

THE REGENT BUSINESS REVIEW

ISSUE 5



Perfecting Your People Skills

**Why People Skills Matter
Twenty Time-Tested Tactics**

**How to Work With People You Don't Like
Godly Guidance for Difficult Conversations**



Perfecting Your People Skills

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AN RBR MINI-CASE

How To Work With People You Don't Like

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Regent University Graduate School of Business

A Magazine for
Christian Leaders
and Managers

THE REGENT BUSINESS REVIEW

Issue 5 (May 2003)

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The Regent Business Review is an electronic magazine published at the Regent University Graduate School of Business. The mission of RBR is "to equip and encourage Christians to be more God-honoring leaders and managers." As such, we offer practical guidance about what it means to be an authentic Christian in the workplace, as well as tools for better communication, for character development, and for other building blocks of leadership excellence. Driven by a calling to make disciples in the marketplace, we seek to exhort and coach Christians to "excel still more" (1 Thess. 4:1) in their roles as leaders and managers.

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FAST FOREWORD

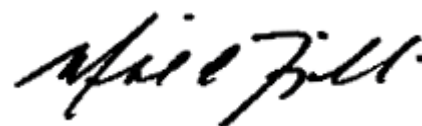
The ROI for People Skills

Why people skills? Why should you invest valuable professional development time with such soft stuff? And why should a business magazine devote the better part of an issue to the subject?

Because for the Christian management or leadership, people skills are, for at least two reasons, imperative. The first is that Jesus taught us to love one another. Trite? Clichéd? We hope not. After all, it's not called "The Great Commandment" for nothing. But what does the Commandment have to do with people skills? In a word, *everything*. The more we cultivate these skills – skills like those explained in "Twenty Time Tested Tactics" (page 8) – the more we make the people around us feel important ... significant ... valuable ... *loved*. In fact, it's no exaggeration to say that strong people skills are a prerequisite for anyone who wants to reflect the loving character of God in the workplace or anyplace else.

And beyond being saltier salt and brighter light, there's a second, more pragmatic reason that people skills matter in business. As explained with wit and wisdom by Dan Chamberlin ("Why People Skills Matter," page 5), our people skills foster close-knit relationships and as they do, we find ourselves in a powerful position to persuade. Whether the other person is an employee from whom we need more productivity, a supplier from whom we want prompt delivery, a prospective creditor from whom we want capital, a customer from whom we'd like more business, or a colleagues whose buy-in we need for a new initiative, people skills can build tight relationships and engender trust, yielding the influence necessary to meet our business objectives. Moreover, when we have to convey a message of correction or reproof – say, to an indolent employee or a tardy supplier – our people skills may be determinative of whether their behavior actually changes.

This issue of *RBR* unpacks these ideas much further, with one central goal in mind: to remind the Christian practitioner that there's a tremendous ROI from even modest investments in interpersonal acumen – returns that accrue in both the eternal and temporal realms.



Michael Zigarelli, Editor

In Our Next Issue: Unbelief Unedited

Do you understand the worldview of your colleagues? Do you understand their basic assumptions about how the world works? About right and wrong? About how business should be conducted? About God and about absolute truth? These are not academic issues. Understanding the secular worldview is a precondition for persuasively communicating with your colleagues and for advancing Christian values in the workplace.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Issue 4

“If Jesus were to drive, he would be driving a motor coach ... After all, he and the twelve disciples would not be able to fit into even the largest SUV.”

The *What Would Jesus Drive?* Ad Campaign

What we drive may or may not be important to God, but what is most certainly important is that we humbly ask him what He would like us to drive. God may remain silent, or He may give us clear instruction about what to drive and where to go. The key is to give Him control in these small areas of our lives so that He can trust us in bigger areas.

As we walk more closely with Christ, we can know His heart, and our desires will become more conformed to His. If His

desire is for us to use a gas guzzling SUV to do kingdom work, we had better obey.

Kent Satterlee
Mandeville, Louisiana

Pretty good commentary on the SUV topic. Stewardship is indeed the responsibility the God gave to us. To be honest with you, at times I think the Lord would take the bus.

Sean Gerold
Foothill Ranch, California

I enjoyed reading your commentary on the *What Would Jesus Drive?* campaign, but I think that answer is obvious. First, Jesus would not be driving. I am fairly sure that Jesus would let Peter drive since he would get the group there faster (though Jesus might have to talk with Peter about his aggressive driving). Second, if Jesus were to drive, he would be driving a motor coach of some sort or maybe an older model Greyhound bus. After all, he and the twelve disciples would

not be able to fit into even the largest SUV. Alternatively, Jesus might drive his old pick up truck. He was a carpenter and he would have needed a flat bed for getting supplies from the Jerusalem Home Depot.

H. Beau Baez, III
Manassas Virginia

Actually, scripture yields even more direct counsel when Luke tells us that Jesus and his disciples were in “one accord.” Perhaps a mid-size Honda was the vehicle of choice!

– Ed.

Write to RBR

The Regent Business Review welcomes your substantive comments and questions. Letters to the editor must include the writer's name and address if intended for publication. They may be edited for space and clarity.

Please send your letters via email to michzig@regent.edu



Why People Skills Matter

by Dan Chamberlin

Life with machines is simple. By and large, machines work dependably. When they don't, we consider it the exception rather than the rule, and we are usually not irked by the necessity of fixing them. And most machines can be fixed. They come with repair manuals, and for the more complicated, with computer diagnostics.

Practically none of this applies to humans. We lack the dependability of machines, and when we aren't working, diagnosis of the cause is painful and difficult. And yet, the progress of almost every organization depends on the creativity and productivity of humans. No organization I can think of is solely or even largely machine-dependent for its growth.

All this would be of little import if not for one central fact: *people skills are, to use a phrase from my Latin I textbook, the sine qua non of management.* The "without which there is nothing." You can't get any organization to turn out progress, growth, satisfaction and productivity without managing its delicate *people* with consummate *skill*.

For some time now, we have been in an era of organizational contraction and downsizing – RIFing. Managers are being laid off at a considerable rate, and, with or without a war-driven economic upswing, may continue to be. But the ones who are being laid off are those

who, in general, lack the people skills to extract higher productivity from those they manage. When organizational executives look for "dead weight" to cut, they look for managers who lack the people skills to lead triumphantly, to create and maintain a team of producers.

