

Freedom, Inc.

The problem with many companies is that they judge employees on everything except “whether the job gets done and the customer is happy,” write Brian M. Carney and Isaac Getz in *Freedom, Inc.*, as excerpted in the *Wall Street Journal* (10/15/09).

The authors draw from the philosophy of Jean-François Zobrist, a former chief executive, who observed that there are two kinds of companies — “how” companies and “why” companies.

The “how” companies “spend their time telling workers how to do their jobs,” while the “why” companies “replace all the ‘hows’ with a single question: Why are you doing what you’re doing?”

Where the “how” approach completely ignores customer happiness, the “why” question has only one answer, which is “to keep the customers happy.” And if you’re keeping the customer happy, the “how” is pretty much irrelevant.

The authors also write about “the hidden cost of top-down thinking,” which refers to a failure to account for “disengaged, stressed out, ill, or even absent” employees. This hidden cost results in “turnover, workplace stress, conflict-ridden labor relations,” as well as “a lack of innovation and slumping organic growth.”

They also call for a new kind of leadership, where leaders eschew status symbols and subordinate themselves to their employees. The key, they say, is to make your people feel like “human beings instead of human resources.”

Delete

It’s becoming more expensive to forget than to remember, suggests Viktor Mayer-Schönberger in his new book, *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*, reviewed by Adam Keiper in the *Wall Street Journal* (10/23/09).

This is actually something of a contrarian perspective because some historians are concerned that the digital era is making it harder to keep permanent records: “Archivists and librarians have looked for strategies to preserve digital public records, with mixed success,” and some fear a “digital dark age” ahead.

But Viktor is looking at the issue differently. Observing that “the economics of storage has made forgetting brutally expensive,” he worries that this might inhibit us in a way that imposes on our sense of freedom.

He frets, for example, that our children might not speak their minds online for “fear their blunt words might hurt their future career.” His solution involves a system of data “expiration dates,” on the assumption that “getting people to constrain what they desire to share is difficult.”

Eating the Dinosaur

In his new book, *Eating the Dinosaur*, Chuck Klosterman frets over the state of American pop culture as he makes “an eloquent defense of it,” writes Michael MacCambridge in the *Wall Street Journal* (10/23/09).

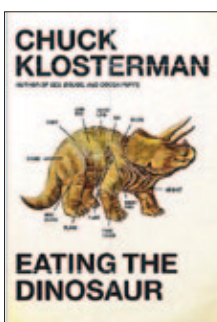
The book consists of a series of essays, covering a spectrum of pop-culture topics, “from the lasting appeal of Abba to the annoying staying power of sitcom laugh tracks; from the nearly forgotten 1980s basketball star Ralph Sampson to Garth Brooks’ critically dismissed foray into rock.”

He writes a “well-reasoned” essay on “the ethics of time travel,” in which he admits that “there’s an inherent goofballedness in debating the ethics of an action that’s impossible.”

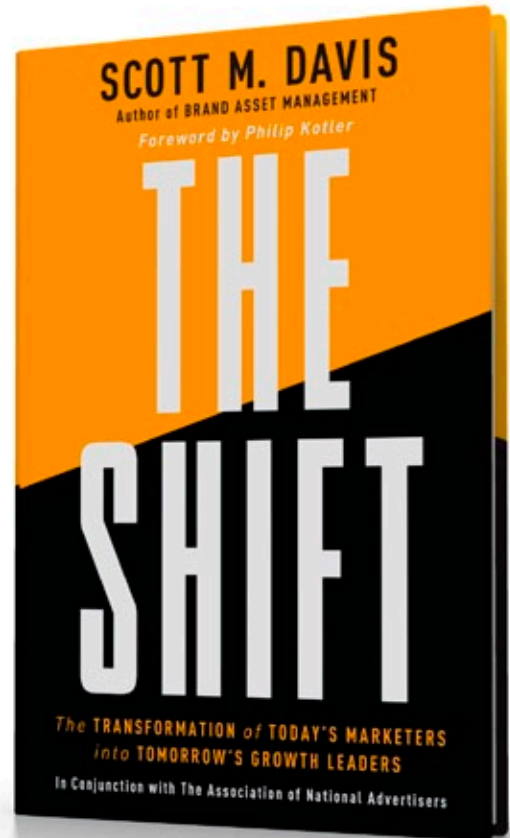
He provides an analysis of the Unabomber’s 35,000-word manifesto, and finds “not the lunatic ravings of a terrorist but something more disturbing: In addition to being an attack on technological civilization, the manifesto was a trenchant media critique that strikes him as more incisive than ever in the age of the internet.”

Indeed, the recurring theme throughout the book “is that we are so saturated by media that its sheer omnipresence not only alters our sense of reality but also prevents many of us from comprehending the degree to which that omnipresence exists.”

Along the way, he raises questions that help re-frame our view of “media, truth and discourse in the modern age,” such as whether “Bob Dylan is a good singer or a bad singer ... That’s the essential question of all criticism, right?”



Where are you on your journey to becoming a visionary marketer?



Traditional marketers live in a short-term world where immediate results outweigh long-term brand building. They are often limited to running agency relationships and enabling the sales force, and are constantly being squeezed for funds they do not have. But the days of marketing strategies and business strategies being created separate and apart from one another are coming to an end. The best marketers are now creating integrated perspectives that start with the growth aspirations of the entire organization.

In *The Shift*, Scott M. Davis, author of *Brand Asset Management* and co-author of *Building the Brand-Driven Business*, outlines how marketers can take action to engage more effectively with the executive team and ultimately ensure that they take a leadership role when it comes to the overall growth strategy.

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At Zappos.com, we've always approached business in our own unique way. The Shift outlines many principles we holistically embrace. Kudos to Scott Davis for putting together such a great resource!

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10 South Fifth Street, Suite 330, Minneapolis, MN 55402 | 612.204.9790 | rpmconnect.com

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