

Monthly Book Reviews for Financial Executives Networking Group (FENG) By Dawn L. Little, Holistic Business Strategist

YOU'RE IN CHARGE—NOW WHAT? THE 8-POINT PLAN by Thomas J. Neff and James M. Citrin. Published in 2005 by Crown Business, a division of Random House, Inc.

Commentary: You may be deceived by the title of this one. It's not just for new managers. Those who are changing departments, functions, levels, organizations, fields or industries can all benefit. In other words, pretty much all of us.

The authors take readers through their 8-point plan to great performance in the first 100 days. Then they teach how to maintain and build on that momentum during the next 100 days and beyond. Good common sense strategies that we are all guilty of leaving in the ditch from time to time.

Chapters include entertaining first-hand stories from senior executives of current or former top-tier companies including GE, Reader's Digest, AOL, and yes, even the venerable IBM.

Recommendation: Must read if you are transitioning as described above. But be prepared to dig into the detail.

"Hi Dawn, I just read your review of YOU'RE IN CHARGE-NOW WHAT? THE 8-POINT PLAN by Thomas J. Neff and James M. Citrin. I think I will read the book you recommended to help me through my next transition."

- *Melanie Michaud, FENG Hartford, CT/Springfield, MA FENG*

“Never Compete With Cows”

ASK THE HEADHUNTER, Reinventing the interview to win the job
by Nick A. Corcodilos; published by the Penguin Group, 1997.

Just as the title suggests, Mr. Corcodilos' philosophy is amply demonstrated throughout his book. He tells you step by step, how NOT to blend in with the rest of humanity. My favorite part is chapter 5, the subject of this review. A portion is excerpted below.

The author compares the vast majority of job seekers with a herd of cows. He agrees with an associate who has said that he believes 80 percent of all people are cows: “If you watch cows in a field, you will notice that they don’t move around much. They all look and act pretty much alike. They stand around eating grass. Nothing really motivates them. ... You can throw rocks at them and they don’t seem to care. You can push them and they’ll move wherever you want them to go. At night you can even tip them over while they’re sleeping. They lead boring, uneventful lives because they are boring, unconcerned animals.”

“Eighty percent of people act like cows. They stand around watching the world go by. Like all the other cows, they spend their lives mindlessly following the rules. And when they don’t know what rules pertain to a particular situation, they stand around and do nothing. When they move, they move as part of the herd.”

“Most cows sit in interviews and wait to be told what to do. They wait to be addressed, or they say nothing. They are there for one reason – to be milked for information about their past. ... When the interview is over, they wait to be herded out the door.”

“Cows all have resumes in one of the popular formats. They all wear the right kind of spots. They all study the same interview questions and answers. ...

“If you act like a cow during your interview, ... the job will go to a better candidate. Rise above cow-ness. Be the best job candidate. Get down to business and start solving problems, right there in the interview. Know exactly what you’re there for and make sure the employer knows it, too. Do the job. ...”

Recommendation:

Despite being published in 1997, this is a refreshing alternative to other tomes that suggest mindlessly memorizing rules about job creation. **ASK THE HEADHUNTER** is one of my favorites, high on the list of recommended reads. Refuse to follow the herd. Be part of the 20% who rise above cow-ness!

“Thanks for your review of the interviewing book. This is a valuable service ...”

- *John Shrawder, Princeton, NJ Chapter*

“Dawn, I found your review helpful and have added the book to my list to check out ... Thanks for taking the time to inform us.”

- *Doug Schaeffer Princeton; NJ and Philadelphia; Montgomery/Bucks, PA Chapters*

“Hi Dawn, very good article. I like the way it challenges the status quo. I've never thought about the interview process in the way you posed it. Thanks for sharing.”

- *Ed Kulinski, Long Island, NY Chapter*

BRAG! THE ART OF TOOTING YOUR OWN HORN WITHOUT BLOWING IT by Peggy Klaus, published by Warner Business Books, 2003.

As Matt and Doug and Norm and other FENG members continually remind us in the newsletters, the job search is no time to hide our lights under a bushel. We need to make ourselves shine, to stand out, to draw attention to ourselves – in a good way, of course. To help us do that, Peggy Klaus has written the book that is the subject of tonight’s review (BRAG! for short).

