

BOOK REVIEW

**SECRETS OF THE CORPORATE JUNGLE, SHIRLEY PEDDY
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Secrets of the Corporate Jungle is a book which aims to divulge the secrets of those who are successful in today's organizations. It is intended for not only academics in the field of Management and Business, but anyone and everyone who has a job or ever intends to work for an organization of any sort. Dr. Shirley Peddy, who has had over twenty years of experience in training and consultancy, has achieved this aim quite successfully in her book and it truly is a book that will be appreciated by anyone who reads it.

The reasons why Peddy has been successful are various. Her simple conversational style is one, and addressing issues every working person has come across and offering realistic, practical solutions is another. Peddy has also been very careful to make her book understandable by all and has used little theory and much more practical applications. It is suggested that if this book is used academically, it should be used in conjunction with a proper text on Organizational Behaviour along with other books. It cannot be used independently as it has almost no references to any theoretical matter on Organizational Behaviour. Yet another reason why the book has worked can be because Peddy has not minced words and has stuck to the point for the most part. This accounts for why the book is just 153 pages long. In fact Peddy also makes sure that there are minimal pictures or illustrations, or vague theoretical models to distract the reader with.

One of the devices that Peddy uses in this book is quotations from another fictional book within this book. The fictional book is authored by Jack. Jack is the mentor of Sandra who is depicted as the typical hardworking but unsuccessful and unappreciated worker who as yet has not managed to unravel, understand and use to her advantage the secrets of the corporate jungle (which may at first

seem a bit strange, as Sandra is supposed to have an MBA). In fact, the book starts off with Sandra about to resign because she is so unhappy with her job, and Jack intervening to help her find happiness by changing her attitudes and her perceptions about her workplace. This he does not only through many conversations with her, but also through the book that he is authoring which contains two central characters called 'Keli' who has lost his way in the real South American jungle and an elder tribesman, his mentor, who helps him find his way. However, unfortunately, this effort of trying to make things interesting through this device of the book within the book fails to capture the reader's interest. Thankfully, it is printed in a different font, so one can just skip it and read the interesting parts.

Apart from this, the book quite successfully divulges a lot of secrets to the uninitiated. It does not always present only the positive, it also gives important warnings such as "Management approval is elusive – and even if you hit the mark it doesn't last very long" and that working hard "...entitles you to a paycheck and the opportunity to continue working....but it won't earn you the other rewards...."

For those who are in a hurry the book also italicizes all important "secrets" and also summarizes them once again at the end of the chapters in a journal that Sandra maintains which she calls her lessons, which some may find a bit juvenile. In fact, overuse of such devices may be another one of the criticisms that this book will have to deal with, but then again it is aimed at the layman for whom these techniques make it easy to read the book.

The book is divided into twelve short "lessons" or chapters. It starts off with explaining the difference between torches and lamps. We are told "...In

business, some people are torches and some are lamps. Both are sources of light, but the difference is important. Torches use up their own fuel and burn out while lamps are plugged into a continuously renewing energy source..."; the point being that we should all try to be lamps.

The first chapter is entitled "On Learning, Mentors and Tests". An example of an interesting lesson in this chapter is "...you must earn the respect of the people you work with, and at the same time, treat them with respect whether you think they have earned it or not. Some people fail the test because they don't produce results, but more fail it because they don't understand the importance of building good working relationships with others." Another one is "if you want to get things resolved, center your attention on the problem, not on the person".

The next chapter deals with among other things how to deal with negative criticism of one's work. It also advises that "if you stay in your shell, no one can help you, and you stand no chance at all of getting what you want." So the point is ask for what you need.

The third chapter is called "On Making Career Decisions". This chapter is addressed to those who are suddenly being faced with new opportunities and cannot decide whether to go there or not. It also offers help to those who are not currently happy with their current jobs and tells them how they can find happiness in their current positions without changing their jobs.

There are interesting revelations in the fourth chapter such as "... you cannot be a star until you've recognized the importance of being a team member..." Analogies are used throughout the book and one that is used here is that of basketball teams: "A great player who is not a team member can still shoot many baskets, but it's no guarantee the team will win. A great player who is a team member, however, raises the standard and quality of play for everyone." It also contains invaluable advice about how to deal with overwhelming workloads by categorizing work according to the level of importance your boss places on the various types of work. Chapter ten later carries on with this theme with a special emphasis on diversity.

The fifth chapter entitled "On Choices, Pitfalls and Traps" and chapter six entitled "On Handling Differences", cover what to do when things beyond

your control but which are part of the organization, prevent you from achieving what you want. It also talks about how to handle problems with co-workers and give them negative feedback, and how to handle "turf wars" or inter-departmental rivalry. Important advice doled out here include "...it's even more important to be gracious in winning. People might forget the outcome, but they never forget how you treated them."

Chapter seven covers the important topic of reputation. "Having technical skills means very little if no one is aware of them. You need to make them known. The trick is to do that without seeming to blow your own horn. Provide a report to the boss, offer to serve on a project team, give a short presentation at a meeting. Do something, but whatever you do, don't close your office door and do it in the dark..." advises Peddy.

Chapter eight and nine are both similar in that they both deal with change. Chapter eight mainly addresses how to get new proposals approved, especially if the new way of doing things would be a major change from the current way. It warns, "those who violate ...protocols are seldom successful." It talks about the differences between open and closed organizations and what tactics to use in each type to get information. Chapter nine talks about changes like downsizing and restructuring the organization and what to do in such circumstances. It strongly discourages relying on rumours.

Chapter eleven is about direction and purpose and how important it is for one to know what one wants out of life. It is much more philosophical than the other chapters.

Chapter twelve comes full circle by addressing the issue of becoming a mentor. Here we are introduced to the qualities a good mentor needs to have. Also the "greatest secret of all" is divulged at the end of this chapter.

The good thing about this book is that it provides good advice that is handed out to the reader without sounding too patronizing. Peddy manages to do this by using the characters Jack and Sandra to full advantage, since Peddy does not lecture us, but instead Jack gives advice to his good friend Sandra. Jack also reminisces about various incidents in his past career, when he learnt important lessons. Also, we get realistic descriptions of the different types of

problems (and opportunities) that Sandra faces in her work over a period of time and details of her work and movement in the organization are provided in the book which make the whole thing more believable. The reader thus ends up identifying with Sandra and learning the lessons she is learning. Peddy's success also lies in the fact that she addresses issues not commonly talked about, in addition to common ones such as networking, diversity and change. However even with the common issues, Peddy uses a different angle, as she talks about the issues from the perspective of the individual employee rather than the manager or the employer. This is what makes the book different.

The best word to describe *Secrets of the Corporate Jungle* is 'useful' especially because it addresses issues which are usually not part and parcel of the average textbook on Organizational Behaviour. It may not be the most captivating or intellectually stimulating book one has ever read, but it certainly is a book I suggest that anyone who wants to be successful in their work read at least once.

REFERENCE

Peddy, Shirley (1997). *Secrets of the Corporate Jungle*, Jaico Publishing House, India.