The progress of almost every organization depends on the creativity and productivity of its people – outcomes largely determined by the people skills of its managers

But people skills are not only important from the negative viewpoint of keeping one's management job. They are important because they're the assets which permit a manager to extract from his or her people their very best, created under conditions of their greatest happiness. People skills in management, then, may be defined as that set of proficiencies in the manager which maximize the productivity, satisfaction and growth of the managed.

The Golden Rule is a part of people skills, "doing unto" the way you would like to be "done unto." But at the risk of heresy, I have always thought the Golden Rule could go farther. Doing to you what or how I want done to me doesn't take

into consideration our individual differences. Maybe you don't *want* to be done unto the way I do. Is there, perhaps, a "Platinum Rule"? Should we do unto others as they would have themselves done unto? With certain exceptions, this seems to me an enhanced perspective on the problem of people skills. Learn what truly motivates and pleases those in your sphere of influence and provide those things to them, insofar as you are able.

People Skills Begin With Understanding

If you buy into the Platinum Rule idea, you have obligated yourself to a very high-calorie, high-maintenance life-management style:

understanding and supporting others. People skills begin with understanding. If you don't believe that, ask a marriage counselor about the causes of the alarming rate of marriage breakdowns. "He/she just doesn't understand me" is the most commonly heard complaint in the marital counseling session. The same general complaint, couched more in terms of "the boss doesn't care about me," or "I'm just a small cog in a huge wheel" accounts for much of the strife in organizations today.

This may be a throwback to the days of the so-called "Scientific Management" of Frederick Taylor, who believed that only he (and perhaps a few select engineers in his employ)

knew how any job in the foundry should be done. We would like to think we have moved past this autocratic style, learning from such milestones as the Hawthorne Effect and the Human Relations school of management in the latter half of the last century, but input from the managed – those being “done unto” – would not seem to bear this out. Survey responses in general reflect a gap between the rankings of what the worker values and what management thinks they value.

The average member of an organization today wants his/her work to “matter” (be of some significance), to be fulfilling (provide satisfaction and some measure of personal growth), and to provide some

level of sociability. Workers place these job characteristics above pay in survey after survey. Equally, however, they appear to understand that their productivity is vital to their organization’s continued success, and, according to Douglas MacGregor’s Theory Y view of them, are quite willing to work hard.

However, management hasn’t yet seemed to understand this – at least not universally. Management, when surveyed, usually gets things in the wrong order, figuring workers are most concerned about pay, and generally predicting that factors concerning personal involvement and satisfaction will rate much lower on workers’ wish lists. “What we have here is a failure to communicate” – a failure of

management to plumb the feelings, wants, needs and thoughts of their employees on a regular basis. Too often, we have a management that “knows” how the job should be done, and a work force that isn’t being served by that omniscience.

Managers can bridge the gap by seeking out and listening to their work forces. This act alone could improve labor-management relations significantly. One of my favorite quotes, unfortunately anonymous, is that “being listened to is so close to being loved that most people can’t tell the difference.” I believe active listening is the most important single quality of a good manager. Active listening is listening with all the senses, really hearing both the words

Some Powerful People Skills Resources

People Skills by Robert Bolton (Touchstone, 1986). A perennial best-seller, this is considered one of the better books for helping people develop their listening, assertion, and conflict management skills.

Conversationally Speaking: Tested ways to increase your personal and social effectiveness by Alan Garner (McGraw-Hill, 1997). A half-million-plus seller that teaches the reader how to ask questions that promote conversation, how to listen in ways that encourage others to talk, and how to reduce anxiety in social situations.

The People Skills of Jesus, William Beausay II, (Nelson, 1997). A slim book – only 122 pages. It might remind you of *Jesus CEO*, given the two page chapters. However, by contrast, the theology is defensible here and the guidance is both practical and worthwhile.

Dale Carnegie Training® (www.dale-carnegie.com) Twelve week programs, two-day seminars, on-site training – you pick the approach. Whatever you choose, it will be the gold standard in the interpersonal skills industry. But if you don’t have the budget to spend four figures on personal development, consider buying the \$15 book on which this is all based, the classic ***How to Win Friends and Influence People***.



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and the gut feelings from which the words spring. It requires not only the obvious full attention, but the restraining of oneself from interjecting responses, suggestions, and solutions. It is, in my opinion, the ultimate “people skill” because of its power. When used with the proper selfless motivation on the part of the manager, it can accomplish two desirable outcomes at once: (1) it can make the worker feel appreciated and respected, by virtue of being listened to, and (2) it can often lead the worker to soften his adversarial position, sometimes even culminating in the solving of his own problem.

Back in the Stone Age, when I took Organizational Behavior in grad school (it was called “Administrative Practices” in those days!), we eager students would solve every case by trying to “make them understand.” We were humiliated each time by kindly old Professor Joe Bailey asking us to continue, to describe to the class just *how* we would “make them understand.” Of course, anything we suggested was met with hoots and catcalls from our classmates, because none of us had yet learned that generating understanding in another is not a matter of force. It wasn’t that “they” couldn’t understand, it was that we were highly unlikely to “make

them” understand by what we were suggesting: lecturing them, ordering them, whatever. Workers will “understand” when they want to – on their own terms – and it is only through the *sine qua non* of people skills that the manager genuinely affects that understanding.

Dan Chamberlin is a graduate of Harvard Business School, a former senior executive at four large consumer package goods companies, and currently, an Associate Professor of Management at the Regent Graduate School of Business. You can reach him at danicha@regent.edu

Twenty Time-Tested Tactics For Improving Your People Skills

by Michael Zigarelli

Here's a recent news item that might surprise you. It's a conclusion from a recent Wall Street Journal survey of more than 2,000 corporate recruiters: **"Interpersonal communication and other so-called soft skills are what corporate recruiters crave most, but find most elusive in MBA programs."**

Did you get that? Communication skills. Interpersonal skills. People skills. That's what recruiters are looking for more than anything else when they seek to fill management slots. Sure, the recruiters seek the "hard" skills, too. They want you to know strategy and economics, how to analyze the financials, how to examine statistical data, and so on. But the soft skills are currently king of the skill hill. Perhaps they should have been all along.

