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**Change Without Pain: How Managers Can Overcome Initiative Overload, Organizational Chaos, and Employee Burnout**

By Eric Abrahamson

Harvard Business School Press, 2004  
288 pages, \$26.95

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Much of the advice that has been given to corporations about managing change is bad, according to Eric Abrahamson, a professor of management at Columbia Business School. In *Change Without Pain*, he takes to task the advocates of “creative destruction” and the mantra of “change or perish,” which he suggests has been “overprescribed by gurus for decades.” He argues, as we have also argued in *s+b* (See “The Four Bases of Organizational DNA,” by Gary Neilson, Bruce A. Pasternack, and Decio Mendes, Winter 2003), that adaptive change is most successful in organizations when it involves the recombination of existing “genetic” elements, rather than the obliteration of the past. Managers will be most successful when they tinker, kludge, and improvise rather than try to reinvent from scratch. Although the resulting change may not be entirely “without

pain,” it certainly implies less pain than total reinvention.

To guide the reader through his approach to the incremental change process, Professor Abrahamson develops a two-dimensional “recombinant map” with an organization’s process and structure on the “hard” side and its networks and culture on the “soft.” People are at the center. He identifies three types of recombinant change of escalating difficulty: clonable (the same means can produce the same ends across different parts of the firm), customizable (the means must be modified to produce the same ends), and reinventable (the means must be reinvented to produce the same ends). The recombinant metaphor together with its arcane associations with genetics and genetic engineering may obscure as much as it illuminates, but chapter headings such as these summarize the messages:

- Redeploying Talent Rather Than Downsizing
- Reusing Structures Rather Than Reorganizing

The result is a thoughtful, practical book that may act as a valuable antidote to the changeaholics whose nostrums can lead to repetitive change syndrome in their dazed

organizations, which soon become resistant to all efforts to transform them.

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**Signor Marconi’s Magic Box: The Most Remarkable Invention of the 19th Century and the Amateur Inventor Whose Genius Sparked a Revolution**

By Gavin Weightman

Da Capo Press, 2003

312 pages, \$25

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With a wireless revolution now well under way in the computing world, *Signor Marconi’s Magic Box*, by filmmaker and journalist Gavin Weightman, is a timely look back at the origins of the original wireless technology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Guglielmo Marconi was the product of an Italian father and an Irish mother. He showed a fascination with all things electrical at an early age, read the scientific journals of the day, and experimented in the attic of his father’s villa. By his early 20s, he had a working system for the wireless transmission of Morse code and had demonstrated the feasibility of an entirely new technology. The news of his breakthrough captured the imagination of the public and investors alike. Marconi soon had his own company, which was financed by his mother’s network of contacts, and secured the patents worldwide that allowed him to carry on with his experiments.

It is surprising to learn just how little Marconi knew about the theory of radio waves and why his invention worked: He proceeded intuitively, scaling up the size of the equipment to massive proportions to transmit messages over longer distances. Progress was rarely smooth: Just as is the case today, there were

puzzling losses of signal followed by equally mysterious reconnections. But the new medium received regular publicity boosts as radio began to figure prominently in the broadcast of spectacular news events, such as the rescue in 1912 of the survivors of the *Titanic* shipwreck.

Unfortunately, Marconi's gift for science and entrepreneurship had no counterpart in politics, and until his death in 1937, he was a supporter and friend of Benito Mussolini. This lively book does a fine job recounting Marconi's life and work.

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### **How to Advertise: Building Brands and Business in the New Marketing World**

By Kenneth Roman, Jane Maas, and Martin Nisenholtz  
Thomas Dunne Books, 2003  
268 pages, \$24.95

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This third edition of a classic aimed at generalist users and creators of advertising services is written in the tradition of David Ogilvy's *Confessions of an Advertising Man*. The authors (Kenneth Roman is former chairman and CEO of Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide; Jane Maas is chairman emeritus of Earle Palmer Brown; Martin Nisenholtz is CEO of New York Times Digital) acknowledge their debt to David Ogilvy and his philosophy of research, results, creative brilliance, and professional discipline. *How to Advertise* is organized in two parts: "What to Say — and Where to Say It" and "Getting the Message Out."

The style is succinct and to the point: "Advertising is the art of delivering a sales proposition in an attention-getting, involving vehicle and positioning the product uniquely in the consumer's mind."

The book is also well organized with short chapters and multiple headings and checklists.

The biggest change that has occurred since the previous (1992) edition is, of course, the emergence of the Internet. Although the predictions of the demise of "advertising as we know it" have proved premature, the Internet is having a significant impact (albeit as an enabling technology, not a disruptive one). The authors emphasize the continuity of the Web with other advertising media and the need to integrate the messages into an overall brand strategy.

If you want to catch up on the state of the art in thinking about advertising, you can't do better than using *How to Advertise*.

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### **Fortune Favors the Bold: What We Must Do to Build a New and Lasting Global Prosperity**

By Lester Thurow  
HarperCollins, 2003  
340 pages, \$26.95

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A good deal has been written about globalization and the fate of the world economy from many perspectives — those of economists and financiers, ethicists and anticapitalists. What Lester Thurow, the Jerome and Dorothy Lemelson Professor of Management and Economics at MIT, adds to the debate with *Fortune Favors the Bold* is a provocative analysis of the problems globalization has created and pungent prescriptions for public policy change.

Professor Thurow sees globalization as an "economic Tower of Babel being built without construction plans" — the outcome of a complex interplay of technologies that gives corporations significantly

greater freedom to locate their operations and support functions in countries where they can minimize their costs of production. The resulting dislocation of people and communities is just one of the more visible and disturbing aspects of globalization. Although there is no conscious plan for globalization and its progress seems inexorable, Professor Thurow suggests that its trajectory can be shaped. The result, however, is unlikely to be a smooth curve. Crashes and crises are endemic to capitalism, in his view, a product of its volatile genetic mix of "greed, optimism, and the herd mentality."

Professor Thurow identifies several sources of current and future economic instability related to globalization, and suggests bold ways to deal with them. One problem is the inability of Japan to clear the rubble left by its economic meltdown in the late 1990s. Professor Thurow's solution is to liquidate the firms and write off the debts, with the Japanese taxpayer picking up the bill. Another problem looms in the U.S. balance-of-payments crisis and the inevitable fall in the value of the dollar. The risks in the speed of this change, suggests Professor Thurow, can be counteracted only by bold action — reflation in the economies of Japan and the European Community. Another threat is the absence of clear, worldwide intellectual property rights: Here he advocates a vigorous campaign on the part of the U.S. to enforce a new global system of such rights that deals with multiple, often conflicting needs — the need both for cheap drugs to fight malaria and AIDS in Africa, for example, and for pharmaceutical firms to earn high enough returns to develop new medicines. +