BOOK REVIEW

Changing Occupations, Changing Challenges: A Review Essay

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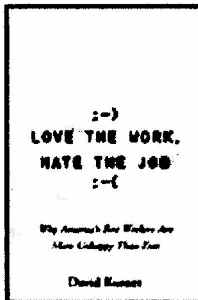
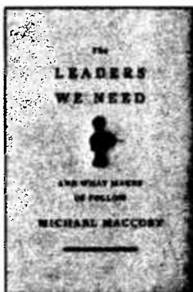


Love the Work, Hate the Job: Why America's Best Workers Are More Unhappy Than Ever. By David Kusnet. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2008. Pp. 288. $25.95 (hard cover). ISBN 978-0-471-74205-0.

Doubt Is Their Product: How Industry's Assault on Science Threatens Your Health. By David Michaels. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. 384. $27.95 (hard cover). ISBN 978-0-19-530067-3.



The Leaders We Need: And What Makes Us Follow. By Michael Maccoby. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2007. Pp. 240. $26.95 (hard cover). ISBN 978-1-4221-0166-7.

Suppose professionals achieved the power to develop and offer professional judgments without external interference. The concept may not be radical, but its consequences could be. Suppose, for example, that federal scientists could have reported the evidence about global warming without facing political pressure. How much further along would our response be? Suppose nurses had a greater role in determining patient loads. How many more patients would survive?

Over the decade ending in 2016, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that one of the two fastest growing groups in the American workforce, and the single largest, will be professional and related occupations.[1] If work is repetitive, it may be automated. If work can be digitized, it may be sent abroad. But someone has to connect professional services, science, and technology to their users.

The centrality of professional and related occupations makes defending the ability to do the job right ever more important. Three new books highlight the challenges for professionals (*Love the Work, Hate the Job*, by David Kusnet), for the public they serve (*Doubt is Their Product*, by David Michaels), and for leaders of diverse organizations in a range of sectors (*The Leaders We Need*, by Michael Maccoby).

Trying to Do the Job Right

The pitch-perfect title *Love the Work, Hate the Job* is likely to resonate with many workers. Its multilayered account blends workplace drama, acute analysis, historical context, and provocative questions.

David Kusnet structures his narrative around four case studies from Seattle. In 1999, demonstrations against the World Trade Organization meetings signaled widespread discontent with globalization. Kusnet uses the demonstrations to cue his analysis of change and conflict in the year 2000. At Kaiser Aluminum, a progressive social contract with its workers disintegrated. At Northwest Hospital, what had been community-based health care faced corporatization. At Microsoft, so-called perma-temps, hired through staffing firms at the behest of their behind-the-scenes employer, fought for better conditions and better products. At Boeing, some 17,000 engineers went on strike.

Two themes are particularly compelling here. The first is Kusnet's examination of the breakdown of the social contract. For decades after World War II, employers rewarded loyalty with employment security. Kusnet adds an additional aspect to the contract and its demise: It used to be that a commitment to high quality brought professional and techni-

cal workers respect and the latitude to do the job right.

Kusnet's second compelling theme is his demonstration that unions serve not only blue-collar workers, but professionals as well. Professionals are capable of breathing new life into collective action. A nigh-legendary aspect of the Boeing engineers' 2000 strike was their development of environmentally sound burn barrels for cold-weather picketing.

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Less colorful but more important was the engineers' demonstration that their goal was to keep Boeing true to its traditions of quality and innovation. The Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace called the largest strike by professionals in United States history. SPEEA declared the strike was not *against* Boeing, but *for* it. The ability to do the job right matters not just to professionals, but to their employers—and to the rest of us.

Science, Policy, and the Public

While Kusnet focuses on the workplace, David Michaels investigates the intersection of science, industry, and government. In instance after instance—tobacco, asbestos, vinyl chloride, lead, secondhand smoke, chromium, mercury, greenhouse gases, and others—he documents a pattern: Industry insiders discover that a product or process endangers workers, consumers, or the public. Industry executives ignore, conceal, or deny the evidence.

When outside scientists or government regulators notice, public relations firms and "scientists for hire" swing into action. Paid for by a threatened industry, they create doubt about the scientific evidence that would otherwise justify governmental action. Their goal is delay, which permits business as usual. The delay may cause or increase large-scale suffering or death, but those incidental effects do not immediately affect profits.

