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Chapter 2: A Seasoned OD Professional Reviews New Books

In the following section, Don Bushnell, Professor Emeritus of the Fielding Graduate University, reviews three new books that you might want to tuck in your briefcase or beach bag and enjoy for a good OD read this summer:

From Workplace to Playspace: Innovating, Learning, and Changing Through Dynamic Engagement by Pamela Meyer, Ph.D. (Jossey-Bass, 2010)

Appreciative Leadership: Focus on What Works to Drive Winning Performance and Build a Thriving Organization by Diana Whitney, Ph.D., Amanda Trosten-Bloom and Kae Rader (McGraw Hill, 2010)

Competitive Intelligence Advantage: How to Minimize Risk, Avoid Surprises, and Grow Your Business in a Changing World by Sheena Sharp. (John Wiley & Sons, 2009)

In reviewing the books by Meyer, Whitney, Trosten-Bloom and Rader, I was struck by the similarities of concepts offered by the authors for building creative workplaces that bring new energy and leadership into the work environment. Both books offer guidelines for tapping into “relational space” and a “collaborative and relational process” that free up the creativity and energy of work teams. Both offer methods of engagement that create a safe place for innovation and for conflict around ideas. And both suggest tapping into stories about successful innovations and learning experiences as a means of revealing some of the core values of organizational members and of the organizations themselves. These coincidences seem to point to emergent theory about how to create and sustain creative workplaces. The third book, by Sheena Sharp, is a goldmine of guidelines for obtaining competitive intelligence including how to dig into “invisible” on-line corporate reports to help competitive organizations keep ahead of the curve of new products and innovative practices. All three books are highly recommended for those who seek to be newly inspired in the work they do.

From Workplace to Playspace
by Pamela Meyer, Ph.D.

Dr. Meyer’s new book emphasizes play as a necessary ingredient in stimulating work environments and she makes a compelling case for building “playspace” into every workplace. Using improvisational techniques to bring out the playful and innovative responses of employees are her principal methods for transforming a workplace either through training or through introducing new policy and practices into the workspace.

She emphasizes the necessity of taking individual responsibility for creating the dynamics of playspace. These dynamics include expanding one’s *relational space* - broadening one’s network

by valuing and engaging in relationships with others; increasing one's *generative space*, that is becoming an energizing force by sharing new ideas and making them playful and engaging; creating a *safe space* by being free to be oneself and giving similar permission to others; and fostering *provocative space* where new ideas can be challenged safely and old methods of doing work can be questioned. Each of these concepts is explored in separate chapters.

If you're a facilitator, trainer, or external consultant, these core dynamics can best be taught by utilizing a variety of games, simulations, and improvisational methods. While Dr. Meyer's references throughout her book are real-life examples from her practice, her methods are best illustrated in a handy workbook offered free and on-line at Playspace.biz with the title "Learning and Facilitation Guide." It provides projects and exercises designed for workplace application and for training. (One needs to read the book first, however, to make informed use of the guidelines and examples offered.)

For me, Dr. Meyer's most important and provocative chapter is the one entitled "Timeful Space." She characterizes work in the playspace as timeful if those engaged in creative play learn to fully participate in the present moment outside of clock time. She writes, "In playspace, many are not aware of time passing at all, only of the present moment . . . playspace is able to hold both the urgency of clock time and the fullness of the present moment to make more room for innovating, learning, and changing (p. 132)." In timeful space the author suggests we learn to generate ideas spontaneously and without attachment to how things have been done in the past. And she argues effectively, that in timeful space individuals, teams, and entire organizations can learn to be responsive to crisis. They learn by developing improvisational abilities in response to both the planned and the unplanned.

"From Workplace to Playspace" reveals how to shift from an organizational mindset of workplace as a constraining environment to a place where teams and on-line staff are potentially open and playful, inspiring creative collaboration and high-energy engagement.

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To read reviews of the other two books mentioned above, visit <http://www.odnetwork.org/publications/seasonings/index.php>



About the Reviewer

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