BY PATRICK IBARRA

MUST-READS FOR LEADERS:
PART 2

More books to enlighten your leadership journey

I n the September 2018 issue of *PM,* I offered the first part of my "must reads" and shared books to support my version of a contemporary leadership model, including creativity, innovation, change, courage, and leadership. In this issue, I tackle the other five aspects of my leadership model: organizational performance, strategy, talent management, management, and culture.

Important points to remember as you read this article and the books referenced:

- Government is the business of public service.
- One of the primary roles of a leader is to be a teacher.
- Distinguish between problems you can solve and problems that require ongoing work.
- Leadership is about achieving positive outcomes.

In pursuit of "getting better all the time," I encourage readers, after reviewing the list, to start a book club. Make it voluntary and informal and meet periodically to discuss what people have read. Explore how what's been read can be applied to your organization.

Also, I've never been a fan of the "flavor of the month" or "management by" best seller. It wears people out and creates change fatigue. I suggest you take ingredients from each of these books and realizing you're the chef in your career kitchen, cook up your own recipe for success.

Organizational performance. "Every organization is perfectly designed to achieve the results it gets." That's right, there are no accidents in an organization. Whatever you are accomplishing, it's intentional. Question is, what are you trying to accomplish? Remember government is not in the output business, it's in the outcome business.
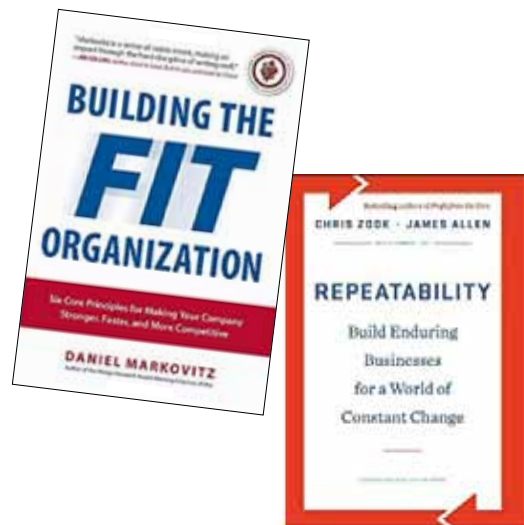
Let me ask: What is your organization's fitness plan to stay in shape and navigate the unpredictability you face daily? If you're not sure, then I recommend reading *Building the Fit Organization* by Daniel Markovitz.

Whatever language you choose—in English, it is Lean; in Japanese, it is Kaizen; and in Spanish, it is Mejorando—continuous improvement is mission critical.

In this practical hands-on guide, Markovitz walks you step-by-step through the process of making Lean as intrinsic to your organization as the pursuit of successful outcomes. You will learn how to make an unshakable commitment to increasing the value provided by doing the *right* work in the *right* way with continuous monitoring of processes and structured coaching for everyone.

I found the book *Repeatability: Build Enduring Businesses for a World of Constant Change* by James Allen and Chris Zook provocative in exploring the concept of organizational performance. Based on a multiyear study of more than 200 companies, the authors stress the value of repeatability in business, showing how the "big idea" today is really made up of a series of successful smaller ideas driven by a simple and repeatable business model (FYI, a budget or an organization chart are not business models).

Zook and Allen show how some of the world's best-known firms combine a core differentiation model with speed, adaptability, and simplicity to land them at the top for long periods of time. In fact, they attribute long-term success as requiring a foundation of enduring and stable core principles.

Strategy. As the saying goes, "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got." In today's world, that is not good enough.

Imagine a new employee or a resident approaching you today and asking, "What is the city or county trying to accomplish?" What's your reply? You have about 10 to 15 seconds of that person listening before they move on.

Your strategy should be concise, clear, and compelling; for instance, it could be, "Our city is the advocate for a better quality of life for our residents, and each day, partnering with our elected officials, we build a stronger community and change lives." Remember, public service is a noble profession.

Two books that will help you dig deeper into strategy are *The Hard Stuff*

He contends that "recruitment and talent management should be driven by the skills and competencies needed for long-term success."

This means talent management requires agile systems that can respond quickly to changing conditions.

In their book *Talent Wins,* authors Ram Charan, Dominic Barton, and Dennis Carey echo Lawler's observations on the rapidly changing workplace and contend that talent practices most organizations use are "designed for predictable environments, traditional ways of getting work done, and where lines and boxes define how people are managed."

Talent drives value to customers/residents and managing human capital as wisely as financial capital is the overarching theme of the book. They recommend you form a "central brain trust" or the G-3, which includes the top administrator, chief financial officer, and chief human resources officer, who meet regularly to ensure the organization has the right talent and "to ensure that talent is truly integral to every major strategic decision across the organization."