Bragging is an art that can be learned to turn each of us into skillful self-promoters. Do you think modesty is going to get you that next dazzling position? Do you feel your work – past or present - will do all the talking for you? Do you believe others will take up your cause and do your bragging for you? The answers to these are no, no and wrong! The author explodes these and other myths about bragging in the first part of her book. The remainder of BRAG! teaches you how to toot your own horn “in a way that’s sincere, feels comfortable, and is appealing to those you’re trying to impress.”

Here is a sampling of the author’s 12 Tooting Tips for Bragging:

- Be your best, authentic self.
- Keep it short and simple.
- Talk with me, not at me.
- Have a sense of humor.
- Use it all: your eyes, ears, head and heart.

A job search opportunity is your moment to sparkle in the sun. It’s your 15+ minutes of fame, when you can tell the world what a great person you are, what you have to offer, how you’re going to offer it, and why others should want you to offer it. A bonus comes from the fact that whatever you learn about bragging in your professional life can only add to the spice and flavor of your personal life, and vice versa.

This book is small and easy to read, less than 200 pages in paperback. If you’re not real comfortable with whom you are within yourself, and when presented to the world, this book is for you. If you’d like to check out your comfort level, go BRAG! online at www.bragbetter.com and click on ‘Take-12 Questionnaire’.

EXECUTIVE JOB-CHANGING WORKBOOK by John Lucht, The Viceroy Press, New York, 2002; \$29.95

By now, we should all be familiar with the granddaddy guide of them all, John Lucht's RITES OF PASSAGE AT \$100,000 TO \$1 MILLION. RITES is a thoroughly compiled, conversationally written reference tome containing everything you need to know about job hunting but were afraid to ask – and then some. If you haven't already done so, check that one out first.

Once you're familiar with WHAT to do as described in RITES, the next step is Mr. Lucht's companion book, EXECUTIVE JOB-CHANGING WORKBOOK, a guide for the HOWs of doing the WHATs. The author takes you through step-by-step processes and hands-on, action-oriented exercises with the aim of helping you identify your unique business individuality that translates to solving a potential employer's needs – the name of the game.

Formatted as an 8 ½" x 11" paperback, the WORKBOOK is written in very large type, divided into two sections, and designed to be literally cut apart. The first half is a "comprehensive tool kit" on resume writing, cover letters, networking, and interviewing. This is also the place where you do your self-analysis and written exercises, after brief introductions by the author. His premise is that preparing in advance the answers to his Five Key Considerations will go a long way toward developing your successful, convincing self-promotion campaign:

1. Your Highest and Best Use
2. Your Most Impressive Achievements
3. Your Most Enthusiastic and Prominent Supporters
4. The Likeliest and Strongest Reasons NOT to Hire You
5. What Do You Really WANT To Do?

The second half of the book contains record-keeping tools designed to track networking contacts, interviews (I especially like the Interview De-Briefer page), and tax and expense details. While some of the forms are redundant since tracking can easily be accomplished on a PC-based spreadsheet, Mr. Lucht has covered all the bases by including the fill-in-the-blank forms here.

At first glance, this workbook may seem too elementary to consider. I suggest you leaf through it, see what interests you, and then decide whether you can use what it offers in your job campaign. If you're ready to invest disciplined energy and time in completing the exercises and answering the helpful questions intended to make you an expert on YOU, then give it a go.

FYI: All of the books reviewed in this column are available through public libraries. Most municipal libraries are affiliated with one or more regional or state library systems. If your local branch doesn't have a required book, it can be obtained from another member town or municipality, exponentially expanding your world of reference material. Also, most larger libraries/systems are now available on-line, and you can request books (as well as CDs, DVDs, books-on-tape, etc.) via simple-to-use websites. Check with your local librarian – or your kids -- for specific information.

RESUME GUIDE FOR \$100,000 EXECUTIVE JOBS by William E. Montag, published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002.

