



Book Review Editor: Theodore J. Weidner, Ph.D., P.E., AIA

This issue addresses three important elements of APPA's Body of Knowledge (BOK)—design, construction, and leadership. Start the new year off right and consider these books.

### **BROKEN BUILDINGS, BUSTED BUDGETS: HOW TO FIX AMERICA'S TRILLION-DOLLAR CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY**

by Barry B. LePatner, University  
of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2007,  
185 pages, hardcover, \$25.

Reviewed by Ted Weidner

The APPA Body of Knowledge includes a great deal of information about the design and construction of facilities, which is an important element in a facility officer's job. It is also a costly and risky area for colleges and universities, as Barry LePatner points out in *Broken Buildings, Busted Budgets*.

I first learned about *Broken Buildings* from a colleague who sent me an op-ed piece LePatner wrote in the *Boston Globe*. I thought the op-ed piece was slanted, so I decided to buy the book and attempt to debunk the author. As I read *Broken Buildings* I came to agree with the author's opinion about problems in the design and construction industry and some of his suggestions for improvement.

So here's a facility officer's perspective—throughout *Broken Buildings*, LePatner presents examples of what he considers successful and unsuccessful construction projects. The Big Dig—Boston's effort to bury the elevated I-93 highway that cut through downtown Boston—features prominently as an example of a construction project gone bad. After living in Massachusetts for five years

and working in the public arena with the complex public construction requirements the Commonwealth demands, I can understand how the Big Dig was also referred to as the Big Pig (over budget by a factor of five or more). The 1970s' attempts to rein-in the old-boy, mysterious, and corruptible Massachusetts construction environment by legislating how construction is supposed to be done just increased the networks, mystery, and opportunities for corruption. In my opinion, the laws don't work; LePatner provides examples of how they don't work and suggests a different approach.

On the positive side, he cites the massive residential development of Levittown, the post-war, Long Island community meant to provide affordable home ownership to thousands of returning GIs and their families. Levittown was a construction success, producing a large number of limited designs

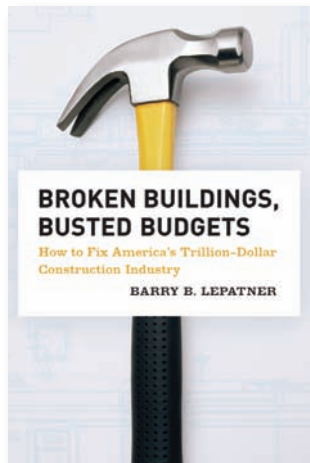
in assembly-line fashion. What Henry Ford did to automobile and then aircraft production, Arthur Levitt and his sons did to housing after the war. "You can have any color as long as it's black" was Ford's way to keep production of the Model-T economical. In the Levitts' case, home owners could choose from minor variations in the finished product but otherwise, each house in town was the same as everyone else's. Architects don't like the initial concept but do like how individual homeowners have changed their houses over time. Obviously, the homeowners didn't like the uniformity and made changes to personalize their homes to their liking.

LePatner points out that the design and construction industry is full of small, mom-and-pop operations that come and

go and often have little construction or business know-how. These companies may not be the well-capitalized firms that are covered by typical contract requirements for performance and payment bonds, but as suppliers of key components they may have a costly, adverse effect on the project anyway.

LePatner advocates several changes in the construction industry.

- Vertically integrate construction; create a corporation that fabricates its own parts, windows, doors, shingles, woodwork, brick, etc., and eliminate the need for multiple conflicting technical specifications and multiple intermediaries who take a percentage along the way. While the Levitts did this in Levittown, it doesn't appear likely in our highly decentralized and regulated environment. Recently, vertically integrated industries have been moving toward increased subcontracting and use of multiple suppliers; this too is possible, but there are other technical demands, which reduce the likelihood.
- Create large companies serving large regions (or the entire country) so economic variations can be ameliorated. LePatner recognizes the difficulty of this with many conflicting codes and regional construction techniques. The capital requirements alone would require enormous investment and resources.
- Increase use of the design-build delivery method, where designers and contractors work together and provide a fixed price for the project upfront. This approach carries its own risks for the owner who must have a significant in-house staff time focused on careful planning and budgeting to maximize value. There are APPA members who use this delivery method for all building types: dormitories, classrooms, and research facilities.
- Increase the detail provided by architects and engineers. The AIA appears resistant to increased detail (and responsibility by




the A/E team) as evidenced by recent changes to their standard documents. (I hope to get a review of those documents in a future column.)

