatically.” Ditto for love and duty.
- “By the year 2020, the largest employer in the developed world will be ‘self.’ Is this good? You bet.”

There is a dark side to being digital, and Negroponte glosses over privacy invasion, copyright piracy and radical worker dislocation. Nevertheless, anyone whose 80-year-old mother sends him email daily cannot be less than optimistic about the future.

The End of Work

by Jeremy Rifkin

New York: Putnam's, 1995

"The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era" is the subtitle of Jeremy Rifkin's latest book. His earlier books, *The Emerging Order* and *Time Wars*, were well received and successful. This one is ominous, especially in its prediction of global unemployment.

"The Information Age has arrived," Rifkin announces. "In the years ahead, new, more sophisticated software technologies are going to bring civilization even closer to a near-workerless world." In the past, fading sectors of the economy always seemed to give way to new, emerging sectors. Agriculture gave way to manufacturing, which gives way to the service sector. However, Rifkin notes, all three sectors are experiencing "technological displacement."

If there is a new economic sector emerging, it is the "knowledge sector," made up of entrepreneurs, computer programmers, educators and consultants. This small but growing sector of "knowledge workers" cannot begin to absorb more than a fraction of the millions of workers displaced by machines.

Especially hard hit during re-engineering and downsizing were African Americans in office and clerical jobs and laborers, as well as trade unionists, like Machinists, Steelworkers and UAW members. Some entire unions, such as typographical workers, were wiped out in the recent postindustrial revolution.

Rifkin points out that this is not a national problem. At times his rhetoric is harsh, scary. For example:

The death of the global labor force is being internalized by millions of workers who experience their own individual deaths, daily, at the hands of profit-driven employers and a disinterested government. They are the ones who are waiting for pink slips, being forced to work part-time at reduced pay, or being pushed onto the welfare rolls. With each new indignity, their confidence and self-esteem suffer another blow. They become expendable, then irrelevant and finally invisible in the new high-tech world of global commerce and trade.

The price of this "program," for Rifkin, is threefold: a wider disparity between the super-rich and the abject destitute, a slow death for the middle (working) class, and "a more dangerous world" due to teen unemployment and terrorism.

Like most of his hard-hitting, penetrating and well documented books on social policy, this book offers solutions to turn the gloom and doom into sunshine and happiness. His solutions are two. First, we must reengineer the work week as we have the workplace. Europeans are experimenting now with the shorter work week (four days) or 30 hours per week. Secondly, Rifkin proposes "a new social contract" based upon "empowering the third sector." Our market economies have stressed the government and commerce sectors at the expense of what he calls the social sector of education, health care, the arts, religion and community service. Various welfare reform schemes involve workforce in such third sector jobs as daycare and after-school programs.

Immediate implementation of both these solutions may, however, be too little too late, according to Rifkin. Some social scientists imagine a high-tech world just around the corner wherein two percent of the world's population can sustain the food, shelter and clothing needs of all the rest. What the unemployed do in such a world is still a mystery, but Rifkin produces plenty of evidence that the end of work as we know it may substantially diminish if not disappear yet within our own lifetime.