In *Doubt is Their Product*, Michaels lays out his facts and sources clearly and comprehensively. He traces the ways in which industry exploits the culture of science. Science fuels its progress with questioning and hypotheses. It tests theories against evidence. It does not assert absolute certainty, but measures levels of probability.

Industry exploits the culture of science.

To show a probability of harm to humans, epidemiologists look to patterns of exposure and illness, to animal testing, or both. Intentional testing of suspected pathogens would be unconscionable. Patterns of exposure and sickness may emerge only over decades and in large populations, and other factors may call causation into question. Animals are not humans, and equating their exposure levels or reactions to those in humans is again subject to second-guessing.

Scientists for hire specialize in exploiting these vulnerabilities. They may reanalyze epidemiological data with parameters that yield the results an industry wants. Even more pernicious is the "funding effect." As Michaels shows, even eminent scientists rarely publish research concluding that an industry funding their work causes harm.

Under the current Bush administration, political pressures have abetted industry pressures. From global warming to arsenic in drinking water, political appointees invited industry representatives to serve as scientific advisers or censored data adverse to corporate interests. Scientists at the Environmental Protection Agency, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration found themselves regularly battling demoralization, and many simply quit. Again, the ability of professionals to do their jobs, without external pressures that ignore the common good, matters to all of us. The stakes often involve life and death.

Michaels' book deserves a wide audience. It will certainly interest all who eat, drink and breathe. Policy makers, including our new President, our new Congress, and our judges, should study it. As Michaels writes, "the best solution is leaders who respect science and scientists" (p. 255).

Rethinking Leadership

The centrality and visibility of leaders have engendered a voluminous literature, most of it anecdotal, much of it prescriptive, and little of it encompassing the messy realities that leaders often confront. In *The Leaders We Need: And What Makes Us Follow*, Michael Maccoby brings to bear an eclectic background as an anthropologist, psychoanalyst, student of organizations, and adviser to leaders for more than 40 years. The result is an original and provocative contribution that, unlike many others, recognizes the importance of context to leadership.

Maccoby anchors his argument in a point so indisputable as to seem initially uninteresting: A leader is someone whom other people follow. Alluding to a range of motivations for followers—self-interest, fear, force—Maccoby focuses on "transference," the Freudian concept of unknowingly displacing emotions developed toward one person (sometimes as an emotional imprint from infancy) onto another.

Maccoby focuses on "transference."

The bureaucratic leaders of large hierarchical organizations, Maccoby contends, drew on a family template of paternal authority: a dominant male who issued directives, tendered rewards, and imposed sanctions. Then women

came to work in increasing numbers, and the familial template changed. Fathers and mothers became partners at home, and children looked less to paternal authority and more to siblings and peers. Maccoby suggests the consequence has been a major shift in the social character, his term for a widely shared element of personality.

Proving something as intangible as a shift in social character is not easy. One might posit other explanations for the changing demands on leaders: a difference between the veterans of World War II habituated to hierarchy and a cohort that came of age in the 1960s suspecting authority; a radical move to global computer networks that facilitate communication and interaction; or a shift from producing goods to offering services. Whatever the explanation and whatever the sector, however, if followers change, then leaders may need to adjust as well.

In today's leaner, flatter, less hierarchical organizations, Maccoby says, leaders must become more interactive and less authoritarian. Leadership may encompass developing a strategic vision, translating a vision into outcomes, or enabling diverse experts to work effectively as a team. To elicit the best work, leaders throughout organizations will require not just a willingness to interact, but also an acute sense of their followers' individual personalities. Maccoby propels and illustrates his points with examples from his work with organizations in business, health care and education, and then proposes questions we should ask as we choose our next president.

Maccoby exhorts leaders to respect the people they lead and to serve the common good. Only if leaders do so, he says, will they build the trust with which to succeed. His theme of respect returns us to that of Kusnet, while his emphasis on the common good dovetails with the work of Michaels.

Few of us would argue against asking leaders to extend respect to subordinates or seek the common good. Yet leaders violate these apparently unassailable precepts daily. How do we overcome that divergence? Michaels shows the stakes may be nothing less than the habitability of our planet. The rest is up to us.

NOTE

1. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Table 4. Employment by major occupational group, 2006 and projected 2016* (December 4, 2007; accessed July 22, 2008 at http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/print.pl/news.release/econpro.t04.htm).

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