Need more evidence of the value of people skills? Listen to the recruits as well as to the recruiters. A survey of 1,500 graduates from eighteen full-time MBA programs, conducted by the leading B-school accrediting body, found that graduates rated "one-on-one communication" as the most important workplace skill. However, only six percent of these alums considered their business school better than "moderately effective" in helping them develop in that area.

Interesting findings, aren't they? People who can get things done through others – those who can persuade, those who can motivate, those who are liked and who get along well with others – stand the

Want to be a great leader? Want to succeed in your career? The word is out: your interpersonal skills are critical

best chance at becoming effective leaders in the workplace (and the best chance at getting the jobs in the first place). Interesting indeed, but hardly path-breaking. We've known this for decades. Just look at *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, the perennial bestseller. It made the same argument as far back as 1936!

Want to be a great leader? Want to succeed in your career? The word is out: your interpersonal skills are critical. At work, in the home, at church, around the neighborhood and just about everywhere else, these skills can make or break your ability to get things done.

A Plethora of Powerful Practices

A quick truth-in-advertising disclaimer: what's said in this article has been said before. These human relations practices certainly predate me and they predate 1936. In fact,

they've been handed down through the ages. They are time-honored and battle-tested. They've been published in myriad forms by myriad authors. That's because they're powerful practices. They work. They'll improve your life and the lives of those around you.

The list below is not an exhaustive list, of course – you could no doubt add to it – but I hope that you'll find it to be a helpful primer for how you can perfect your own people skills.

1. Don't complain: It's been said (and rightly so) that we shouldn't bother complaining. Eighty percent of the people won't care and the other twenty percent think you deserve what you're getting! But if you prefer scriptures to quip-tures (yes, I know that's not a word, but it does rhyme nicely), consider the Apostle Paul's admonition to the Philippians: "Do everything without complaining or arguing" (Phil. 2:14).

Don't complain. It doesn't get you very far because people tend to react negatively to toxic talk. Instead, offer potential solutions when you identify problems, or say nothing at all.

2. Smile a lot: Check out that mug of yours in the mirror. Do you usually have a "no" face or a "yes" face? Does your expression tell the world to leave you alone or that you're friendly and approachable? My

guess is that Jesus smiled a lot. After all, the fruit of the Spirit is joy.

Try this out, just for today. I'm serious – experiment with this. Make yourself smile, even if you don't feel like it. Do it consistently throughout the day and then watch how others respond to you. You'll be pleasantly surprised (and they might be too!).

Don't complain. 80% of the people won't care and the other 20% will think you deserve what you're getting

3. Listen closely and

actively: When I was in grade school, my grandfather often said to me (in a distinctly Italian accent): "You hear but you don't listen!" He was usually right. I could parrot back what was said to me, but I didn't really process it, much less obey it.

When it comes to interpersonal relations, that's a blunder bigger than the lasagna that mama used to make. And the result is frustration and repetition – frustration because nothing incenses a speaker quite like the feeling of being ignored; repetition because the speaker will try to remedy the problem by repeating what he or she just said.

But try this instead. Make a real effort to listen to everything that's being said to you. Concentrate on it rather than letting your mind wander to something more interesting – or to what you want to say in

response. Then, especially if there is the potential for disagreement or misunderstanding, paraphrase what the person has attempted to communicate to you. Be patient here and briefly summarize his concerns, points, or ramblings as a preface to your own rejoinder. That person will know that he's been heard. Then, in reciprocation, he'll be more likely to listen to you.

You'll reap what you sow here. Communication will improve, guaranteed. So will the relationship. And you'll never again have to worry about getting tugged around by the ear because you hear but you don't listen.

4. Make them feel important:

Lack of affirmation and respect may be reaching epidemic proportions in our narcissistic society. At home, at work, and everywhere else, people seem to be starving to hear that they're important and relevant. So feed them. Let them know you think they're working real hard, that they're doing a great job – that they're contributing, that who they are and what they do has genuine value. Try it with your spouse, with your employees, with your friends, with your pastor. Be an encourager and an affirmer. There is no straighter pathway to building up people and building your relationships.

5. Show your appreciation:

Gratitude is a cousin of affirmation. When someone has expended some effort from which you benefit – even if it's something they're expected to do – let them know that you appreciate it. Make a habit of

expressing gratitude. People feel entitled to it and when it's withheld, resentment fills the vacuum. By contrast, when you express gratitude, you can instantly make that person's day.

So thank your spouse for taking out the trash or for doing the dishes, not just for the special things. Thank your employees for their effort, even if it doesn't always produce fruit. Thank the mailman for being so reliable. Then watch their faces brighten. Gratitude costs you nothing and it gives them much. Awesome ROI.

6. Talk about their interests:

Try this the next time you're at some stuffy social function. Make a game of it, if you'd like. Rather than hoping for opportunities to tell people how great you are, and rather than just making small talk about the five day forecast, talk about the other person's

Gratitude costs you nothing and it gives them much. Awesome ROI.

interests. Set yourself aside for the evening and become interested in those around you. This person is a secretary and a mother? Ask about the job and about her kids. That person has a Star Trek shirt. Ask about Star Trek. It doesn't matter that you don't really care about Mr. Spock or understand that ear condition of his. The person you're speaking to is a fan, so start there. People love to talk about their interests, so give them the opportunity to do so.

By the way, this technique works outside of parties as well. Try it the next time you see that neighbor who's been giving you a hard time.

Knock yourself down a few notches. Paradoxically, it'll probably raise you up in the eyes of others

7. Remember every name:

Some people have an uncanny ability for remembering names. The rest of us find creative ways to hide the fact that we've forgotten them. "Hello, friend. Oh, hi there buddy. Welcome, brother. Great to see all of you again!"

It's been said that someone's name is the sweetest word that person ever hears, so do whatever it takes to make that sweet sound. You'll do more than impress them. You'll make them feel memorable.

8. Make a sacrifice for them:

Words are powerful, but few of your words will be more treasured than a sincere sacrifice of time or money on your part. So get in the habit of identifying and meeting people's needs. Be kind. Put their needs ahead of your own. Let the overworked mother drop off her kids at your house for an afternoon and then tell her you'll take care of returning them. And while you're at it, bring a pizza for their dinner. When that mom thanks you lavishly for going out of your way to bring dinner, just say: "hey, the pizza place was only an extra mile!" She'll get it.

Nothing – *nothing* – will earn you more real friends than sacrifice. And if you're evangelically-minded, nothing will earn you the right to be heard on important issues like your faith.

