



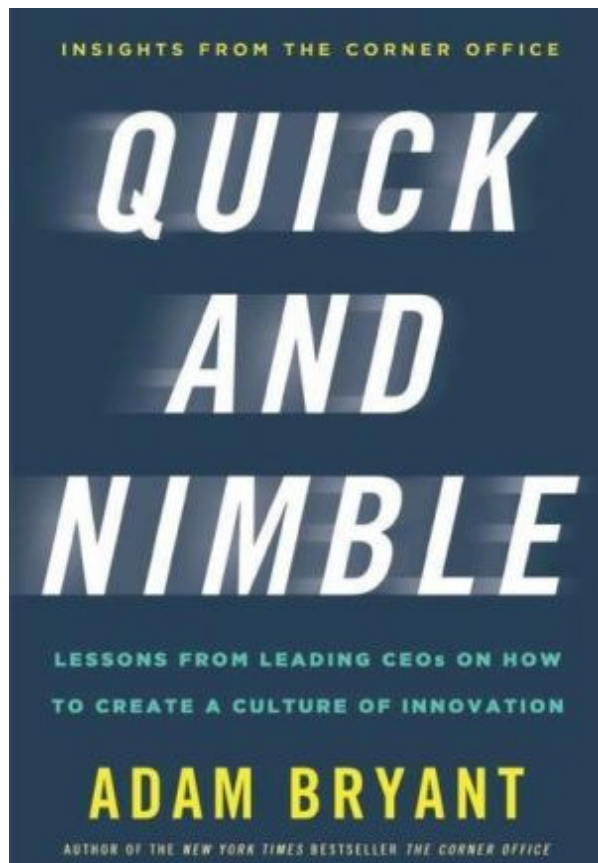
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Combines 'overarching philosophy, nuts-and-bolts-advice'

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"Quick and Nimble: Lessons from Leading CEOs on How to Create a Culture of Innovation," by Adam Bryant. New York: Times Books (Henry Holt and Co.), 2014, 288 pages, \$26 (cloth).



"One of the greatest challenges for leaders is to strike the right balance in creating a sense of urgency and change," Adam Bryant writes in "Quick and Nimble: Lessons from Leading CEOs on How to Create a Culture of Innovation," the second book based on his weekly column in The New York Times.

What distinguishes Bryant's book from every other management tome in the business section is the authority represented by the vicarious contributors to the project. "Quick and Nimble" is the result of Bryant's interviews with more than 200 highly successful CEOs across a wide range of organizations.

This lends an air of credibility to the insights and recommendations offered that is often missing from similar volumes. Anyone can write a "business book" outlining the proverbial recipe for success in a global economy. Few can make such a compelling case their suggested strategies actually work.

"Too much and too fast, and people will be left behind," the author writes. "Too slow, and the competition will jump out front. Many leaders talked about the importance of consistency, smoothing out the highs and lows, setting the right pace for change."

"Quick and Nimble" is comprised of 16 chapters arranged in two major sections. In "Part One: Setting the Foundation," Bryant explains what variables have to be in place if a company has any chance of rising above the fray to become an industry leader. This is followed by "Part Two: Taking Leadership to the Next Level," which offers a realistic plan for achieving extraordinary results. In both cases, leadership constitutes the key ingredient.

Bryant presents the perfect combination of overarching philosophy and nuts-and-bolts advice. He recognizes the undeniable importance of having a vision; indeed, this is a key element in the arsenal of any effective leader. But rather than confine the conversation to this sometimes abstract realm, the author shows clearly and concisely how to translate the mission into reality on the front lines. In

order to flourish in an increasingly competitive world, leaders must find a way to marshal the creativity and resourcefulness of the entire workforce.

I found several chapters to be particularly instructive. “Adult Conversations” resonated with me for a variety of reasons. Here Bryant discusses the importance of being honest: “If leaders want their managers and employees to be frank with one another, they have to set an example themselves. Many CEOs say it is a simple test for effective leaders: Can you look someone in the eye and give them tough feedback?”

“David Rock of the NeuroLeadership Institute says that because people naturally feel threatened by critical feedback, another strategy that can work in many situations is to have people provide their own feedback,” Bryant writes. “That makes them feel more in control, and elevates their status in their own mind, rather than feeling their status has been diminished by their superior.”

“Knocking Down Silos” was another chapter I found especially compelling. In this thoughtful and persuasive reflection, Bryant describes a rather common phenomenon that can be very detrimental to larger organizations: “As companies grow, tribal behavior inevitably kicks in, and people align themselves in smaller groups. They start talking about ‘us,’ meaning their part of the organization, and ‘them,’ meaning other groups within the company.” He then goes on to describe how several CEOs have approached the problem, utilizing an assortment of tools ranging from the creation of incentives to assigned seating.

Bryant has held a number of editorial positions at The New York Times. He currently authors the paper’s popular “Corner Office” column. He previously was a senior editor with Newsweek. This is his second book, the first being “The Corner Office: Indispensable and Unexpected Lessons from CEOs on How to Lead and Succeed,” which spent several weeks on the best-seller list. Bryant also teaches a course on leadership at Columbia University and was the lead editor for the Pulitzer Prize-winning series, “Driven to Distraction,” which dealt with the dangers of cellphone use while driving.

My favorite chapter was undoubtedly “The Hazards of E-mail.” As I was reading this cautionary primer on the dangers of electronic communication, I found myself nodding in agreement on almost every page: “To be sure, e-mail has its place. It is great for simple, transactional messages. The problem starts when something is at stake, like a person’s ego, or when there’s even the slightest possibility that the intent or tone can be misread.”

My immediate reaction was “how true.” Anyone who uses email on a regular basis can instantly relate to the challenges inherent to the medium. As Bryant correctly asserts, prudent leaders always prefer face-to-face communication or a telephone conversation when the stakes are high and the consequences of inaccuracy are potentially devastating.

“My goal in writing this book has been to help leaders reduce the distracting noise in their organizations so that they can focus on building a high-performing culture,” Bryant notes near the end of the book. After sifting through the tangible, concrete, down-to-earth advice offered by the CEOs he interviewed for “Quick and Nimble,” I can only conclude the author achieved what he set out to do.

Perhaps Jim Collins, celebrated author of “Good to Great” and “How the Mighty Fall,” sums it up best: “Reading this book is like joining a dinner table with some of the best leaders in America, listening in as a master conversationalist leads a spirited discussion you cannot forget.” I could not have said it better. I highly recommend this book.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.