In short, being a talent-centric organization is fundamental to your organization's continued success. As the novelist E. M. Forster put it, "One person with passion is better than 40 people merely interested."

Management. What is most difficult in your organization: going from 0 to 1 (starting), 1 to 0 (stopping), or 1 to 1,000 (expanding)? Return to that question after you read about management. Besides the rise of influence by young residents, in our demand- and experience-based economy, your residents expect easy, accessible, and reliable (EAR) services.

Government tends to be reactive instead of proactive and can miss the

future when mistaking the temporary for the timeless. Remember, you lead people whereas you manage such things as services, budgets, operations, and programs.

In his book *The Future of Management,* Gary Hamel asserts that you must "aspire to build [an] organization that is capable of continuous self-renewal in the absence of crisis." Hamel poses the question, "What's the tomorrow problem that you need to start working on right now?"

His response is that "management innovation changes the way managers do what they do and does so in a way that enhances organizational performance." Another of his books, *What Matters Now,* is excellent, too.

"Organizations don't execute unless the right people, individually and collectively, focus on the right details at the right time." Governments do many things well, but one thing it doesn't do well is stop doing things. Money is not an organization's most precious resource, time is.

On what are people spending their time? In fact, making more efficient what shouldn't be done in the first place is a tremendous waste and makes no sense.

In their book *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done,* authors Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan outline a number of building blocks to improve execution, including the leader's seven essential behaviors: 1) know your people and your business; 2) insist on realism; 3) set clear goals and priorities; 4) follow through; 5) reward the doers; 6) expand people's capabilities; and 7) know yourself.

Nothing revolutionary here, but Charan's writing style makes the ordinary seem extraordinary.

Culture. Workplace culture matters because it is a powerful, hidden, and unconscious set of forces that determines both our individual and collective behavior, ways of perceiving, thought patterns, and values. In short, employees draw

of *Organizational Performance* by Colin Price and Sharon Toye and *The Startup Way* by Eric Ries. In *The Hard Stuff,* the authors, through extensive research, found that top-performing organizations have determined how to be both big and agile.

And key to their success is acceleration. They can build and change momentum quickly, largely because of their ability to strip complexity down to the bare essentials and to make apparently contrasting objectives compatible and achievable. As Leonardo DaVinci was to have said, "simplicity is the art of sophistication."

Ries offers a statement so applicable to local government: "The awareness of the need to both protect and grow an existing service while also being able to experiment with new ones in this way is critical to success in the twenty-first century, and a hallmark of a modern company/organization."

Talent management. What's your organization's employer brand? My reply: qualified, capable, mission-driven people who choose every day to recommit themselves with laser-like focus to high-quality service. Attracting, developing, and optimizing your organization's talent is the mark of an effective leader.

In his book, *Reinventing Talent Management: Principles and Practices for the New World of Work,* author Edward Lawler describes the emerging world of work as one in which people- and job-sharing is more prevalent, along with other shifts, and people own their own development.

emotional energy from the organization's culture.

It's impossible to create a work culture where everyone is happy in the sense of being joyous and brimming with positivity. That's just not human nature. Employees, however, should be committed to supporting the goals and values of the organization and to supplying their team with the resources and support needed to get the job done.

Ask yourself: How healthy is our workplace culture? The following two books will help you craft a response to that question.

First up is *Hit Refresh: The Quest to Rediscover Microsoft's Soul and Imagine a Better Future for Everyone* by Microsoft's chief executive officer Satya Nadella.

After being appointed as the third CEO in the history of Microsoft, Nadella visited its business units around the globe and came away with this impression: We're a know-it-all mindset and I want us to be a learn-it-all mindset."

He recounts that over years of success, the culture of Microsoft had become complacent and thwarted the introduction of new ideas.

The second book is *Connection Culture* by Michael Lee Stallard. Three types of culture are described by Stallard; however, he focuses on the best, which is a connection culture.

In this type of culture, most people describe feeling connected to their supervisor, colleagues, work, organization's leaders, and people the organization serves. When people feel these connections, they thrive, individually and collectively.

A connection culture is created when leaders communicate an inspiring vision, value people, and give them a voice.

An easy way to remember this is Vision + Value + Voice = Connection.

Keep in mind that leaders must facilitate a workplace culture that makes sure the penalty for making mistakes is not greater than the penalty for doing nothing. These leaders realize that growth and comfort don't co-exist, but that creativity and discipline do, in their efforts to nurture and cultivate the production of potential solutions.

As John Wooden, coach of the UCLA Bruins college basketball dynasty in the 1960s and 1970s said, "It's what you learn after you know it all that counts."

E-mail your questions and comments to me at address below. Happy reading! **PM**

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