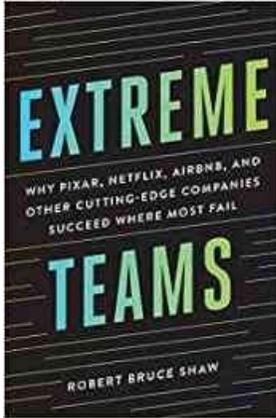


## PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: **Extreme Teams: Why PIXAR, AIRBNB and Other Cutting-Edge Companies Succeed Where Most Fail**

Author: **Robert Bruce Shaw**

Publisher: [www.amacombooks.org](http://www.amacombooks.org)

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Reviewer: Douglas Dodd, Jr., MBA, PMP

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### Introduction

This book tackles the lesser-addressed issue of high-performance teams and their critical impact to the success of some of the highest achieving organizations of today. The reader gets a peek inside of the mindset of the organizational founders and their drive to build and keep their corporate culture alive through the use of high-performance teams.

### Overview of Book's Structure

The book is structured into 7 chapters. They are designed based on the statement “The common approach of the highly successful organizations reviewed in the book is that they (value)”:

1. Results and Relationships
2. Foster a Shared Obsession
3. Value Fit over Capabilities
4. Focus More, then Less
5. Push Harder, Push Softer
6. Take Comfort in Discomfort

Chapter seven then reviews results as proof of their successful utilization of teams:

7. Teams at the Extremes

The remainder of the book is its Acknowledgements, Chapter Notes and Index sections, which come in handy if you wish to dive further into any one of the companies studied.

## Highlights

This book takes a very balanced, shockingly brutal look at the benefits, costs and potential pitfalls of utilizing high-performance teams as the cornerstone of your employee alignment model.

For every success, the author is quick to list a noted failure and stresses that the high-performance team approach is *not* for every organization. For instance, organizations who need to maintain the status quo such as regulatory and various City, County, State and Federal agencies may not utilize high-performance teams as effectively as the private sector. Indeed, high-performance teams may introduce fear and job insecurity in institutions that can't compete in the compensation market against private sector business and use job security as a major recruiting chip for those people more interested in a work/family balance than at-market salaries.

Shaw also points out that when considering the implementation of high-performance teams, the company must be willing to face uncomfortable situations head on and adjust as needed to find the right balance between results and relationships. He gives examples of companies who ventured to the extreme end of each and the negative impact that was created as a result. The successful companies made the needed calibrations to move forward. Also, making a concerted effort to revisit the balance on a regular basis.

With the Results and Relationships balance solidified, they were then free to develop a shared obsession by hiring and maintaining employees by valuing the best 'fit' over the best resume, initially driving the team hard then backing off once the team was trusted to reliably achieve results. They also stressed to the team the importance of disagreement, encouraging them to respectfully challenge each other in order to avoid groupthink.

Finally, Shaw takes a final dive into the original visions of the respective company founders and weighs it against the current and long-term cultural and financial results.

### Highlights: What I liked!

Although each individual will integrate one or more concepts from this book into their respective professions, *my* main take-away is the unflinching look at the Results vs. Relationships balance that plays a part in every organization, regardless of their utilization of high-performance teams or not. Shaw consistently mentions that a common component in high-performance teams is that the members of the team share a shared obsession with work. They also truly believe in the culture, values and goals of the organization, almost to a religious level.

This forces each team member to take an inventory of their priorities prior to joining the

team as well as regularly, once a member of the team. This led me to ask the question, “Can high-performance teams deal with shifting priorities in life outside of work?” e.g., Children, sickness, emotional needs, etc.

Does the organization have the structure and support to temporarily transition a valuable member of a high-performance team who is facing such issues to a different role temporarily, until She or He is ready to resume the pace and time commitment needed to once again be a productive team member?

### **Who might benefit from the Book?**

Anyone, from an individual contributor to the CEO will benefit from the team concepts and examples deeply explored in this book.

### **Conclusion**

This is one of the few books that I have seen to directly address teams realistically. It does not view teams through an aspirational view of what they ‘should’ look like. Instead, it shows you successful companies that utilize high-performance teams, how they got there (The good, the bad and the ugly) and, how they strive to maintain top profits while utilizing their respective team methodologies.

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For more about this book, go to: <http://www.amacombooks.org/book.cfm?isbn=9780814437179>

*Editor’s note: This book review was the result of a partnership between the publisher, PM World and the [PMI Dallas Chapter](#). Authors and publishers provide the books to PM World; books are delivered to the PMI Dallas Chapter, where they are offered free to PMI members to review; book reviews are published in the PM World Journal and PM World Library. PMI Dallas Chapter members can keep the books as well as claim PDUs for PMP recertification when their reviews are published. Chapter members are generally mid-career professionals, the audience for most project management books. If you are an author or publisher of a project management-related book, and would like the book reviewed through this program, please contact [editor@peworldjournal.net](mailto:editor@peworldjournal.net).*

## About the Reviewer



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**Douglas Dodd, Jr**, MBA, PMP, OCA, Oracle 10g, 11g DBA, Network+, Security+, is a member of the PMI Dallas Chapter and has been involved in project management at multiple levels over the last decade, as a stakeholder, team-member or project manager. He has 20+ years of experience as a Business Analyst, Finance Manager, Financial Information Systems Manager and Business Software Solutions Analyst. He currently works as a consultant in Higher Education at Columbia Advisory Group in Dallas, TX. He is also on the Adjunct staff of Dallas Baptist University in Dallas TX. He currently resides in Wylie, TX with his wife Ava and son Brandon. Douglas can be contacted at [ddoddj@gmail.com](mailto:ddoddj@gmail.com)