“In the career and job search game, the only thing that really matters is results.” That’s one of Mr. Montag’s closing lines in a couple of chapters of this book. Sounds like he’s warming us up for some unconventional advice (see below).

The author adequately makes the case that it is absolutely necessary that each of us prepare a powerful marketing presentation package. The package consists of a “well-thought-out, well-crafted, and hard-hitting presentation” of your marketable skills and achievements. (The two components of the package are a powerful resume and a “hard-hitting, creative, achievement and skills-oriented cover letter.”) So far, so good.

The primary emphasis of this book is helping the reader develop the strongest possible achievement statements (i.e., success stories) and skills definition sections of the resume and cover letter. He does a good job on that. Here’s one concrete example: “Overcame powerful organizational resistance to produce over \$3 million cash and annual savings of \$2.1 million by persuading the Chairman to sell the corporate yacht.”

The author encourages us to extract, borrow and adapt key words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs from his samples that most closely resemble those in your field, background and objectives. (Don’t use the yacht story above unless it really happened!) Most of the sample resumes, presented according to executive function, are solid, but I do quibble with his insistence to include “References available upon request” at the bottom of the resume. To me, this is a silly waste of valuable real estate.

To demonstrate his theories, Mr. Montag includes more than 60 real life client histories throughout the book. He confidently boasts that his material “successfully generated quality interviews and six-figure career moves”, that his clients “repeatedly out-marketed, outsmarted and outdistanced the competition”, that “This book achieved the results for [people] just like you – they produced positive interviews and job offers...[included are] “market-tested and proven methods that resulted in successful career moves for satisfied clients.” In debunking the one-page resume requirement he says, “decades of firsthand experience and the success of my ... clients ... indicate that the rule that the resume must absolutely not exceed one page is simplistic tripe.” You get the point.

With a heads-up to Matt, the book demonstrates and recommends the combined functional and chronological resume format: career skills, knowledge and career achievements on page 1 (functional format) with chronological employment history on page 2 (chronological format).

Much weight is placed on the cover letter, treating it and the resume as co-equal and inseparable components of the total marketing package. Mr. Montag argues, “the marketing cover letter is the single most critical document that you will produce. ... [it] must be developed as a stand-alone document based on the assumption that the reader will only review the letter And may well not get past it [to the resume].... Since you only have 15 to 30 seconds of the reviewer’s time to market yourself and make your case, if you don’t sell the reader with your cover letter, you will very likely not sell the reader at all. ...I can state this unequivocally, based on my experience in the marketplace and on feedback from clients. ... Failure to develop [the cover letter] is a missed opportunity.” Hmmm...

Resume Guide stresses the importance of high-volume marketing, encouraging readers not to automatically dismiss any one particular method over another in your promotional campaign. He

wants us to understand that all methods can be viable so we need to be open to all avenues that could potentially produce the desired result. These include direct company contact, recruiter contacts, the (on-line) classified ads, networking, “radical telephony” (refusing to be dismissed or waylaid), and on-line job search sites.

The author is a self-described Fortune 100 manager, veteran writer and executive career consultant who has partnered with CareerJournal (CareerJournal.com) to produce this 350-page interactive paperback. There’s nothing wrong with the partnering, provided you don’t mind the 25+ pages devoted, naturally, to the CareerJournal.com website. Another 30+ pages cover other “market-tested career and job search websites” plus two appendices.

Bottom line: The book’s underlying message is well received by this reviewer. As mentioned above, some of his advice may be viewed as unconventional. I’m not going to judge that, because he is trying to be a cow that doesn’t follow the herd. However, because his advice is constantly surrounded by over-the-top bragging – even a bit much for self-promoters - it can get tiring. You may not always agree with his arguments or their rationale but in the end, “The only opinion that really matters in judging the quality and effectiveness of your marketing [material] is the opinion and response of the marketplace.” Amen, brother. Check it out at your friendly hometown library before plunking down \$21.95 to buy it.

"A Change Is Gonna Come" *

WHO MOVED MY CHEESE? By Spencer Johnson, M.D. Published by G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1998.

This short and deceptively simple story told in less than 50 large-type 9" x 6" pages takes less than an hour to read. So you've got tonight's train or bus commute covered.