- Improve the transfer of information between the A/E team and contractors to eliminate confusion, errors, delays, and additional costs. There's promise here with the development of BIM (building information modeling) and the use of the Internet to correspond with all parties.
- Develop the skills and expertise, or buy them independently, to keep the contractor from winning the scheduling and change order game. This is a key action an owner can take to prevent the contractor from using his knowledge to get more money.

One of LePatner's best recommendations is to designate an on-site representative for each project. This is consistent with the practice at many campuses. The education and experience

of these institutional representatives is important. APPA members can leverage their knowledge and expertise to address this and other recommendations.

The author makes a convincing argument using examples of problems within the construction industry to make his points. While several of his recommendations are consistent with APPA's BOK, the book provides good documentation for anyone on campus who may doubt the costs of managing a construction project. It's one more opportunity to use outside expertise to make your case for increased in-house attention to design and construction details. 

#### THE SOURCE OF LEADERSHIP: EIGHT DRIVERS OF THE HIGH-IMPACT LEADER

by David M. Traversi, New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2007, 208 pages, hardcover, \$24.95.

*Reviewed by Suzanne Drew*

There seems to be a consensus across management publications regarding the character traits of effective leaders: credibility and curiosity; positivity and resiliency; courage and forward thinking; and focus and integrity. Unfortunately, while these descriptors are often documented, there are far fewer resources to help people acquire or develop the traits described. How does an adult truly become more curious, positive, courageous, or people-oriented than they naturally are?

In *The Source of Leadership*, author David Traversi describes choices anyone can make to help them expand their capacity for these behavioral traits. These drivers—as he calls them—include:

- Living in the present
- Being open to others and new ideas without judgment or defensiveness
- Having clarity and alignment across your thoughts, actions, and behaviors

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## the bookshelf cont'd

- Acting with intention and positivity
- Taking personal responsibility for things you want to influence
- Knowing when to use and trust your intuition
- Looking for connections others may not yet see
- Communicating with honesty and empathy


Traversi also provides a variety of tips, techniques, and exercises to help put these choices into daily action. While some of the proposed techniques may lean a bit toward the new-age, including meditation and positive visualization, many are simple, practical, and easily applied.

The author suggests the most fundamental choice is the decision to live in the present. By

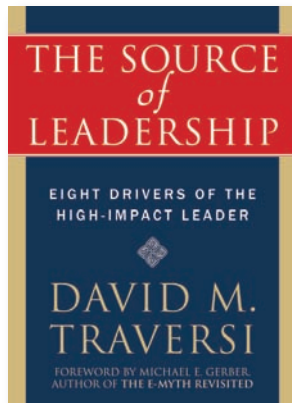
choosing to not allow thoughts about the past or future to color or distract from the moment—or at least choosing to be aware of how they are impacting your perception of it—you can pay better attention to the people, opportunities, threats and the interrelationship of things before you. The purpose of the past, he says, is to remind us of happiness and good things and to help us learn so that we can make better decisions for the future.

To replay the past for any other reason is usually neither productive nor enjoyable.

Similarly, the purpose of thinking about the future is to figure out a way to make tomorrow even better than today. A sample of his advice: when you can, plan; when you cannot, pray and then redirect your focus onto something that you can control or influence.

There are a number of management books, which give advice on how to structure an organization or what to say to influence others. Traversi, who describes leadership as the ability to transform one's personal energies into extraordinary interpersonal results, takes a more elemental approach and focuses instead on how to manage your own thoughts and energies. By making conscious decisions about how we think and act, we affect how we are perceived and followed. All in all, it is an interesting choice. 

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