

Book Review

Catalyst - The ultimate strategies on how to win at work and in life

Author - Chandramouli Venkatesan

Publisher - Penguin Random House India 2018

Reviewed by

M. Viswanathan, Professor, MBA Department
Acharya Bangalore B School

About the Author

Chandramouli Venkatesan is an industry veteran with over 26 years of corporate experience. He has worked in some of the leading companies such as Asian Paints, Cadbury, Onida and Pidilite. He has held very senior positions in these companies and in some cases been at the helm of affairs as CEO or Managing Director. There was a three year period in his career when he did a stint as HR head for Cadbury India which further developed his understanding of what makes people successful. He is a keen golfer and sports enthusiast and believes in holding his career and personal life in balance.

Essence of the book

Many people have the ingredients for success, but they mistakenly assume that just the presence of these will guarantee success. Unfortunately, that is not the case; it needs a catalyst which comes in the form of specific actions and efforts.

Introduction

The theme in the introduction of the book is "Success Needs a Catalyst" where the author encourages managers to introspect their careers and identify areas that would give maximum ROI (Return on Investment) in terms of creating impact and maximum satisfaction and advises them to relentlessly pursue in that direction.

The book is divided into three parts where the author advocates self development of the individuals in the three stages.

Part 1

The author emphasizes on real individual growth through right skill development taking into account those factors in the environment that can act as tailwinds in pushing one's career forward. In doing so, the individuals have to recognize catalysts or factors in the work and industry environments that can enhance their experience, bring in higher productivity, imbibe values, maximize learning cycles, and improve personal productivity.

Part 2

In this part, the author warns managers about growing too fast in the first half of their careers and suffering a burnout in the second half, resulting in many health issues affecting the individuals. The author, therefore, advocates preserving some of the vital energy for the second half of one's career as he emphasizes that more significant career achievements often occur in the second half of one's career. At this stage, he advises managers to look at their bosses and mentors as catalysts in order to derive inputs for their career development. He further advocates that the reason for quitting a company should not be based on longevity of service in the company but on what this service is doing to one's career - is it developing or moving towards reaching a plateau?.

Part 3

Here the author looks at the other general aspects of an individual's personal life and reiterates the importance of life acting as a catalyst at work which

integrates the values, beliefs, integrity and other human characteristics that one brings daily to work. The author is of the opinion that these 'life characteristics' have a huge impact on how successful a person is at work. The next point the author advocates is 'passionate striving' along with human values to act as a catalyst for success that would have a tremendous impact on the leadership qualities of the individuals. Finally, the author concludes that all the factors that an individual recognizes in his work environment which can act as catalysts needs to be integrated together for a successful career development.

Conclusion

In the rapidly changing business world, it is not possible to offer a single solution for career development of individual managers. This book at best, provides a foundation for newly joined managers to look for catalysts in their work environment that can aid in their career development. For experienced managers, the book gives an opportunity to review their career journeys and helps in taking appropriate decisions in their respective careers.