The Cheese, with a capital C, represents what we want to have in life, whatever it is that we believe will make us feel happy and successful. This could be a good job, a loving relationship, money, the community we live in, or spiritual peace of mind.

The metaphorical maze is where we spend time looking for what we want. Every day we spend time in the maze looking for our own special Cheese. Once we find it, we get lazy – we settle in, make ourselves at home, get comfortable, and enjoy the Cheese. We know where it is and we assume it will always be there. We think it will last forever.

As time goes on, we con ourselves into believing we deserve the Cheese. After all, we worked long and hard to get it! Confidence grows into the arrogance of success. We become so comfortable, we don't notice what's happening around us: things are changing, the supply of cheese is dwindling, and what is left is grown old and perhaps moldy. Consumed by arrogance, we become blind to change. We hold on to the illusion of the Old Cheese, even though it's no longer there.

In the book, the maze is a labyrinth of corridors and chambers, some containing delicious Cheese. It may also be filled with dark corners and blind alleys leading nowhere. It's an easy place for anyone to get lost. We all share the common need to find our way in the maze of life.

When confronted with unexpected change, the way we look at things gets cloudy. Life in the maze becomes more complicated and challenging. We get stuck in evaluating the situation, suffering from having no Cheese. Long-held powerful human beliefs and emotions weigh us down. The maze is an uncertain and dangerous place! We don't like it there! It's uncomfortable. We think we're too old – we can't run that maze one more day! We know we'll get lost! We know we'll make fools of ourselves!

We're afraid of going through this alone. We feel paralyzed. Fearful beliefs immobilize us, and that immobility will eventually kill us. Intellectually we realize we need to act smarter, to change, to do things differently. Still, we stubbornly resist change: why should I change? I'm special! I deserve better! And if the Cheese does change, I should get benefits! I'm entitled! I didn't cause this problem! I should get something out of it!

Deep inside we know that what we're afraid of is never as bad as we imagine. The fictional boogiemer under the bed, the monsters in the closet, and the road on the Temple of Doom will be conquered! We will navigate our way through new and different mazes, finding the secrets that let us enjoy a better life in the process.

Here are the lessons to be learned from this parable:

Change Happens

- *They Keep Moving The Cheese*

Anticipate Change

- *Get Ready For The Cheese To Move*

Monitor Change

- *Smell The Cheese Often So You Know When It Is Getting Old*

Adapt To Change Quickly

- *The Quicker You Let Go Of Old Cheese, The Sooner You Can Enjoy New Cheese*
- Change**
- *Move With The Cheese*
- Enjoy Change!**
- *Savor The Adventure And Enjoy The Taste Of New Cheese!*
- Be Ready To Change Quickly And Enjoy It Again & Again**
- *They Keep Moving The Cheese.*

A New York Times business bestseller since its release, Who Moved My Cheese? remained on the list for almost five years and spent over two hundred weeks on Publishers Weekly's hardcover nonfiction list.

* The legendary Sam Cooke recorded the song "A Change Is Gonna Come" back in the 60s. It is perhaps the greatest song to come out of the civil rights movement.

"Dawn, I read your "Who Moved My Cheese" review in the FENG newsletter. I thought it was well done and enjoyed reading it. If I was a literary critic you would get my kudos. Thanks for your time and effort."

- *Mike Garni, Princeton, NJ and New York City Chapters*

"Dawn: Thank you for your book report. It is a great piece."

- *Norman Weinstock, CLTC, Co-Chairman, The FENG*

"Hi Dawn, Thanks for the book review. I have known of this book for several years, but have not read it yet. I will now."

- *Philip J. Doyle, Warren, NJ Chapter*

"Your recap was very helpful. Thank you. I had read the book, but forgot the specifics. Dawn, it was really excellent. You could start a web-site."

- *Michael Goldman, New York City FENG*

"Thanks, Dawn for writing the review – I found it brought home some truths!"

- *Sally A. Brandtneris, JC Jones & Associates, LLC*

"'Who moved my cheese?' I had read the book some time ago -- I love the 'skinny version' as a quick reminder! Thanks for the inspiring update."

