

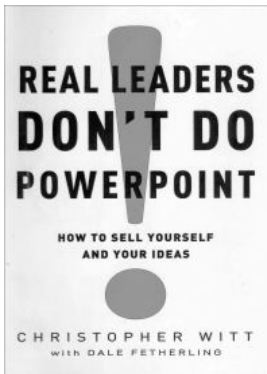


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# Corporate self-help books sprout from seeds of economic woe

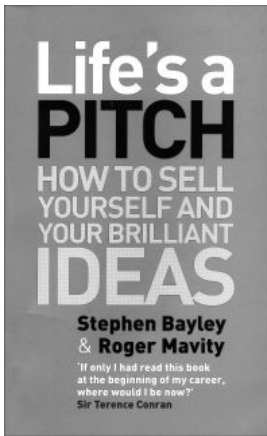
By STEVE PROCTOR  
Sun, May 10 - 7:39 AM



A recent article in Time Magazine identified ten trends that will shape the world over the next decade. To the surprise of many, the re-emergence of work tops the list.

The argument was that while the economy was good for the last couple of generations, people took work for granted. Lose your job? Don't worry; there are five eager employers down the street? Hate your boss? Quit and start your own business.

Instead of work, what became valued over the last 40 years was consumption: buying the biggest house, having the nicest car or going on a more nicer vacation than your neighbour.



Now with the mortgage crisis reducing the value of some homes in the U.S. below their mortgage costs, Hummers and gas guzzling SUV's sidelined by skyrocketing fuel prices and companies slashing workers to stay afloat, the value of a good job has become an asset worthy of recognition.

The publishing world saw the trend. During the last four months a startling number of books on finding work and learning the skills to climb the corporate ladder have been released, or revised and re-released.

One of the best self-help workbooks to come across my desk as business editor recently is called **Life's a Pitch**, by Stephen Bayley and Roger Mavity (Corgi Books, 2008, 300 pages). First published in Great Britain in 2007, it only recently made its North

American debut.

It is a chatty, easy-to-read guide that tells you how to package what you say and do in a way that will get you noticed. It's witty and clever without being irreverent. When you are reading it, it's like a friend pulling you aside and saying, "you know, you're really smart, but nobody knows that because they're all staring at the stain on your shirt. Go change your shirt."

It offers many easy to follow tips about interviews, running meetings and managing unenthusiastic staff. It even gives tips on how to get a date with that girl who seems beyond your grasp.

Do not miss the hilarious, insightful, two-page fictional interviews at the back with the likes of Niccolo Machiavelli and Sigmund Freud.

**Real Leaders Don't Do PowerPoint** (Crown Publishing Group, 2009, 244 pages) shares the same focus as Pitch, but is focused on leadership and presentations. It makes the point

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that real leaders don't speak just to provide information. They speak to promote a vision. If you want to be a leader, speak in ways that change how people feel and act.

One of the best ways to position yourself as a leader, according to the book, is to speak like a leader. Don't indulge in gossip or embellish a tale for dramatic impact. Speak when you have something to say; listen when you don't. Tailor your messages to who you are and what you believe.

The book is filled with stories about presentations gone awry, involving everyone from Rev. Billy Graham to former U.S. president Richard Nixon. It lauds Oprah's style of listening, speaking conversationally, promoting timeless values and stressing what she has in common with the audience.

**Greater Than Yourself** (Extreme Leadership Inc., 2009, 168 pages) is a leadership book with a twist. Rather than focusing on specific self-help strategies, it uses a fictitious set of events to underscore its thesis that the purpose of leadership is to help others grow and develop.

The parable format may appeal to some fiction readers, but for the entrepreneur looking for lessons to take away quickly and easily; it may not be the right book. That said, it is a short book and is easy to read.

**She Inc.** (Insomniac Press, 2008, 282 pages) is a much more serious tome, with a little bit of a financial edge. Written by financial expert Kelley Keehn in the first person, it tries to help women see themselves as corporations and their employer and colleagues as clients. It promises to help want-to-be entrepreneurs increase their effectiveness and fast track whatever career path they've chosen.

This is not a book you can simply read. There are worksheets where the author makes you calculate your debt ratio, list your bad spending habits and identify the personality types you most like working with. It is, in my opinion, geared for women just getting into the workforce or considering opening their own business.

**Think Again** (Harvard Business School Press, 2009, 236 pages) is the most scholarly of this group of books. Published by Harvard Business School Press, it describes why brain processes can "trick" seasoned professionals into making bad decisions based on good evidence.

Decisions are the lifeblood of any organization and the authors contend that by understanding how decisions are processed by the brain, leaders can make decisions that are less vulnerable to error.

A little dry, and with more references to research studies than other corporate books, Think Again identifies four red flags that lead to errors in judgment and suggests safeguards that can be put in place to avoid making them.

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Steve Proctor is Business Editor. He freelanced this review.

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