

The importance of mid-level managers

At a time when organizations from Wall Street to Hollywood to statehouses around the country are undergoing accusations of harassment, skullduggery, cover-ups and shake-ups at the highest levels, who will be left to run the show?

Perhaps it'll be the ones who have always kept things humming: the folks in middle management. And in a case of pretty astute timing, Ana-cortes-based author Mike Cook has just come out with a book to help operational-level managers excel in their work. It's called "Thriving in the Middle."

Cook, whose 36-year career includes time spent working in human resources for Standard Oil of California, now serves as an adjunct professor at Western Washington University and works as a

business consultant. In these capacities, he's been urging a critical reconsideration of hierarchical business models that may not be nimble enough to keep up with the challenges that crop up in today's fast-paced and often ambiguous work environment.

Cook even goes so far as to describe the modern workplace as "... hostile territory. There are hidden snares everywhere and even when we think we can relax a bit, someone tells us a stupid joke or makes some other kind of comment that throws us —

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maybe it's even just a look on their face."

In these times of ongoing social flux, acute corporate expectations and pervasive anxiety, Cook argues that the conventional transmission models used for training management — some information-dump classes, backed up by an employee manual that gets shoved to the back of a drawer or, more commonly these days, a morass of online tutorials — do not inform or sustain effective management over the long haul.

Lessons are forgotten, philosophical underpinnings are

ignored, sometimes problems arise that haven't even been anticipated. And — the author doesn't say this, but haven't we all seen it happen? — sometimes figures get fudged.

To improve the accountability of operational managers, while avoiding heaping unreasonable expectations upon them, Cook advocates for a different model that provides incremental trainings over the long term. Sometimes called "Communities of Mutual Success" or "Distributed Development Communities," this model also emphasizes the impor-

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management." It may not sound like the most revolutionary idea in the world, but the author holds that just as much as having a strong leader is a requirement for organizational success, so is the assurance of having an empowered management core.

"What I have learned is not everyone who goes into management is interested in rising as far upward as they can," Cook writes.

"... (T)here are mid-level managers for life. They are where they should be, and they should be celebrated for it."

"Thriving in the Middle" believes that middle management, if given the tools and the latitude, can be a catalyzing force for helping companies work more efficiently, creatively and successfully.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com.

tance of collaborative problem-solving around on-the-job experiences, and strong peer CONNECTIONs. (Cook uses this word repeatedly and capitalizes it to ensure that the reader will understand its importance.)

The author calls for "restoring the luster to middle

Crossword Answer

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