- *Penny Weller, PhD, CMA, Atlanta, GA Chapter*

"Dawn: Nice little book review. I enjoyed it. Thanks!"

- *John Branch, Los Angeles, CA Chapter*

WHY BUSINESS PEOPLE SPEAK LIKE IDIOTS – A BULLFIGHTER’S GUIDE - by Brian Fugere, Chelsea Hardaway & Jon Warshawsky, published by Free Press, A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2005.

You talkin’ to ME ?

Let’s start with a “quiz.” Read each of the following two sentences out loud. Which do you prefer?

This book is an amusing, tongue-in-cheek diatribe against business language and how it has transmogrified into a specialized, lingo-laden, jingoistic journal of the uninterpretable.

OR

This is a funny book filled with real life examples that explain how we can all learn to speak and write more clearly.

The second sentence sums up the gist of this book. The authors are Big Four consulting refugees who have had their fill of “bloated jargon, monotonous memos, syrupy slogans and deadly dull presentations” (see my first sentence above). They experienced these phenomena while holding various marketing and IT positions, which explains their familiarity with this topic. Fed up with nonsensical words and phrases encountered – and possibly written - during their respective careers, they proclaim, “the official language of business is bull,” hence the book’s title. According to them, this current state of affairs has been brought upon by our reluctance as individuals to remain true to our selves when we attempt “communication at work,” and instead opt for the comfort of conforming in order to obtain the organization’s stamp of approval.

The book warns against falling into one of four traps, all amply illustrated with stories and quotations taken from Enron annual reports, computer system user guides, U.S. presidential statements and “answers” to press questions, various sales pitches, the Challenger explosion investigation reports, and others. The four traps to avoid are obscurity, anonymity, the hard sell, and tedium. When we fall into these traps, we become “business idiots.”

As left brain-dominant technical types, we finance folks need to be especially wary of the traps and plan a route around them. We need to buck the trend to become “boring business stiff” by retaining our innate humor and honesty (our “weekend selves”) and use them as opportunities in a world filled with “bull.” Specifically, avoid phrases like these, categorized in this book as “the best of the worst:”

Best of breed
Center of excellence
Frictionless
Out of pocket
Paradigm shift
Results-driven

Read this book. If you don’t see yourself in it – and laugh out loud - you’re in denial. Whether writing or revising a resume or a marketing letter, polishing interview skills, preparing a presentation, or delivering bad news, use plain, simple language, short words, brief sentences and straight-up talk. Aim to inform, not impress. Commit to yourself to connect with others as a person, not as your job title. “... take off the corporate mask and speak in a real, compelling voice.”

Got it? Good.

NETWORKING MAGIC Find the Best – From Doctors, Lawyers and Accountants to Homes, Schools and Jobs by Rick Frishman and Jill Lublin, published by Adams Media, 2004.

\$12.95 in paperback. Total of 250 5"x8" pages, including 8 pages of testimonials and 3 pages of recommended reading, websites, and organizations, but excluding the Index.

I react with dismay when I read the occasional Good News Announcement in our FENG newsletter that signs off with, "You can remove my name from your Newsletter distribution now."

For whatever reason, these folks, our FENG friends, have chosen to make themselves unavailable through the newsletter forum to welcome new friends, respond to Requests for Assistance, or to send good wishes to other Good News Announcement authors. To me, this is a waste of valuable expertise. After all, they have just successfully navigated the turbulent waters of unemployment, come to a safe landing at a paying position, and hopefully will not be temporarily between jobs again for a very long time.

As crucial, primary resources for the route just traveled, they have a lot to share with others still out at sea, drifting with the wind. Enough of Matt's sailing references. So, for those Good News Announcement people who wish to remain unavailable to help others via the Newsletter, this review's for you, even though you won't see it.