9. Use self-depreciating

humor: Don't hesitate to make fun of yourself. In a world where people are so full of themselves and incessantly concerned about communicating their own importance, self-depreciating humor can instantly make you attractive. So go ahead. Make fun of your flaws. Knock yourself down a few notches. Paradoxically, it will probably raise you up in the eyes of others.

10. Focus on your

similarities: Lots of research bears witness to what might already be obvious to you: we're more likely to be influenced by people who are similar to us. If you've been there too, if you've endured their pain, if you look and talk and dress like they do, they'll probably like you more. They'll listen to you more. They'll confide in you more.

So center on the similar. Even if you have a scant one percent commonality with somebody at work, focus 100 percent of your conversation on that commonality when you can. Some people call that the "101 Percent Principle." Others call it being "as shrewd as a serpent."

11. Create "social

relaxation": That has nothing to do with offering your guest an easy chair. It has everything to do with creating an

environment where people are relaxed in your presence and feel comfortable talking to you. How do you do that? For the most part, through an amalgam of the practices listed here. Smile, compliment them, focus on their needs, and express a real interest in them. Ease into tougher discussions – warm-up to them – rather than being so direct. And always show them you are paying attention by making good eye contact, by nodding your head when you understand what they're saying, and by squarely facing them rather than sitting at an angle. Be genuine, transparent, and accepting – even loving – and you will almost always reap the same in return.

12. Talk about your own mistakes while raising theirs:

You might be a perfectionist, but you're not perfect. If you want to get somebody to listen to you about mistakes they've made, start by identifying your own. Believe me, they'll certainly listen to that! As you do, you'll make it safer for them to own up to their faults.

If you want somebody to listen to you about mistakes they've made, start by identifying your own

13. Don't assume you're

right: This assumption derails more conversations, starts more fights, and extinguishes more potentially great ideas than any other. I'm not always right. That's pretty obvious. But in a conversation or a debate, that somehow becomes less obvious to me. And then it creates problems.

When I assume that my opinion is right and that someone who disagrees with me is wrong, I've lost the opportunity to learn from that person and to generate a win-win solution. Moreover, I just seem to get more entrenched in my position. That's stubborn. That's folly. And that's pride. I should humbly accept that I don't have all the answers, and that someone – even someone who is criticizing me – might have a good point.

If you sometimes have this problem too, one remedy is to change your mind-set – to consider the dialogue a “learning conversation.” That is, conceptualize the conversation as an opportunity to learn something, rather than as a joust. Glean what you can from the other person. Maybe your colleague really does have some information you don't. Maybe your mother-in-law actually does have some wisdom she can pass along to

Don't assume you're right. Maybe your mother-in-law actually does have some wisdom she can pass along to you

you. Once we make that mental leap from pushing our point to engaging in a learning conversation, we reap self-improvement, better ideas, and better relationships. And we reduce the number of times that we'll have to use practice #14.

14. Apologize: Just say it. Go ahead. It won't kill you. Besides, you probably owe it to the person. Repeat after me: “I...was...wrong. I'm...sorry.” Tack on a “please forgive me” and you'll be liberated indeed. Beware, though. The resulting rush of peace may cause you to smile. You'll then look just like the person you're talking to.

15. Never, ever gossip – ever: Many people don't even realize they're doing it, bonding with someone by tarnishing someone else's reputation. That's gossip, plain and simple. If what you're about to say undermines the reputation of someone who's not in the conversation, think first about why you're really saying it. Then, in most cases, bite your lip.

16. Don't interrupt when someone is speaking: And never complete their thought for them either. These behaviors infuriate most people. If you have this problem, re-read practice #3 (active listening). Then, make a new screen saver for yourself that says “Shut up and listen!”

17. Never say “you're wrong”: Think about how you felt the last time someone said those exact words to you. Did it help to resolve the problem, or did it escalate it? These words rarely persuade, so excommunicate them from your vocabulary. And please, don't tell me I'm wrong about this.

18. Don't communicate when you're angry: Sometimes it's unavoidable, but often it's not. Most of us do an exceedingly poor job of making our point

clear when our brains are clouded by anger. And then we get even angrier – at ourselves for not communicating well – spiraling the problem. Just step away and count to thirty. Yeah, yeah – that approach is clichéd, but I'll tell you something: it works.

One quick corollary while we're on the topic: never send an email when you're mad.

People skills are like any other skills. The more you use them, the more adept you become

Same rule, different venue. If you send it, your diatribe will be on record for all posterity! So just say no to angry emails.

19. Make self-examination a habit: Am I using these skills daily? Where can I improve? What's working and what's not? As with any self-improvement process, you need to take inventory regularly regarding how you're doing. Reflect on your people skills often and then find ways to improve on your weaknesses.

20. Practice these practices: People skills are like any other skills. The more you use them, the more adept you become. So if you're serious about “perfecting” your people skills, there's no shortcut. Only practice will make perfect.

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How to Lose Friends and Infuriate People

A Manager's Guide

- 💡 When an employee is in your office to talk with you, don't hesitate to answer your phone.
- 💡 Take a week to respond to requests and queries from your employees. Heck, take two.
- 💡 Criticize people in public. Don't worry whether the criticism is direct or tacit. It'll have the same effect.
- 💡 Permit inequities and conflict to persist. Remember that you're too important to deal with employees' petty tiffs.
- 💡 Be stingy with your thank you's. After all, they just make people feel like you should be paying them more money.
- 💡 Pay people less than they're worth. Give raises based on factors they cannot influence or, for more fun, based on their performance relative to one another.
- 💡 Don't smile when you say hello to employees. Better yet, don't even say hello. A third option: if you must say hello, follow up with a "how ya doing?" and then look away before they answer.
- 💡 Ask people to do work outside of their job description.
- 💡 Interpret all suggestions for improvement as personal attacks on your leadership.
- 💡 Do your subordinates' jobs for them, since you can't trust them to do it right. If that's not attractive to you, though, dump your work on them instead.
- 💡 Give people the illusion of empowerment. Tell them they have control over a process, and hold them accountable for the results, but then micro-manage the process to meet your pre-determined ends.
- 💡 Take credit for the good work your people do (and blame your department's problems on their laziness and ineptitude).
- 💡 Hold lots of meetings and make sure they have an unfocused agenda. Allow the conversation to meander aimlessly, permitting one tangential comment to give license to the next. Never cut off a rambling participant and if anyone has a good idea, compel that person to assume responsibility for a new committee to pursue the idea. End each meeting with no action items.
- 💡 When scheduled to meet with an employee or with a group of employees, be late. Sometimes very late. Hey, they meeting can't start without you, right?
- 💡 Never, never forget that you are superior to your employees and never doubt that you are absolutely right. In doing so, you'll be guaranteed to skillfully apply all of the above secrets of success.

