

Media Week 23.02.04

**'Leading the professionals' by Geoff Smith publ. Kogan Page – review
by Gary Duckworth**

'Leadership' - odd word - people don't use it very much, almost as if it's become embarrassing or old-fashioned. While modern businesses have got the idea that the command and control 'just f***** do it' leadership style has had its day, thinking about what we might replace it with is not widely considered. And there's a prevalent myth about that says we've all got to operate at such a speed that anyway managers simply haven't got the time to think hard about what leadership might bring.

So by default, the role of management frequently becomes reduced to 'making the numbers work'. But the scope of this is seriously limited: if you *only* operate with this kind of goal the sum total of the management task becomes decisions on what can be spent/ risked/ cut/ reallocated. This makes life somewhat one-dimensional, and tends to exclude leadership thinking - both in terms of managers finding challenge in their own working lives, plus the business value of inspiring and motivating people to think new thoughts, work well together, cross fertilise and all the other things deemed desirable. Strange how much leadership thinking has been forgotten, considering the parroted mantra that we're all in people businesses.

One of the first useful things Geoff Smith does - in what overall is a very useful book - is to make clear that managing and leading are two very different things, and that both are important in happy, healthy, successful businesses.

He goes on to examine what leadership means if you're leading a group of experienced professionals – i.e. people who generally know their technical stuff, believe in the value of their own expertise and generally don't like the idea of being led – the essence being light touch and sensitivity. The book then becomes a toolkit of the major frameworks and theories about modern

business leadership that have emerged in the last 20 years or so - styles, how organisations change, managing your time, coaching team members, dealing with difficulties and so on. It's both practical and comprehensive, and does not punt up a one-sided heavy-handed point of view about 'the right way'. All in all, a very readable reminder of what a valuable business resource good leadership can be in the current phase of high intensity low-fun capitalism - if only you felt you had the time to read it.

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