Based on my takeaway, there are three main messages in Networking Magic. First (first 74 pages), the authors have chosen to re-familiarize us with what networking IS and what it ISN'T. A brief refresher is a good thing. Here are a few definitions culled from the book:

- Like healthy eating, regular exercise, and not smoking, networking is a lifestyle choice.
- It is an essential part of human interaction, an understanding of the need to give for the greater good without expectation of getting in return.
- To successfully network, you must be willing to give freely – of your time, your talent, and your advice – on an epic scale that exceeds expectations or needs.
- Networking is more than a career, a marketing gimmick, or social tactic. Networking is about connecting, forging bonds and sharing on a personal level to build and maintain relationships.
- Networking is the art of making connections that blossom into strong, mutually beneficial relationships.
- Networking is building and being part of a community—a community built on giving generously and inhabited by people who are the best at what they do.
- Networking is the art of giving to promote the advancement of others. Giving generously triggers the magic referred to in the title. It ignites a passion that will lift you higher, carry you further, and take you to places that will surpass your wildest dreams.

At its most basic, there are "four rules of successful, reciprocal networking" to live by:

1. "You can't always be the connectee; you must also be the connector.
2. You can't always be the taker; you must also give.
3. To build a successful network, you must be prepared to give at least two or three items for every one you receive.
4. Better yet, don't count; just give! "

The second takeaway from this book (covering another 75 pages) is a new twist on an old theme: once we make the networking lifestyle choice, we must learn to build and maintain

networks that will help us get the BEST in life, whether it's a babysitter, an ophthalmologist, a great job, or take-out pizza. We are advised to "...always shoot for the best within your reach. ..."

To position ourselves to get the very best out of life, we need to adjust our focus slightly: "...Surround yourself with the most outstanding, caring, and helpful people. ... Build mutually supportive relationships with top people who will happily help you and who have what it takes to satisfy your needs."

Third, the authors remind us that our networks need to consist of a variety of people who do a variety of things, in a variety of fields. They call this "Spreading Your Blanket:"

"When you visualize your network, don't picture it as a chain or a single column of contacts who all share similar areas of expertise. Instead, see it as a multidimensional meshwork made up of people with differing talents, experiences, and viewpoints that radiate and link in all directions so it can operate like a blanket to cover any conceivable topic, discipline, or target."

I like the blocked-out snippets scattered throughout the book relating anecdotes about "real" people and their networking experiences. My favorite of these is the Jay Leno story (page 41), describing how he beat out Dave Letterman as Johnny Carson's permanent replacement on the Tonight Show. Networking in Hollywood - who knew?

What I could do without: The extensive and detailed pages devoted to describing how several networking groups function, who makes up their membership, what to expect at meetings, what the members talk about, etc. This information could have been conveyed much more succinctly.

Recommendation: Worth a browse while sitting poolside/deckside/seaside this summer.

DON'T SEND A RESUME And Other Contrarian Rules to Help Land a Great Job by Jeffrey J. Fox, published by Hyperion, 2001. \$16.95 hardcover. Total of 172 pages.

Well, that's a pretty catchy title! Don't send a resume! Is he crazy?

The premise of the book is that finding a job is akin to marketing and selling – you. To do so effectively, a lot of research and pre-planning is required - before you even think about firing off a resume to a potential employer. The author explains that sending a resume before you know all you can reasonably find out about a target company, before you have identified its problems and concerns, and come up with proposed solutions, is tantamount to making cold calls to sell any other commodity. We are told such cold calls have a low success rate. And none of us wants to feel that we are part of a commodity – in great supply and indistinguishable one from the other.

Instead of sending the resume FIRST, we are advised to send a resume as follow-up sales literature. In this way, the resume can be written with the distinct advantage of addressing the employer's current problems. A customized resume is more persuasive and reinforces impressions made during the interview.

Whether the author intended it or not, each of the 44 “chapters” in this little gem of a book can be read independently. Each comes across as an individual snippet of wisdom, distilled down to, at most, 4 small (4” x 7”) pages. That's a good thing if you are pressed for time and need to focus in on a particular topic. The downside is that the book doesn't always “flow:” the phrase “point of difference” is used throughout the first 29 chapters, but he doesn't get around to defining it (“something about a product that is different or unique”) until page 122.

Mr. Fox uses a lot of sales and marketing lingo throughout the book. For example, the ‘product’ is the candidate; the ‘customer’ is the interviewer; the ‘sales call’ is the interview. This struck me as cumbersome and I found myself tripping over some of the words. I didn't really get why he took this approach; the author's bio gives no indication that his background involves these areas, so I'm not so sure I trust where he's coming from.