How To Work With People You Don't Like

"There's nothing you can do about it," Wendy responded with a knowing resignation. "A lot of people are just self-centered jerks. And most managers couldn't care less what's fair or what you need. It's always been that way around here. The best thing you can do is to just avoid people you don't like. Don't fight with them and don't be nice to them – believe me, it just makes them bigger jerks. Simply bite your tongue when you're with them and go about your business as if they weren't there. And when you go home, forget they exist. They're not worth it. Trust me, girl, for fifteen years it's worked for me."

Twenty-two year old Rachel pondered the advice. She loved her work but not her colleagues – at least not some of them. Wendy, an administrative assist, was a good friend. She always had a sympathetic ear and often, some helpful words of wisdom. This time, though, Rachel wasn't so sure that this qualified as "wisdom."

"I don't know, Wen," Rachel replied softly, almost inaudibly. She was nearing the end of her rope. "I wasn't raised that way. Avoiding problems might work for awhile, but it doesn't seem all that Christian to just bury things. Besides, I'm not real good at hiding how I feel. I hate some of these people. I've never felt this way in my

life, but some days, I really *hate* these people."

Rewind the tape twelve months. An energetic, freshly-minted college grad is interviewing for a reporter's job at The City News. She's

"I hate some of these people," Rachel confided. "I've never felt this way before, but some days, I really hate these people!"

excited about the opportunity – almost giddy – and she should be. This is the premier newspaper in the city and it would be a real coup for her to land such a position right out of school. Her 3.8 GPA, her editorship of the student newspaper, and the quality of her writing make Rachel a strong candidate. Being female, attractive and single probably doesn't hurt either.

Two weeks later, Rachel gets the job. Everyone is friendly and nurturing for the first few days. Rachel spends several hours in conversation with colleagues eager to share with her secrets of success in the business, as well as how things "really work" at City. Before too long, though, the honeymoon gives way to reality.

Although Rachel loves being out on the street – digging up stories, meeting people,

getting the real scoop for all the world to know – inside the office is a nightmare. Deadlines are pervasive but distractions are rampant. Among the distractions is the poison grapevine. Gossip thrives in this cliquish atmosphere: the news writers don't like the business writers. The sports writers harass the secretaries. The marketers are over-promising again. Managers have no clue what they're doing. Everyone's got someone to complain about, so it's tough to avoid getting sucked in to an acerbic conversation.

Over time Rachel becomes a popular target too, the little Christian girl who wants to make a difference. It's not so much her worldview that condemns her as it is her counter-cultural work ethic. Bursting with energy and a quest for excellence, Rachel is quickly labeled a "boss's pet" by the jaded journalists, a girl who ambitiously does whatever she can to impress. Soon rumors circulate about her extra-curricular dealings with higher-ups, her salacious attempts to get on the fast track to the editorial ranks. Patently untrue, Rachel is both hurt and embarrassed when she learns of the rumors.

Another distraction is Joan in the cubical adjacent to Rachel's. Loud, brazen, and a great writer, her cube is her castle, a little fiefdom where she feels at liberty to do whatever she pleases.

Apathetic to its effect on others, Joan keeps a radio on all day. She blabs incessantly on the phone with her friends, and she more than occasionally sneaks a cigarette, despite office policy. Concentration is hopeless while working next to Joan, and to make matters worse, Joan is unresponsive to Rachel's polite pleas for some consideration.

Rachel's boss Scott also sidetracks her daily. Technically terrific but managerially inept, the only thing worse than his leadership is his halitosis. Rachel dreads his twice-a-day stops at her cubical, stops where he tries to regale her with tales of his personal life while often reminding her to pay more attention to her deadlines. He never seems to get the irony.

Perhaps worse than being a distraction, though, Scott thinks he has a Ph.D. in everything, leaving a trail of arrogance wherever he goes. Typical of this disposition is Rachel's annual performance review meeting. When she tries to alert Scott to the problems in the workplace that are undermining productivity – the noise, the gossip, the chitchat, the office politics, and so on – Scott only gets angry and admonishes Rachel for lecturing him on how to do his job. If she “would just spend more time focusing on meeting deadlines and less time being a busybody,” she might have a chance of getting the raise she's requesting – next year. For now she gets the standard two percent.

So much for Scott's interview promise of Rachel achieving

market pay after the first year. But, of course, there's no talking to him about that either.

Finally, there was this afternoon's fiasco. At the weekly staff meeting, Scott queries the reporters: “We need to cover the school board race. Any of you want to brave that one?”

“How about Rachel for that assignment?” offers Patty, knowing that Rachel likes education issues.

“It would probably be better to have someone with more experience,” grouses Ralph, a veteran writer. “That's going to be a pretty high profile race this year.”

“Rachel has done a lot of writing,” Patty shoots back, “both before she came here and since she arrived.”

“Well, there's writing and then there's *writing*,” Ralph retorts sarcastically. “I would think that by now even *you* would be able to tell the difference!”

Ouch. In a toxic department of pretentious press writers, one-liners are ubiquitous, but this one actually turned heads.

“Don't you have a bottle of wine to get back to Ralph?” Maurice snaps, trying to boomerang the insults.

“Yeah, I'm splitting it with your wife tonight!” Ralph returns with a laugh, clearly amused by his impressive wit.

Two hours later, an exasperated, battle-weary Rachel now sits with her friend

Wendy, looking for answers and maybe some hope that things will get better. “I was confident that this would be a terrific job, a perfect place to learn the ropes of the business, to develop as a writer...” Rachel confides, her voice trailing off.

Wendy smiles wryly. “Confidence is what you have before you know the facts, honey. You'll figure it out over time.”

Rachel wants to “figure it out” now. When she first took this position, she had wanted to do great work and maybe even model Christ in a secular workplace. Now her goals are considerably more modest – like being able to sleep at night. She isn't going to quit, she knows that much. But she also doesn't want to just avoid the whole mess.

