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Intelligence for technology business people



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Leading Geeks: How to Manage and Lead People Who Deliver Technology

Author: *Paul Glen*

Publisher: Jossey Bass
Wiley

Price: £17.15
ISBN: 0787961485



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Everyone knows the stereotype: pizza-eating, coke-swilling, socially inept hygiene-challenged, sci-fi loving geeks; they cannot and will not fit in with corporate culture, will laugh at a manager that tries to pull rank, use their technology knowledge to make others feel inferior.

Leading Geeks provides beleaguered managers, who wonder why their standard management techniques do not work on these 'knowledge workers' with both insight into the psyche and a new range of techniques to cope with this apparently alien group of (largely) software developers. It also dispels a few of these stereotypes in the process.

At times, it is an almost-anthropological text, detailing the many apparent differences between the rules and mindset of 'normal' society and the geek sub-tribe; it also explains how the apparently egalitarian geek society has its own hierarchy and politics that can be understood and moulded. The book's author, consultant Paul Glen, does this without delving into the jargon of either management or psychology, so the book is refreshingly easy to read.

In some ways, Glen paints a frightening picture for any prospective manager of geeks, describing a group of people who are cynical, quick to judge, poorly equipped for the business (and social) world and generally unresponsive to standard incentives such as pay rises, promotions and greater responsibility.

However, this portrayal is never judgmental and is informed through experience and insight into the value systems that make geeks this way. And Glen - a self-confessed geek - is quick to dismiss those stereotypes of Dungeons and Dragons-playing 'losers'. He also points out that the qualities he describes are necessary for the work such developers are asked to perform, and so are hardly altogether negative traits.

Fortunately, the book provides practical advice on how to manage this crea

group. This advice is far more specific than that given in most management books, building on the information it has developed, rather than creating a new, overarching theory of management whose application in the real-world left as an exercise for the reader.

Not all the advice offered will be palatable or even appropriate for many managers. In the UK, many executives are almost as cynical as their geek charges, so Glen's suggestion of "telling stories" as part of a team bonding exercises will not be picked up universally. Nevertheless, his ideas on how to help managers understand geeks better, and also to get geeks to understand business better, are sure to receive an attentive hearing.

The book's title is probably its main letdown. 'Geek' is far more of a pejorative term in the UK than in the US, where 'geek pride' has taken hold. And it also suggests that programmers are the main topic rather than the wider category of technology staff and 'knowledge workers' that the book actually addresses.

As such it is a book that can be applied to the management of any group of creative people - no matter how estranged they are from corporate mores.

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