Similar to the advice found in ASK THE HEADHUNTER*, the author advocates implementing a job search strategy (his “marketing mix”) that is intended to differentiate each of us from the competition. For example, “The Job-Getting Blueprint,” which makes up all of chapter III (pages 12-13), is a 12-point bulleted list on conducting the search. To me the two most valuable of these bullets are:

- Dollarize your potential value to the organization.
- Conduct a needs analysis during the interview.

The message I took away from the book was a reinforcement of the advice that to get the job, it is necessary to stand out from the crowd. That's common sense and something we should all be addressing in our presentations and marketing materials, if we aren't already. While some portions of the book are a little dated (it's been out for five years), it's worth a read for the down and dirty, provided you can get passed the S&M jargon.

“Hi Dawn! ... I just read your review of ‘Don't Send That Resume.’ Once again, a succinct yet thorough job. You know, it can get somewhat overwhelming and confusing to follow the myriad of advice coming from these “self-help” resources. You've certainly read your share of them! I liken you to a surgeon who skillfully cuts through all the fluff and extracts the golden nuggets of information. You should take the best of the best and publish your own document for profit, for the FENG membership, whatever.”

- *Scott H. Pass, Bergen County, NJ FENG*

201 BEST QUESTIONS TO ASK ON YOUR INTERVIEW by John Kador, published by McGraw-Hill, 2002. \$12.95 in paperback. Total of 188 pages including the 25-page Index to Questions.

Normally I read a book twice, at two different times – weeks or maybe even months apart - before submitting a review to the FENG newsletter. I do this so that I have a fresh perspective on the second go round. Well, tonight's book review was written after a third read, and I'm still having trouble with it. Despite my best attempts to find out who is the target audience for this book, I still don't know. It's a little too advanced for a first-time job hunter (on second thought, maybe not – I'll expand later), yet way too basic (I'm hoping) for senior executives such as FENG members. By process of elimination then, I suppose that leaves the experienced job seeker, on his/her way up, who needs a refresher.

Let's focus on the positives first:

-The author reminds us why it is critical to ask questions in an interview. (Remember, the interview is a conversation, and you need to find out information as much as the interviewer does.) That's a good review and takes up the entire first chapter.

-The second thing I liked about 201 BEST QUESTIONS is that it divides up the questions into sections, under headings such as Questions to Ask Recruiters, Questions to Ask the HR People, Questions to Ask the Hiring Manager, etc. This, too, is a good review of the obviously different, yet sometimes overlooked, perspectives each of those roles plays in the process. Therefore, it is necessary to tailor your questions in the language of that person's perspective.

-I also liked the way the author categorizes the types of questions you need to ask into four distinct groups:

Exploring questions – those that probe for details about the job, company, management and the people you'll work with, helping you learn more about the opportunity. Example: What are your major concerns that need to be immediately addressed in this job?

Defensive questions – designed to make sure you want the job and protect you from making a mistake. Example: How much freedom would I have in determining my objectives and deadlines?

Feedback questions – those that identify objections and provide the opportunity for you to solidify your position. Example: Is there anything else you need from me to have a complete picture of my qualifications?

Bid-for-action questions – those designed to clinch the offer. Example: Do you have any concerns to clear up in order for me to be the top candidate?

Now here's what bugs me about this book:

-When someone or something - like a book title - promises me "201 BEST" questions to ask on an interview, I expect 201 new, unusual, exciting or different ideas than the same old-same old recycled questions we've all heard a thousand times before. This book may technically have 201 questions in it, but roughly one-third of them are the same question worded in a different way. Would someone please tell me the difference between:

How would you describe the company's culture here?
and

What can you tell me about the company culture?

-Another turn-off: either this book was not edited well, or the author's writing skills are deficient. The book contains several typos, one obvious in the first sentence of the first chapter, and one at the very end of the last chapter, with others sprinkled throughout. Additionally, the author uses the word "cheeky" at least three times in the last several chapters. That's three times too many as far as I'm concerned. Since Mr. Kador is an experienced author, responsibility for these poorly written pieces goes to the editor.