What Should Rachel Do?

Response from
Diane Wiater, Ph.D.,
Assistant Professor of
Management,
Regent University

Rachel could shrewdly seek advice from those who annoy her

I don't want to suggest that there is an easy four-step plan for “how to work with people you don't like.” There's not. Nevertheless, here are four ideas that Rachel might find to be helpful:

First, she could get in an accountability relationship

with a mature woman of faith. Rachel's life needs to be above reproach and she needs to be in relationship with Christian women who can walk with her through this molding. Her friend Wendy, though, is probably not the person for such accountability, given both Wendy's advice and her propensity for gossip.

Rachel could use her manager's daily visits to garner advice, and she could seek mentorship from Joan, her experienced but inconsiderate neighbor

Second, if she Rachel is not already doing so, I would recommend that she begin praying for her supervisor, her co-workers, and her place of employment. Over time, consistent, earnest prayer will open Rachel's heart to those around her.

Third, Rachel could use Scott's "drop-ins" to bless him. If she knows Scott is going to regularly stop by her desk twice a day, then Rachel should plan for the stops and consider how to use them. I'd suggest she prepare some questions for Scott – genuine questions where she needs his advice or input. "Scott, I'm really glad you stopped by," Rachel might say. "I've been wanting to ask your advice about the approach I'm taking in this story. I was thinking about going in the direction of ABC or XYZ. What might you suggest?" Or, "Scott, you suggested that I work on meeting my deadlines more consistently. How did you overcome this challenge

when you were a staff writer? Could you suggest one or two practical things for me to do over the next few weeks to improve in this area?"

Why would I recommend this approach to Rachel? Foremost, because it would honor Scott. Any time we ask advice from someone, it's a tribute to that person. And in the wake of this honoring, one of two things would likely happen: (1) Scott may begin to view the drop-ins as a time of genuinely advising/supporting Rachel, thereby making good use of her time while also building their relationship, or (2) if he has other motives for stopping by and they're being pre-empted by Rachel's persistent questions, he may cease his practice of interrupting her work. Either way, the current boondoggle is eradicated.

Fourth, as hard as it might be, Rachel could try to demonstrate kindness to Joan, her cubical neighbor. She needn't become Joan's friend; after all, people tend to be suspicious of those who try to befriend them suddenly and inexplicably. Instead, Rachel could simply start to find ways to be kind to Joan, to compliment her and to encourage her. Is this manipulative? Hardly. Since Joan is a "great writer," Rachel's compliments and her interest in Joan would be genuine.

Now, if this sounds like I'm suggesting that Rachel avoid conflict with Joan, that's exactly right. Rachel has tried the direct route to no avail. This alternate route might not only convince Joan to be a

more considerate neighbor, it could simultaneously afford Rachel some much-needed professional mentorship.

Response from Paul Metler, Ph.D., Associate Pastor, Heritage Fellowship, Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Rachel must choose excellence, prayer, and a fresh attitude

The work climate at the newspaper is much different from the climate that Rachel expected. She entered the workplace with a grand vision of a positive and fulfilling experience. Now, Rachel confronts a different atmosphere each day. Although Rachel's challenges are significant, I would encourage her to redeem her experience at the paper. In order to make the most of this opportunity, Rachel can implement the following three practices:

Practice 1: Continue to produce excellent work

Rachel cannot afford to allow her disappointment with the office atmosphere to result in a lowered standard for her writing. Her desire to develop as a writer and to be a Christian witness depends on a commitment to integrity. And that means that she must be true to her standards. Excellence over time is very persuasive. Even the most obnoxious people at the

newspaper may eventually respect her fine work.

Practice 2: Learn to lead from below

Leadership from the subordinate level can be very difficult, but rarely is it impossible. Rachel can influence her leaders by determined efforts to identify exactly what is expected of her and to document performance criteria. One aspect of maintaining integrity in her relationships includes clarifying how she can contribute to the success of the newspaper.

Practice 3: Seek a new perspective through prayer

Obedying Christ's admonition to pray for enemies is never easy. However, the results of such prayers are often surprising. Instead of an observable change in our enemies, God often begins changing the heart of the one who commits to prayer, culminating in a new perspective on the situation. Rachel should remain

cognizant of at least three Biblical truths as she endeavors to travel this challenging route to peace.

First, *great personal growth rarely comes in the smooth passages of life*. Rachel took the job in order to become better professionally, but she probably never considered that, from God's perspective,

Christian witness never shines brighter than in the midst of darkness. So City News may be a perfect place for Rachel to pursue both her professional and personal goals

becoming a better professional might require becoming a better person. Her job environment offers a valuable opportunity to develop her character through adversity.

Second, *Christian witness never shines brighter than in*

the midst of darkness. Rachel entered the workplace with a sincere desire to be a Christian witness. She certainly has that opportunity. But she's not seeing clearly. If she were surrounded by "nice" Christian people, there would be less chance for her light to shine. By contrast, City News is a perfect place to achieve her witnessing goals.

Third, Rachel should remember that *we cannot control our circumstances, but we can control our response*. This may be obvious, but it's often forgotten. In fact, we could go so far as to say that this is the real key to Rachel's day-to-day effective response. Rachel can allow herself to be a victim of her circumstances or she can make the daily choice to select a humble and forgiving attitude toward these people. That doesn't mean that she should become the company doormat, but it does entail consciously and steadfastly selecting the attitude of Christ (Phil. 2:5) whenever she gets stepped on.

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Godly Guidance for Difficult Conversations

I. Pray for Inner Peace

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”
(Philippians 4:6)

II. Don't Assume Their Motivation

“The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out”
(Proverbs 20:5)

III. Deal with the Problem Quickly

“Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry”
(Ephesians 4:26)

IV. Deal with the Problem Privately

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you”
(Matthew 18:15)

V. Listen Before Answering

“Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry”
(James 1:19)

VI. Tame Your Tongue

“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing”
(Proverbs 12:18)

VII. Ignore Petty Insults

“A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult”
(Proverbs 12:16)

VIII. Seek a Win-Win Solution

“Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others”
(Philippians 2:4)

IX. Try Forgiveness

“Forgive, and you will be forgiven”
(Luke 6:37)

X. Repay Evil with Good

“Bless those who persecute you...overcome evil with good”
(Romans 12:14, 21)

A Better Way To Think About Prayer

by David Steindl-Rast

May we presume that everyone knows what prayer is? From one point of view, the answer is “yes.” Every human being knows prayer from experience. Have we not all experienced moments in which our thirsting heart found itself with surprise drinking at the fountain of meaning? Much of our life may be a wandering in desert lands, but we do find springs of water. If what is called “God” means, in the language of experience, the ultimate Source of Meaning, then those moments that quench the thirst of the heart are moments of prayer. They are moments when we communicate with God, and that is, after all, the essence of prayer.

