

'Ownership Thinking' focuses on accepting personal responsibility

"It would never occur to a person of self-esteem and independent judgment that one's 'identity' is a thing to be gained from or determined by others." — Ayn Rand, "Capitalism, The Unknown Ideal."

This quote concisely captures the sentiment inherently embedded in "Ownership Thinking: How to End Entitlement and Create a Culture of Accountability, Purpose, and Profit," the new book by Brad Hams. It is obvious that Hams is a dedicated follower of Ms. Rand; her influence on his thinking is evident on virtually every page.

"There are people in the United States who need help, and some of them are unable to help themselves," Hams explains.

"I do believe it is our obligation to help these people; however, there really are not that many people in this condition. The vast majority of people who are struggling have the capacity to help themselves."

Hams is founder and president of Ownership Thinking, a consulting company that specializes in changing organizational culture. At one time he was a vice president for Mrs. Fields Cookies. His current clients include Alcoa, Hewlett Packard, MediaOne and Monroe Publishing. Hams has a master's degree in organizational development and human resources from the University of San Francisco and is an adjunct professor with the University of Phoenix.

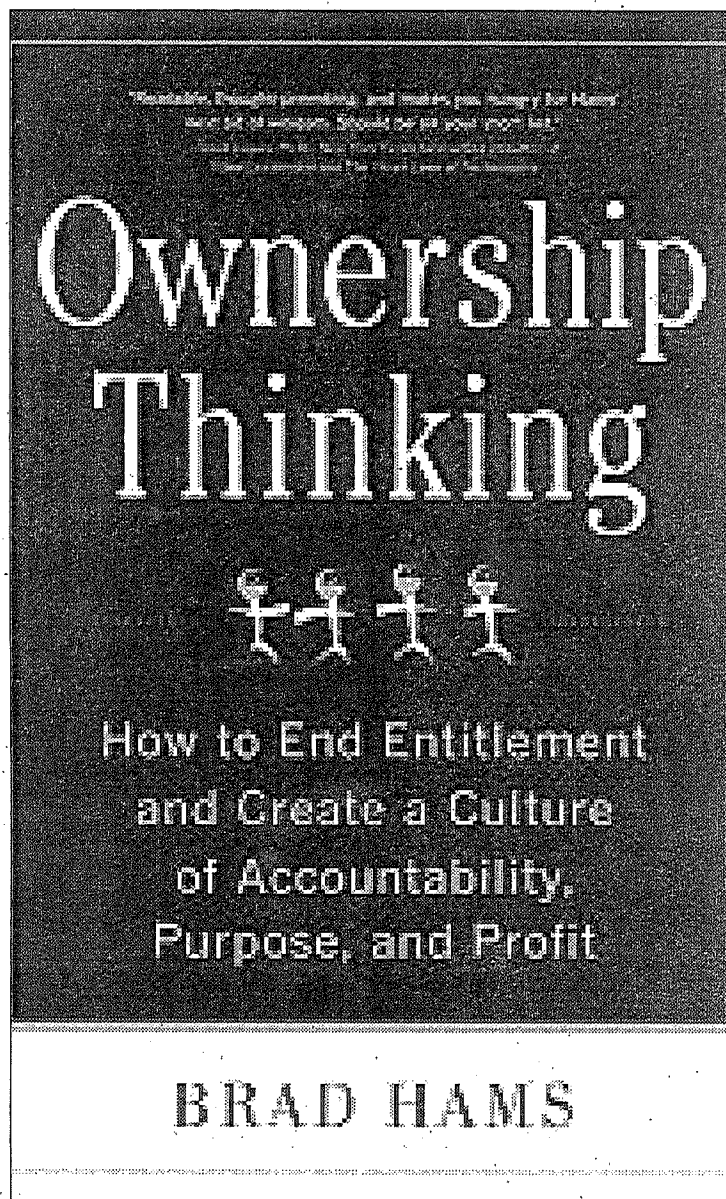
"Ownership Thinking" consists of seven relatively straightforward chapters that can be easily digested by anyone possessing even a rudimentary understating of basic human nature.

An especially appealing feature of the volume is the inclusion of a "key concepts" section at the conclusion of each chapter. Here the author summarizes the main points he has made in the preceding section, which helps the reader to see more clearly the case he is building.

Hams is definitely not an "academic." The book is not extensively researched in the traditional sense; the concepts and applications at the core of the author's thesis seem to be more rooted in ideology than empirical evidence. And although the lack of any substantive references to other books, articles or research studies is noticeable, the author does draw extensively from his real-world experience as a consultant. Examples and case studies from the companies he has worked with in the past are scattered liberally throughout the book. The first-hand accounts of how his ideas have proven beneficial to a wide range of organizations can be very persuasive.

Although I do not personally agree with a lot of what Hams advocates, I certainly understand the appeal of his book to those who see themselves as being almost totally responsible for what they manage to achieve in life.

But instead of just complaining about the "culture of entitlement" that he sees as slowly overtaking our way of life, Hams at least offers concrete recommendations for reversing this undesirable trend and setting us on what he



"Ownership Thinking: How to End Entitlement and Create a Culture of Accountability, Purpose, and Profit" by Brad Hams. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012. 242 pages, \$28.

envision as a more appropriate course.

"Our obligation is not to focus on the short-term fix but rather to teach people how to become self-reliant," Hams contends.

"And when they become self-reliant, it then becomes their obligation to teach others the same. This is a truly noble form of altruism."

Again, one of the aspects of the book I do like is the author's proactive orientation toward his subject matter. He ventures beyond vague generalizations about the changes he thinks are necessary for companies to thrive in the coming decades. For example, in Chapter Two, "How to Create Incentive Plans That Work," Hams is very specific in describing how to develop and implement policies that serve the best interests of the company as well as the individual employee. Well-designed incentive plans, he argues, are understandable, relatively challenging, self-funding, have perceived value, involve shared targets and tend to align behaviors with business goals. Poorly-designed plans, on the other hand, tend to create fiefdoms, involve unrealistic or unattainable objectives, have little or no perceived value to employees, do not define the connection between actions and rewards, and seem to evolve in an almost random fashion.

I found Chapter Seven, "Ownership Thinking for the Long Term," to be particularly intriguing. In this section, Hams lays out a plan for sustaining a "culture of earning" that will extend beyond the initial enthusiasm that new initiatives typically generate.

The author's ultimate mission is to bring our society back to what he considers "reality." Within this view is the over-arching notion of tying self-reliance to the collective good — a transformation that has to begin, according to Hams, within the scope of commerce. Economics drives everything.

"Adults don't argue with reality," Hams writes. "As of this writing, our country is on the tail end of a significant downturn in the economy, which companies have been dealing with for a few years. However, regardless of the economic conditions (or any other circumstances, for that matter), some companies will win, and some companies will lose."

"The winning companies (and people) will be those that accept reality for what it is and make the decisions and take the actions that will get them through successfully," he continues.

"And as adults, they know that the short-term pain will be rewarded in the long run."

Despite its various shortcomings, I did find "Ownership Thinking" to be a good read. I believe it is important to consider all sides of an issue before coming to any definitive conclusions. In the very least, Hams presents a sincere and thought-provoking treatise on the virtues of taking personal responsibility in a world that increasingly sees the less fortunate as victims unable to contribute to their own well-being. If only it were that simple.

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