-The author blocks out Memorably Good Questions and Memorably Bad Questions at various points throughout the book. I think this is overkill, since the entire lists of both good and bad questions are repeated in the Appendix. Also, maybe it's me, but it absolutely boggles this reviewer's mind that people have really asked questions like these in an interview – AND – that they have to be told NOT to:

-So what is it exactly that you guys do?

-Will they fire me for not wearing underwear?

-I just want to get rich and get out. How long will that take me?

As I mentioned earlier, perhaps, after all, the book is not too elementary for first-time job seekers. On the other hand, if you have to ask, "Who are your competitors?" instead of knowing exactly who are the company's competitors (through the research and homework you've done BEFORE getting to the interview) and asking a targeted question about increasing/decreasing market share or something similar, then you have a lot to learn about advance preparation.

Aside from the 21 Memorably Bad Questions (pages 187-188) that may provide a moment of levity, there's not a whole lot of value to be found in this book. In my opinion, the cons outweigh the pros.

BETWEEN TRAPEZES Flying Into a New Life with the Greatest of Ease by Gail Blanke, published by Rodale, Inc., 2004.

Gail Blanke is a corporate veteran (20 years at Avon), frequent guest on both network and cable TV, feature article contributor for numerous magazines, and the author of her first book, *IN MY WILDEST DREAMS: LIVING THE LIFE YOU LONG FOR*.

Her most recent work, the subject of tonight's review, starts off well, piquing this reviewer's interest first with the title. BETWEEN TRAPEZES is an apt metaphor for the in-between-jobs state in which some of us find ourselves. The prologue and first 30 pages also sound promising. However, after that, the book's story line landed with a dull thud on the floor of my brain.

The author's preamble is a valid one: we are the creators of our own lives, the inventors of how we are perceived, the one and only person who can embrace or repel the opportunities that uncertainty brings us. Indeed, the book's overleaf says sometimes "... We are so reluctant to face uncertainty that often we cling to a view of ourselves that we know can never allow us to soar, that keeps us from leaping headlong into an exuberant life."

Ms. Blanke's book purports to teach us how "...to propel ourselves forward with a sense of curiosity and adventure, rather than anxiety and trepidation." Great! I'm hooked. Unfortunately, she doesn't deliver. There is precious little "how" in this book. Instead, we are regaled with underdog stories of four men and four women who face adversity, each in their own way, and manage to find themselves on the path to a new life, post-layoff or downsizing. Along the way, Ms. Blanke subtly, yet shamelessly, plugs her own career at every opportunity, while sharing with us autobiographical stories from her life, events she calls "defining moments." Personally, I'd rather she not share them; I'm not in the mood. They are a dime a dozen, and I've read a few too many lately for yet another one to have a positive impact.

No doubt the author's intention with these stories is to inspire readers by showing us examples of the good ole American work ethic; after all, if they can do it, we can, too! Buckle down, Wally! But the tales are told with such attention to the situational minutiae of each hard-luck story, that after three pages of background (...Mike was laid off after 24 years and a stellar career, has three college-age kids and a non-working wife who depends on him, a huge mortgage, yadda, yadda, yadda), I found myself thinking 'alright, already, what's your point?'

Ms. Blanke quotes in scary detail specific conversations, complete with descriptions of her surroundings, as well as the dates and times of those conversations, with each of the eight individuals profiled. In some cases, we are even subjected to the profilee's significant other's description ("sparkly blue eyes") along with his/her thoughts and feelings. This approach didn't sit well with me. I did not choose to read this book to learn the details of significant others' lives. Furthermore, my memory can be really bad at times, so much so that sometimes I can't remember what I had for breakfast. Ms. Blanke's insistence on recalling (did she tape record each and every one of these conversations??) and retelling such nonessential trivia detracts from the power of her message.

Based on the title alone, BETWEEN TRAPEZES seemed like a good idea at the time. But this book's tone, style and format turned me off. If you choose to read it, I'd be interested in hearing others' thoughts and comments.