But do we recognize these meaningful moments as prayer? Here, the answer is often “no.” And under this aspect we cannot presume that everyone knows what prayer is. It happens that people who are in the habit of saying prayers at certain set times have their moments of genuine prayer precisely at times when they are not saying prayers. In fact, they may not even recognize their most prayerful moments as prayer. Others who never say formal prayers are nourished by deep moments of prayerfulness. Yet, they would be surprised to know that they are praying at all.

Suppose, for example, you are reciting Psalms. If all goes well, this may be a truly

prayerful experience. But all doesn’t always go well. While reciting Psalms you may experience nothing but a struggle against distractions. Half an hour later you are watering your African violets. Now, suddenly the prayerfulness that never came

For some of us, saying prayers wholeheartedly may be the crowning achievement after we have learned to make every other activity prayer

during the prayers overwhelms you. You come alive from within. Your heart expands and embraces those velvet leaves, those blossoms looking up at you. The watering and the drinking become a give-and-take so intimate that you cannot separate the pouring of the water from the roots receiving it, the flower’s giving of joy from your drinking it in. And in a rush of gratefulness your heart celebrates this belonging together. As long as this lasts, everything has meaning, everything makes sense. You are communicating with your full self, with all there is, with God. Which was the real prayer, the Psalms or the watering of your violets?

Sooner or later we discover that prayers are not always prayer. This is a pity. But the other half of that insight is that prayer often happens without any prayers. And that should cheer us up. In fact, it is

absolutely necessary to distinguish prayer from prayers. At least if we want to do what Scripture tells us and “pray continually” (Luke 18:1), we must distinguish praying from saying prayers. Otherwise, to pray continually would mean saying prayers uninterruptedly day and night. We need hardly attempt this to realize that it would not get us very far. If, on the other hand, prayer is simply communication with God, it can go on continually. In peak moments of awareness this communication will be more intense, of course. At other times it will be low key. But there is no reason why we should not be able to communicate with God in and through everything we do or suffer and so “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17).

Where should we start? I can only suggest that we start where we are, that we begin with what comes easiest. Why not start by surveying your typical day? What is it that you tend to tackle with spontaneous mindfulness, so that without effort your whole heart is in it? Maybe it’s that first cup of coffee in the morning, the way it warms you and wakes you, or taking your dog for a walk, or giving a little child a piggyback ride. Your heart is in it and so you find meaning in it – not a meaning you could spell out in words, but meaning in which you can rest. These are moments of intense prayerfulness, though we

might never have thought of them as prayer. They show us the close connection between praying and playing. These moments when our heart finds ever so briefly rest in God are samples that give us a taste of what prayer is meant to be. If we could maintain this inner attitude, our whole life would become prayer.

Granted, it is not easy to maintain the mindfulness, gratefulness, prayerfulness we experience in those wholehearted moments. But at least we know what we are aiming to maintain. It is like learning to balance a pencil on the tip of a finger. Talking about it is not much help. But when we for once have managed to do it, we know at least that we can do it, and how it is done. The rest is a matter of practice, of doing it over and over again, till it becomes second nature. Applied to prayer, this might

mean eating and drinking every mouthful as mindfully as we drink that first cup of coffee. Soon we discover that eating and drinking can be prayer. Indeed, a meal ought to be a prayer. If we are to “pray without ceasing,” how could we stop praying while we eat and drink?

This approach has yet another advantage. It allows us to speak about prayer without using religious jargon. If we said “prayer,” someone might think we mean an activity to be added to our daily tasks. Right away we’d be back in the confusion between prayer and prayers. But if we call it mindfulness or wholehearted living, it is easier to recognize prayer as an attitude that should characterize all our activities. The more we come alive and awake, the more everything we do becomes prayer. Some people find it easier to eat and drink

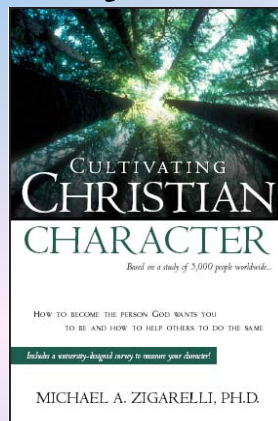
prayerfully – mindfully – than to say their prayers prayerfully. Should this surprise anyone? Why assume that our prayer life starts with saying prayers? If prayerfulness is our highest degree of aliveness, the starting point might be whenever we spontaneously come alive. Does it seem easier to recite a Psalm with recollection than to eat or drink or walk or hug with that same wonderment and concentration? It may well be the other way around. For some of us, saying prayers wholeheartedly may be the crowning achievement after we have learned to make every other activity prayer.

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BOOKSHELF

Executive Influence: Impacting Your

Workplace for Christ

By Christopher Crane and
Mike Hamel (NavPress,
2003)

Corporate Giants: Personal Stories of Faith and Finance

By Robert Darden and P.J.
Richardson (Revell, 2002)



You've probably read a few books by Christian CEOs, intriguing books proffering 200 pages about how the faith is implemented in an organization. They're certainly worthwhile reads. But between the covers of *Executive Influence*, we get fifteen of these books simultaneously, parsimoniously packaged into a mere 160 pages. It's a great approach for busy business readers.

The authors – a successful entrepreneur and a former pastor – personally interviewed fifteen top executives and then boil down each interview to nine or ten pages of essentials. Written better than most books in this genre, you'll hear from folks you might recognize as

Christian business people – people like Bill Pollard and John Beckett – and from several others that you probably don't know – people like Anne Beiler, founder of Auntie Anne's Pretzels, and Dennis Bakke, CEO of energy giant AES. Refreshingly, each of the interviews is worth reading and each provides valuable inspiration.

