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## BOOK REVIEWS

***Schools that Work: America's Most Innovative Public Education Programs*** by George H. Wood, published by Penguin books USA Inc., New York, USA, 1992 (290 pages).

This book brings hope for everyone concerned with public education. The question "Can We Have School that Work?" was answered on a positive "Yes" by the author after years of observing, talking and participating with the students, teachers, parents, principals, administrators and others as the resources of change in different public schools in the United States.

The author, a parent and educator, gives us his firsthand experiences and observations of what visual and practical tools and strategies can bring differences to school. His search for successful educational models through his belief that we are more likely to learn from success rather than failure will encourage schools to strive and do well despite the odds and problems about them. His descriptive reporting of his exploratory day-to-day observations of selected public schools in Georgina, Ohio, Chicago, New York, and New Hampshire among others gives his readers a clear picture of what's really happening in those schools. He mentioned of four provisos in his book: he admits that nothing always works perfectly; that he is presenting models for us to learn and adopt whenever it makes sense; that his book represents only a sampling of what is out there; and that he used the real names of the teachers and schools involved in his study. He found "healthy schools" that we may be inspired and see how those schools changed for the better. He talks about school reformers and resources for change.

His book tells of how public elementary school children, at their very young age can learn to think, can cooperate and be actively engaged in and out their classrooms. His way of emphasizing democracy and respecting the child's right to be empowered as a learner, collaborator and by recognizing every child as an integral part in decision-making could lead us to progressive education. The priority being given to our dear children, our schools are to be models for others to witness and see the difference. Our children, our hope for the future needs school that will teach them to be inquisitive learners and prepare them to a democratic life. His illustration of Spectrum program where 3 Spectrum teachers devote their knowledge, time and skill by coaching and getting to know each child closely while learning and the Foxfire project where students are given the courage to stand up and speak for what he or she wants had turned them to grow with better understanding of being a part of a community with participatory democracy.

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Wood points out that teachers should be partners and collaborators and should not be managers or competitors. As school reformers, they are to teach with discipline. They are to come to school prepared to share enticing and interesting classroom activities with a vision of who they want their students to become as reflected in all they do. The school climate should be that of a community of learners working together with a school spirit of active learning, doing real things. Everybody should actively work cooperatively, not competitively. The curriculum should give our children memories to live by, giving them the time to know more of themselves. They are to know more of how to learn, not know much they learn. They are to enjoy their childhood meaningfully in a way that will prepare them to productive and successful lives after school. They are to explore the world while in school with a focus of who they will become someday. Thus, students will leave the school with a better sense of who they are how they are to with others and what they can be.

The book pushes us to do more of our children. We can create and change schools, whether public or private with strong determination no matter what barriers lay before us. We can make a difference. It suggests that schools need be smaller regardless of current size; get closer to its students with a child-centered vision. We are to take our time with them as much as possible to see to it that students will be asking the right questions and search out important answers with the power of making decisions about things that really matter. Of course, there are roadblocks that might stop us along the way every now and then, in the school, in the district, in the community, and in the lawmaking body of the country but with that burning desire to bring about those positive changes, we have to rethink what models and strategies the author has shared could fit our school.

All our life, we work hard for the future of our beloved children. While they spend most of their childhood and learning in schools, why don't we pause for a moment and help make our schools work? This book can trigger you to begin with.

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*As Nature Made Him* by John Colapinto. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000. (289 pages).

This book presents the real-life story of a boy, who lost his penis while he was undergoing a routine circumcision at St Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, the same hospital where he had been born seven months earlier.

Identical twins Bruce and Brian Reimer were born 22 August 1965. At seven months of age, their mother noticed that the twins showed pain when urinating. After consulting with a physician, circumcision was recommended and performed on 27 April 1966. The scalpel attached to the electrocautery machine did not respond. The hemostat was turned up and up again. When power finally reached the scalpel and the surgeon applied to Bruce's foreskin, the excessive power incinerated the entire little penis! This disastrous accident prevented the procedure on Brian and time proved it unnecessary.

Mr. and Mrs. Reimer spent endless days from doctor to doctor to find a solution. Prognoses seemed unsatisfactory — plastic surgery to produce an organ with no other function than conduit for urine. In their search, the Reimers located Dr. John Money, a Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine psychologist, specialized in gender psychosocial identity. Money advised sex reassignment as soon as possible. This consisted of surgical castration, sowing the orifice in such a shape as to resemble a female vulva. Then parents would raise this child as a girl. He assured that, after hormonal treatment at puberty and further surgery, she would become a normal and well adjusted female that, although unable to be a mother, could have a functional vagina capable of intercourse and sexual pleasure. Doing what they thought the best available option, the parents accepted the procedure. But this was to be only the beginning of an ordeal that would last decades for the Reimer family.

