



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

### This month I'm grateful to delegate

reading and review responsibilities to Suzanne Drew, director of staff development and management at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Suzanne speaks from years of experience on two books about employees and employee interactions.

While Suzanne writes on serious topics, I'll mention a work of fiction that I just finished. *Beet*, by Roger Rosenblatt, takes a cynical look at liberal arts education. I read it on my Kindle (technophile that I am) but you can get it in print too. It's a nice diversion from the nonfiction stuff we read for work.

Reviews by Suzanne Drew

### ONE FOOT OUT THE DOOR

By Judith M. Bardwick, Ph.D.; AMACOM, 2007, 202 pages, \$24.95

The title of Dr. Judith M. Bardwick's book, *One Foot Out The Door*, refers to some scary research findings of recent years, which indicate that most American employees may show up to work most days, but few are actually willing or motivated to give it their all. The book provides both context and recommendations for improving organizational performance and productivity by first improving the employee work experience.

About a third of the book describes research results to support the link between business success and employee perceptions of their employment situation. While easy and interesting to read, the data is persuasive whether you make

decisions based on people or numbers: when employees are engaged in their work and committed to their employer, they are more productive and the employer more successful.

Another third of the book discusses specific, practical things front-line supervisors and organizational administrators can do to increase employee engagement and commitment. Among the recommendations: hire the right people. Hire people who research suggests are more likely to be engaged in their work than other people. The characteristics to look for? Emotional maturity, flexibility, a high motivation to achieve, a positive disposition, a passion for the work they do, and a tendency to hold themselves accountable to their own standards of performance. Hire people who not only have the skills and abilities your organization needs, but make sure they will be

motivated by and comfortable in the work environment your organization offers.

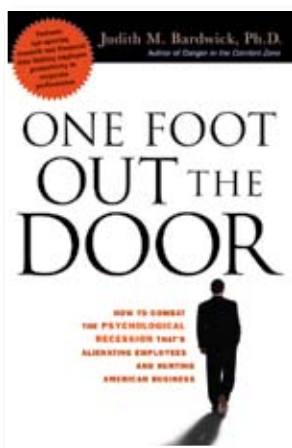
Most of the recommendations build on the propositions that engagement and commitment are essentially emotional responses and feelings almost always win over facts because how people feel determines how they act. The most important focus should be placed on supervisor-employee relationships (since people may join companies but they almost always leave supervisors) and

it should be on building genuine trust through genuine communication. The best relationships are characterized by enough personal disclosure to build trust, enough empathy so people feel as if they are liked, enough admiration so they feel accepted, enough mutual respect so disagreements are the start of conversations rather than conflicts, and enough training so that people know how to

really listen to each other. Additionally, the very best relationships recognize that different employees are motivated by different rewards and opportunities.

Companies can build trust and commitment by acting in ways that communicate a balanced interest in the welfare of their people and the accomplishment of business goals. Specific suggestions regarding the power of family-friendly policies, investments in training, honest communications, and the importance of leading by example are detailed.

Finally, the remaining third of the book provides an explanation of why today's employees are motivated by the things they are and what to expect in the future. With some economic and social analysis, some public-policy discussion and proposals, and a good deal of practical and sensible advice, *One Foot Out The Door* is an interesting and compelling read.



### THE TEAM-BUILDING TOOL KIT: TIPS AND TACTICS FOR EFFECTIVE WORKPLACE TEAMS (SECOND EDITION)

By Deborah Mackin, AMACOM, 2007, 209 pages, \$17.95

Team building is a phrase that can evoke a variety of interpretations and reactions. To some, it recalls an afternoon of "trust falls" and getting-to-know-the-real-you exercises. To Deborah Mackin, author of *The Team-Building Tool Kit*, it means a structured, tactical process that successfully and consistently transforms people into highly effective, productive, and cohesive groups—working together to achieve specific goals.

Since the first edition, published more than ten years ago, many have used this best-seller to create and manage self-directed work teams and various types of short-term improvement or design teams. This second edition reflects

subsequent changes in technology and the natural evolution of many of the tools included in the first edition, which have been improved by users over the years.

This is *not* a resource to convince you why a team approach is better than the traditional structure of having one leader supervise the decisions and efforts of a group of employees, but a detailed reference for how to make it happen.

What makes teaming so difficult to achieve is also what makes it so effective when done correctly. In traditional work structures, there is one manager who is skilled and knowledgeable of the technical aspects of the work—the arts and science of communication, conflict resolution, and decision making; and the operational necessities of organizational life, such as



interpreting and enforcing HR policies and managing budgets. Under the teaming paradigm, everyone in the workgroup shares these responsibilities (which are called “teaming” skills in this environment) and is given the time and resources to become proficient in them.

Whether you are empowering employees to participate in self-directed work teams, or you want to encourage increased employee ownership and participation in decision making—while retaining your traditional reporting relationships—or you want to provide your front-line leaders with new supervisory ideas and tactics, this book is an excellent resource. The topics and suggestions are timeless: how and when to conduct meetings so they consistently add value; how to create and implement ground rules that reinforce professional and productive

behaviors and discourage those that can undermine mutual respect, good will, and cooperation; how to deal with disagreements and conflicts; how to structure and organize productive and participative group decision-making and problem-solving conversations; and how to give feedback for improved performance.

The practical descriptions, tools, and insights are useful in nearly any employment structure. Whether you use the book to spark discussion or as a reference tool, *The Team-Building Tool Kit* is a good addition to any management library.

Suzanne Drew is the director of staff development and management at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. E-mail her at [sdrew2@unlnotes.unl.edu](mailto:sdrew2@unlnotes.unl.edu). Ted Weidner is assistant vice chancellor of facilities management & planning at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; he can be reached at [tweidner2@unlnotes.unl.edu](mailto:tweidner2@unlnotes.unl.edu).



## SCHWEET. The S348-I

The industry-leading Schwarze **S348-I** is an easy to operate, powerful sweeper that provides exceptional durability, a superior factory warranty and customer support that is second-to-none. Standard equipment includes a 65 horsepower diesel auxiliary engine, and our 30-inch diameter “Whisper Wheel<sup>SM</sup>” blower.



**INFINITE POSSIBILITIES Call Today 1-800-879-7933. [www.schwarze.com](http://www.schwarze.com)**