Indeed, the book as a whole turns out to be more inspirational than practical. Although there are some good ideas for implementing the faith in business sprinkled throughout the volume, there are better books out there for that purpose. Instead, *Executive Influence* aims to renew our resolve to live the faith in business with unabashed authenticity by demonstrating that Christian values and financial performance can be compatible.

That said, the authors do attempt to feed readers' hunger for practical tips with a brief section at the end of each chapter called "Other Voices." These are essentially some best and worst practices as told by Christian managers who have little name recognition but impressive, high-level titles. Most if not all of these "Other Voices" are worth hearing and heeding.

Executive Influence may remind you of Laura Nash's 1994 classic, *Believers in Business*, which was based on interviews with 75 evangelical CEOs. But whereas Nash assimilated and

organized her interviews into seven "tensions" with which Christian executives wrestle, Crane and Hamel eschew assimilation in *Executive Influence*, simply describing one executive at a time, virtually ignoring connections across interviews. Accordingly, this book makes a nice complement to Nash's work and similar empirically-based books.

Methodologically similar, but structurally different, *Corporate Giants* is even longer on compartmentalization of the executive interviews. Here, the authors serve up 300 pages of straight Q-and-A with thirty-five top executives and business owners, most in the for-profit world and all who have clearly succeeded by worldly standards. Questions range from mundane warm-up queries like *can you give us a short capsule of your business career?* to more provocative questions about the nature of the interviewee's spiritual journey and how faith informs his or her management style. There is also the pervasive question posed to most of the executives – *what advice do you have for young Christian managers?* – a question that, for some, might by itself be worth the hefty twenty dollar price tag.

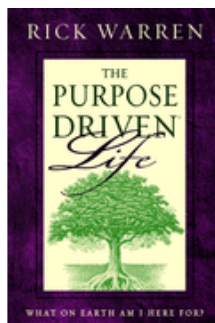
The virtue of this pitch-and-catch approach is that the reader can quickly peruse the boldfaced questions and then skim past information and issues with which he or she might not be interested, cherry picking at will. If you want to

read the whole interview and get a fuller picture of the interviewee (and you will for many of these people), it's there for the taking. But *Corporate Giants* is not something that most readers would likely read cover-to-cover. It's purely a compilation of executive interviews, making it too laborious to read for the typical consumer of business books.

That's a shame because despite the structure, *Corporate Giants* offers a treasure chest of wisdom from the trenches, treasures that have been buried for far too long, but treasures that will remain buried for all but the most patient readers.

Reviewed by Michael Zigarelli. Michael is the editor of the Regent Business Review. You can reach him at michzig@regent.edu

**The Purpose Drive Life:
What On Earth Am I Here
For?** by Rick Warren
(Zondervan, 2002)



If it's not there already, *The Purpose Driven Life* should be in your book collection. Here, Rick Warren tackles the question we've all asked at one time or another: *What on earth am I here for?* Though he offers no specific cookie-cutter answer, after you finish this

book, you'll likely have a clearer idea of God's purpose for your life.

That said, if you're looking for a quick read, this book is not for you. Regardless your reading acumen, it'll take you forty days to read. That's because it's a forty chapter book to be digested in one-chapter-a-day doses. Warren shows the significance of forty days in the Bible, explaining that often, when God wanted to prepare someone for His purposes, He took forty days. At the end of each day, you'll have a point to ponder, a verse to remember, and a question to consider. And this isn't just hackneyed filler material: Warren asks powerful questions that require us to dig deep into thought and prayer, asking God for guidance and direction.

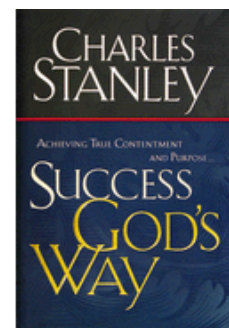
Regarding the *What on earth am I here for?* question, rest assured that Warren does not leave us cast adrift in an ark or wandering alone in the desert for these forty days. There are five primary purposes for our lives, according to Warren: (1) we are planned for God's pleasure, (2) we are formed for God's family, (3) we are created to become like Christ, (4) we are to be shaped for serving God, and (5) we are made for a mission. Structuring the book around these five purposes, Warren offers both a usable model for pursuing purpose and challenging targets for the Christian seeking to do God's will.

The Purpose Driven Life is an excellent book that will benefit even the most mature believer.

Read it and consider giving it to people you care about. Indeed, it may begin to change your life and theirs.

Reviewed by Ryan Eddy. Ryan is an MBA student at the Regent Graduate School of Business. You can reach him at ryanedd@regent.edu

Success God's Way
by Charles Stanley (Thomas Nelson, 2000)



What Christian CEO, entrepreneur, or other businessperson hasn't wondered during their trek up the ladder whether "success" and "God" were rungs on that same ladder? Are God's will and success compatible, or must we choose between the two? According to Dr. Charles Stanley, longtime pastor of the 14,000-member First Baptist Church of Atlanta, the answer depends on your definition of "success." If it's success in God's eyes, no choice is necessary. In fact, if your goals are godly goals, then, says Stanley, "God not only desires your success – He is committed to it."

Unpacking that point further, Stanley teaches that a godly goal "is one that transcends

time into eternity,” whereas a worldly goal is more shortsighted and/or materialistic, confined to your life here on earth. The former stores up treasures in heaven; the latter will limit your achievements and rewards to your time on earth.

But does that mean a person pursuing success in God’s eyes cannot attain monetary wealth or prominence? A resounding “no!” responds Stanley, but clearly, wealth and reputation cannot be primary objectives. Rather, they are to be conceived as a natural outgrowth of faithfulness – blessings bestowed by God as a result of obedience to His commandments. Such blessings are not guaranteed, mind you, but God does offer this guarantee to those who persevere: the priceless rewards of inner peace, true contentment, and everlasting joy.

As one would expect, Stanley serves up plenty of biblical support to demonstrate God’s deep desire and commitment to help us succeed. But Stanley also offers some practical equipping of his own, devoting chapters to using time wisely, overcoming roadblocks to success, conquering negative attitudes, and finishing the race. Indeed, as you reach the finish line of this book, you will be in a better starting place for your own race for success God’s way.

Reviewed by Debby Eddy. Debby is a Christian businesswoman, a freelance writer, and a frequent speaker at women’s retreats. You can reach Debby at debbyeddy@hotmail.com

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