Brenda (Bruce) grew up without any knowledge of the gender reassignment or the hospital accident. Her parents were consistent and scrupulous in following Dr. Money's social prescriptions. But the truth of the matter is that there was nothing feminine about Brenda. She was stereotypically boyish in all behaviors even to a further extreme than her twin brother Brian. Furthermore, she was uncomfortable as a girl, as if something inside her was telling her that she was not a girl. With such contrary-to-nature societal expectations, Brenda had only rare moments of happiness in her growing years. And things grew worse when Dr. Money considered it time for more surgery. Brenda became so opposed that her parents decided not to proceed. Finally, Brenda was told the truth, at age 14, by her parents. After the initial shock, she said: "Suddenly, it all made sense why I felt the way I did, I wasn't some sort of weirdo. I wasn't crazy." Brenda became David Reimer the man that now lives in reasonable happiness with his wife and three stepchildren.

This book along with recent medical and psychological studies has alerted the scientific community of the flaws of John Money's theory that the primary factors during psychosexual differentiation are learning and experience, not biology. There is simply no way to transform through social and environmental rearing the sexual chromosomes written on every cell. This case is now bringing alternatives to the traditional surgical sex re-assignment procedures practiced for decades in many countries.

The author, John Colapinto, has done a remarkable job of journalistic research, interviewing scores of individuals relevant to the case, investing thousands of hours asking questions and listening to people's statements. As a result, we have a highly readable, well documented publication of interest to physicians, psychologists, educators, as well as the general public interested in the topic.

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*The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Supervisor* by Brad Humphrey and Jeff Stokes published by Jossey-Bass Pfeiffer, San Francisco, 2000 (332 pages).

This book is ultimately about leadership — raw leadership. Supervisors must be first and foremost leaders. They must possess the skills to move people in a positive direction, even when the path is uncomfortable or unknown. If you are supervisor, you will find several skills presented in this book that need to be embraced and incorporated into your leadership efforts.

The twenty-first century supervisor will continue to be the main conduit between senior management and frontline workers.

Five hundred organizations were surveyed to identify the job skills that would make supervisor successful. Here are the nine skills that received the greatest number of response on the survey and the percentage of respondents who selected each set of skills.

Percentage	Skill
83	Communication skills
81	Coaching
80	Team skills
78	Project management skills
75	Computer skills
73	Continuous improvement skills
71	Writing skills
68	Business analysis skills
66	Resource management skills

**Communication skills.** The communication skills came number one and the resource management skills came the last. Although people skills are sometimes called the soft skills of leadership, there is nothing soft about learning to communicate more clearly, coach more effectively or lead a group of employees so they function as a team.

**Coaching skills.** Successful coach must be able to lead their players to do things they may not feel able to do on their own. Good coaches must possess the leadership qualities necessary to bring together may different personalities, attitudes, values and expectations and mold them into something greater than the sum of their individual strengths.

**Team skills.** Recognizing the employee's capabilities is very important. Identifying a team's capacity means what the team can do as a whole. Recognizing and rewarding employees is an important part of supervisor's role.

**Project management skills.** Vision is the first step of effective project management. You cannot get where you want to go without knowing where you want to go. Your vision challenges, directs, and motivates your people. Creating a vision begins by understanding the direction in which your entire company is moving.

**Computer skills.** Computers are created to aid people in their work and made them more efficient and effective. They allow people to accomplish their work in less time. A computer's output will be only as good as the information and programming they need.

**Continuous skills.** The first step is to plan; and individual or team engages in a planning process that involves recognizing obstacles. Find the nature of obstacle and explore the root causes so that you can correct negative situation.

**Writing skills.** Letter writing will become common for twenty-first-century supervisors. Writing letters to customers and suppliers will be a direct by-product of the continuous improvement process. Writing a letter is how you put yourself writing in a paper that reflects the professionalism, and how your message is clear and concise. Letter, once again are communication without the advantages of voice tone, body language, or immediate two-way conversation as further ways to get your meaning across.

**Business analysis skills.** Business analysis skills are yet another example of an area that supervisors need to acquire that was once the primary responsibility of managers. Business analysis skills enable you to learn *what* your organization does and how. It highlights the importance of each step and which step can be improved, adjusted or eliminated. A variance is an area in the process where results do not match needed specifications. Understanding the work flow and work flow variances will enable you and your teams to identify and at least reduce if not eliminate performance problems of departments, teams, and individuals.

**Resource management skills.** The development of your administrative abilities as a twenty-first century supervisor includes adding resource management skills to your job description. To keep employees on track and performing optimum levels, you will be required to provide employees with all the different things they need to accomplish their tasks.

### **Conclusion**

Mastering all nine of these skill areas will reinforce your specialized generalist status and make you an even more valuable leader to your organization. The journey on which you are about to embark will not be easy. As you proceed, you will find experiences that will test you, even seem to drag you back for a time to where you used to be more traditional supervisor. When those situations appear, sit down and evaluate how far you have come overall. Stay true to the course and you will become a true twenty-first century supervisor.

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