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Common Purpose: How Great Leaders Get Organizations to Achieve the Extraordinary

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Kurtzman, Joel. *Common Purpose: How Great Leaders Get Organizations to Achieve the Extraordinary*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010. 212pp. \$27.95

In his latest book, Joel Kurtzman draws on his experience as editor, reporter, and columnist for the *New York Times*, editor in chief of the *Harvard Business Review*, founder of the magazine *Strategy + Business*, columnist for *Fortune* and *Chief Executive Magazine*, and adviser to the World Economic Forum (Davos), the Wharton School's SEI Center, and MIT's *Sloan Management Review*. He attempts to capture the essence of what it takes to be an effective organizational leader in today's world, and the term he uses for this is the title of the book, *Common Purpose*.

Kurtzman starts out with the conundrum that leaders of organizations face today: How do you move from traditional hierarchical organizations to flatter, sensing organizations that are responsive enough to react quickly and appropriately to new information, threats, and opportunities? How do you encourage prudent risk taking while empowering people at all levels to make decisions that benefit the organization without losing focus on the vision and mission or squandering time and resources on efforts that do not contribute to desired long-term goals and objectives? In other words, how do you align effort from top to bottom without traditional bureaucratic approval procedures that waste time and effort? Kurtzman cites as extreme negative examples the FBI just prior to the attacks of September 11 and the Enron Corporation. In the first example he demonstrates the danger of not

empowering people at lower levels to act when they become aware of information, and in the second he shows what can happen when people are empowered to act but get carried away with short-term goals without considering the effect over the long term.

In later chapters Kurtzman identifies ingredients of leadership that produce an atmosphere of shared, common purpose in high-performing organizations. He points to many examples, leaders like Gordon Bethune at Continental Airlines, Steve Wynn at Wynn Resorts, and Shivan Subramaniam at FM Global (an insurance company in Rhode Island that has been in business since 1835). He discusses the importance of values that are demonstrated, not just preached, by the entire leadership team, serving as examples for everyone in the organization. He points out that the best organizations have leaders who acknowledge and incentivize the flow of new ideas from all levels of the company, not just from the top. He speaks about the importance of trust within organizations and identifies ways in which trust can be developed and strengthened despite tough economic times in which massive layoffs have diminished the loyalty of employees toward organizations.

Finally, Kurtzman believes in the power of positive thinking and the importance of the leader performing the roles of coach and mentor. Citing the research of Richard Boyatzis of Case Western Reserve University, he maintains that the best leaders create supportive environments that are enjoyable to work in, an effort that pays off in increased retention and even increased willingness of employees to take prudent risks to produce better outcomes. Kurtzman believes that the mutuality of interests

among employees and the organization is one of the most important aspects of achieving a state in which everyone is working together, with a common purpose. He also provides some useful insight for older leaders working with an emergent Generations X and Y workforce.

This is a well written book that offers some time-tested and proven ideas to new leaders and serves as a good reminder to seasoned leaders, who may have gotten into bad habits.

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Aurelius, Marcus. Translated by C. Scot Hicks and David V. Hicks. *The Emperor's Handbook: A New Translation of the Meditations*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002. 150pp. \$22

Whether or not the first-century Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius ever intended his personal musings to be shared with anyone, his *Meditations* has been translated and published numerous times over the centuries. Writing at the end of long days campaigning against Rome's enemies, Aurelius sought to capture his personal thoughts on the best way to approach the many challenges presented by life, not only as a military leader and emperor of Rome but also as a father and a man. His thoughts are presented within the framework of the Stoic philosophy, one of the prevailing schools of thought in the first-century Roman world. *The Emperor's Handbook* is Scot and David Hicks's translation of this great philosophical work. Does it offer anything to the reader that other translations do not? The short answer is yes.

For ease of reading alone *The Emperor's Handbook* soars above both previous and more recent editions of *Meditations*. The prose is rendered in modern American English—clearly delivered and designed to present Marcus Aurelius to a contemporary audience. Short sidebar quotes presented every two or three pages allow skimming through the book while still capturing the enduring wisdom it contains; even the most casual readers can become acquainted with Aurelius's thoughts in a very short time simply by reading them. What they would miss, however, is the extensive notes that support much of the text and contribute to the book's strength. For those interested in pursuing further study on either the *Meditations* or the Stoic philosophy of which it is a part, the translators list plenty of additional reference material in their short introduction. There is a short index.

Scot and David Hicks believe that anyone can benefit from reading Marcus Aurelius's thoughts. Many previous editions of his *Meditations* are specifically geared toward military leaders or to leaders in business or government. However, these translators have aimed their work at a much wider audience. The back flap of the book states Aurelius's wisdom "speaks to the soul of anyone who has ever exercised authority or faced adversity or believed in a better day." That means almost all of us, and if this book can spark interest in readers who might not otherwise have turned toward the Stoic mind-set or these particular precepts, it can only be considered a success. *The Emperor's Handbook* is recommended highly for anyone—whether student of philosophy, person in authority, or someone