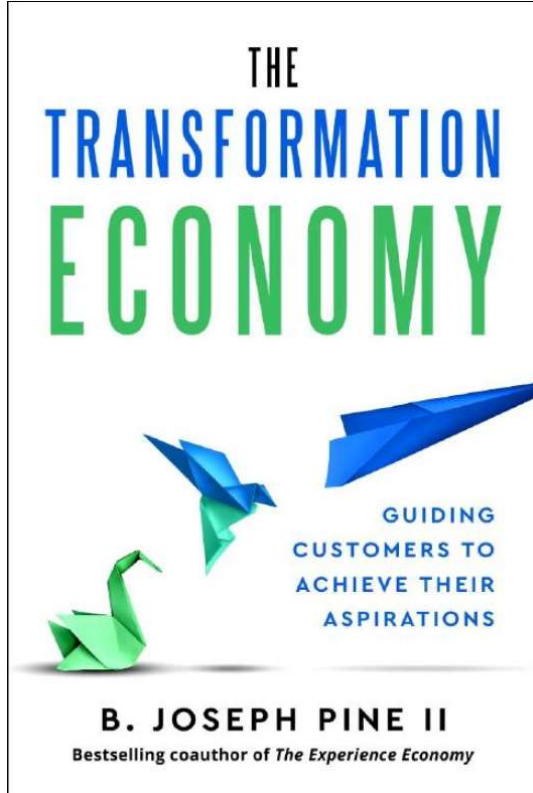


‘Transformation Economy’ inspires readers to see world

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“*The Transformation Economy: Guiding Customers to Achieve Their Aspirations,*” by B. Joseph Pine II. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2026. 272 pages, \$32.00 (hardback).



“You’re leaving value on the table,” B. Joseph Pine II asserts boldly at the onset of “*The Transformation Economy: Guiding Customers to Achieve Their Aspirations,*” his latest attempt to spur the business community to take advantage of missed opportunities. “Whatever you sell to your customers today, I guarantee you they want more. I’m not talking about being better, faster, and cheaper, or delivering higher quality or greater convenience. It’s not about having more features and benefits, more engagement and sensory delights.”

“All those things, and everything else you do for customers, are not enough,” he continues. “People don’t buy what you sell because they value your offerings in and of themselves. The offerings are means, when what your customers really want are ends. The ends they desire are to have a better life or a better business. To be healthier, wealthier, wiser. To have meaning and purpose. To not just buy, but to become who they want to become. To not just have, but to be who they are meant to be. To not just go through life, but to flourish.”

Honestly, Pine had me on this one from literally the first few sentences. So much of what he says in this exquisite little primer on how to be more successful in today’s ever-evolving economic landscape rings true to my own personal quest for satisfaction and fulfillment on a deeper level. And although “*The Transformation Economy*” is not a self-help book, the parallels to that genre are unmistakable. In many ways, Pine is bridging the gap between those two categories by providing an intrinsic connection that is often missing in similar efforts.

Consider the following from “*Shifting from Experiences to Transformations,*” the fourth chapter and one I found especially compelling: “To be memorable, you must be engaging, reaching inside of people and creating the experience within them. Commodities, goods and services exist outside of us, while experiences happen inside of us, which is what makes them inherently personal. When people think of being engaged, generally they think only of emotional engagement – triggering happiness, sparking surprise, building suspense, and so forth.”

“But as mentioned previously, you can engage people not only emotionally but physically, intellectually, and spiritually. All four contribute to human flourishing, so when designing experiences never confine yourself to simply designing for emotions. Think of such traditional examples as sporting events, concerts, plays, and museums. Or more recent varieties, including movies, TV and radio programs, user-generated videos, and digital games. Entirely new genres pop up every year, such as the recent innovations of escape rooms, game cafes, esports centers, axe-throwing venues, immersive art exhibits, competitive socializing nights, and on and on the list could go. Each of these offers something engagingly memorable.”

Structurally, “The Transformation Economy” consists of a “Preparation,” followed by seven relatively succinct yet dynamic chapters that explore virtually every aspect of the transformation process. Like everything else Pine is associated with, the manuscript is extensively researched with 19 pages of source notes that provide the reader with a mechanism for following up on any assertions or contentions they may want to investigate in more depth and detail. The prose is fluid and unassuming, and those with rudimentary exposure to the concepts and applications at the core of his thesis will be able to glean as much from the narrative as those with a more extensive background in the subject matter under consideration.

A Senior Fellow at the European Centre for the Experience Economy (which he cofounded), Pine is a lecturer in the D’Amore-McKim School of Business at Northeastern University, as well as the co-founder of Strategic Horizons LLP. He has also taught at Penn State, Duke Corporate Education, the University of Minnesota, UCLA’s Anderson Graduate School of Management, and the Harvard School of Design. His previous books include “Infinite Possibility: Creating Customer Value on the Digital Frontier,” with Kim Korn, and “Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want,” with James H. Gilmore. His first book, the award-winning “Mass Customization: The New Frontier in Business Competition,” was published in 1993.

One feature of Pine’s strategy in developing his ideas involves the dualistic way he intertwines the past, present, and the future when presenting evidence for his recommendations and suggestions. He simultaneously looks at things from both the perspective of the provider and the user. This strengthens the credibility of the book immensely and helps the reader to understand more definitely what they should do – and why they should do it. One aspect of this approach encompasses the notion of uncertainty and how it must be integrated into assessing the efficacy of virtually every transaction. Pine specifically addresses this in “Guiding Transformations,” the seventh chapter:

“As with all economic offerings, customers often don’t know what they want, and even when they do, they can’t always articulate it. You need to draw it out of them, helping to uncover vaguely known desires or discover previously unknown aspirations. That requires a design tool that guides people in figuring out what they truly want – preferably visually, and ideally viscerally – and guides you in determining what specific, customized transformation offering will enable them to achieve their aspirations.”

“While artificial intelligence promises to revolutionize them, design tools don’t have to be rocket science. Travel design company Explorer X, the company that does so very well with encapsulation, uses a simple, three-minute “Your Journey Begins Now” form and then schedules a video call to discuss potential explorers’ travel dreams. Craig Towle, executive partner at broker-dealer J.W. Cole Financial, teaches the company’s independent financial professionals to use readily available software for creating estate plans and bringing together all financial information into one place for families, but also designed a custom card game to make a timeline for families to see if they are investing their time as wisely as their finances. He told me that time is ‘one of the secrets to a life transformation, where personal, deep, and hopefully fun tools can be used to push people toward a genuinely better life.’”

Tony Robbins, the New York Times bestselling author and one of the world’s leading life and business strategists, puts it this way, “The greatest gift you can give someone is to help them reach their true potential. Pine shows how to do exactly that — all while building a business that thrives. Read it. Apply it. Transform lives, including your own.”

After making my way through “The Transformation Economy,” I could not agree more. Very few books inspire me to see the world, and my role in it, in a slightly more nuanced way than I have grown accustomed to over the decades. But his one falls into that category. My sense is that my experience is probably not unique. Highly recommended.

—Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, WKU.