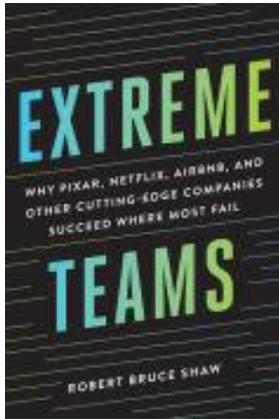


PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Extreme Teams***
Author: **Robert Bruce Shaw**
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Reviewer: **Heather Creer-Rygalski, PMP**
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Introduction

What do Extreme Teams have in common? Demanding work hours, lofty goals, control over work and play hours are just a few items Extreme Teams in the book adhere to because of the successes the companies have seen. While the companies shared in the book are seen as successful today, all of the leaders agreed they made mistakes along the way. Only through continuously improving their processes have they continued to prosper and find suitable employees for their Extreme Teams.

Overview of Book's Structure

Extensive chapters are interwoven with examples of Extreme Teams of well-known companies including: Whole Foods, Zappos, Patagonia, Pixar and Airbnb. The companies have all shared their successes in addition to past mistakes.

Revolutionizing the Way We Work, Foster a Shared Obsession, Value Fit over Capabilities and Take Comfort in Discomfort are just a few of the chapter titles. Looking at the titles only, one might wonder does this really work, or is this real? It does and has for the Extreme Teams but the ideas are not for everyone and will not work for every company. Organizations need to create their own goals, missions etc. best suited for them to deliver "extraordinary results".

Leaders within the companies outlined in the book, took charge of the goals and shared those goals with middle management. Middle management then shared the goals with those within their teams. Isn't that the way goals are supposed to be shared? Of course, but how many times is it really communicated down through the ranks efficiently and effectively where all teams are embracing the goals and visions of the company? How many within middle management instead have their own agendas and those in turn are shared with the teams?

For companies with middle management with their own agendas, they are quickly replaced with individuals whose ideas are aligned to the goals of the organization. Success of the Extreme Teams is all dependent upon the leaders of the organizations having a feel for the pulse of company. Without knowing what is being shared throughout the company, can any organization continue to be successful?

Highlights

Each industry has its own set of norms and standards and the Extreme Teams while using the standards set for the industry, changed the way companies looked at norms. Does your company have full disclosure of employee salaries including the C-Levels? Whole Foods does. Does your company “fully engage callers, with the goal of meeting their needs whenever possible?” (pg. 79) Zappos does. There’s a story of a Zappos executive who told some colleagues in a meeting he could call into his call center at any time and get unsurpassable customer service even if the question he had asked did not pertain to his company. Others in the room made a bet that it couldn’t be done. Not only did he call into the call center asking a question that had nothing to do with Zappos, he also won the bet all because of the extensive customer oriented training of the Zappos call center employees.

How was this possible? “Zappos strives to create an optimistic work environment where people believe in the company’s goal of increasing the level of happiness in the world.” (pg. 103) It is all about hiring the right people for the job as well. “A major benefit of being a purpose driven firm or group is that you know what you are looking for in new hires and attract like-minded people.” (pg. 110)

Within Extreme Teams it is not only about being in an optimistic work environment however, there is some discomfort and conflict involved as well. That conflict within the team requires the following in order to be productive for the organization:

1. An understanding that the discomfort that comes with conflict is necessary and productive.
2. Accountability for pursuing audacious goals that generate a healthy level of tension within a team.
3. An ability to focus the team’s conflict on the “vital few” areas that will make the most difference in the achievements of its goals.
4. The group having the temperament and skill needed to have a productive fight.(pg. 184)

Using these ideas the desired outcome is all about producing desired results.

Highlights: What I liked!

The reader is drawn in from page one with stories of Extreme Teams from companies that we know and love. Whole Foods not only is open with the salaries of all of the employees, it does not sell products that are harmful to the environment or have large quantities of artificial ingredients. At Whole Foods, team members rate

new employees on whether or not he/she is a good fit for the group. Managers take that feedback from the team members and keep or fire the new employees.

Zappos has trained its call center employees to offer exceptional customer service to all who call. How many times have you called and talked with a call center representative and thought you never wanted to deal with the company again just based on your poor experience? Zappos has all but eliminated that with the proper training.

Companies have shared their past successes as well as failures to become extremely successful based upon a common group of shared goals that are created at the top and communicated effectively throughout the organizations creating well-oiled machines. Those machines work only because of the shared beliefs and anyone not a fit for the organizations are moved to different teams as applicable or are eliminated from the organization altogether.

Who might benefit from the Book?

Companies in need of a change from the stagnant results of teams, profits and poor satisfaction survey results from both employees as well as customers can benefit from reading this book. Though the ideas shared will not work necessarily within a particular industry, the premise is finding what will work beginning at the top and communicating it effectively throughout the organization.

Success is imminent when leaders within the organization know the pulse and steer accordingly. For leaders who merge with or acquire companies without any true thought of the outcomes or without sharing the vision and goals of their company, failure is not only an option, it is imminent.

Conclusion

When you hear the names Pixar, Whole Foods, Patagonia or Zappos, what do you think? They are wildly successful, profitable, or even companies that you want to join?

Throughout this book author Robert Bruce Shaw shares how the companies have been so successful in creating Extreme Teams with the right fit of people through effective communication and shared goals and visions.

While the methods and ideas shared might not work for your company, by taking the ideas and creating goals and visions that will work, and pairing those ideas with effectively communicating them, success will surely follow. Anyone not adhering to the goals and visions of the company need to be eliminated.

For more about this book, go to:

<http://www.amacombooks.org/book.cfm?isbn=9780814437179>

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Heather Creer-Rygalski, PMP has more than 20 years of experience working in training and development departments both in the corporate arena and within the public school system using her project management training for all of her projects. She has a BA in Psychology and a M.Ed., both from Texas State University

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