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Must-Read Books for Surface Finishers

The successful surface finishing manager of the future will:

A) Display a keen understanding of how the manufacturing economy and surface finishing industry evolve. B) Have the guts to boldly lead his operation in the strategic direction that best capitalizes

on this evolution. C) Possess the ability to focus his team on the areas of his business that will have the most positive impact on his strategic plan. D) Keep his head screwed on straight and maintain a healthy perspective as the pace of commerce accelerates and the world changes around him.

The following four books, then, should be required reading for the surface finishing manager of the future:

***Innovation: The Five Disciplines for Creating What Customers Want* by Curtis R. Carlson & William W. Wilmot**

This book's authors are the driving forces behind SRI International—the innovators responsible for the computer mouse, HDTV, and voice recognition technology, to name just a few. The book introduces “Exponential Economy,” essentially the concept that many products in industries such as computing, telecommunications, and medical equipment double in price-performance (what you get for what you pay) every 12–18 months.

The authors expound further to explain that this rate of change doesn't just affect these industries, it affects everything. I contend that those finishers that fail to embrace and adapt to the rapid rate of change in many of the market segments we service and in the technology available to us are doomed to be passed by. The first step to embracing change is to face the fact that it is taking place. Innovation helped me to do just that.

***The Monk and the Riddle: The Education of a Silicon Valley Entrepreneur* by Randy Komisar**

What could a book about a fictional Silicon Valley start-up whose business model involves selling funeral caskets online possibly have to do with surface finishing? The answer is this: If the book *Innovation* can help us anticipate the future, *The Monk and the Riddle* prepares us to take the risks we must take in

order for our surface finishing operations to succeed in the future. On the topic of risk-taking, Komisar submits that “Failure is inevitable if you are trying to invent the future,” and “Instead of managing business risk to minimize or avoid failure, the focus here (in Silicon Valley) is on maximizing success... failure is an unavoidable part of the search for success.”

There is a great lesson here for managers in our industry. If a surface finishing manager is to have the fortitude to move his operation boldly into the future, he must also be willing to accept failure as a possible outcome or he will never take the brave steps necessary to succeed.

***It's Not Luck* by Eliyahu M. Goldratt**

Many manufacturing managers are familiar with *The Goal*, Goldratt's prequel to *It's Not Luck*. *The Goal* details Goldratt's “Theory of Constraints” through the telling of a story centered on the life of fictional protagonist Alex Rogo. While *The Goal* garnered much more acclaim in management circles than did *It's Not Luck*, I found the latter contains even more practical and simple-to-apply lessons.

As an example, hanging on the conference room wall in our office is a 2 ½ by 5 ½ foot sheet of paper covered with sixty-two Post-It notes. On each Post-It note our management team identified a UDE (Undesirable Effect), examples of which are shipping orders late, and chemical consumption variances.

We then identified causes of the UDEs, and then the causes of the causes, on other Post-It notes. Next we placed the notes in order of cause and effect. As predicted by Goldratt in *It's Not Luck*, we were able to trace all of our UDEs back to a handful of root causes which, once corrected, would solve the UDEs. The surface finishing manager of the future must focus his team on the areas that will have the highest degree of impact. Some excellent tools for doing so can be found in *It's Not Luck*.

***Million Dollar Habits* by Robert J. Ringer**

Inside the tattered front flap of my copy of *Million Dollar Habits* is an inscription that reads “Matt K – Merry Christmas 1998.” This message is followed by the signature of a close business associate. What an awesome Christmas gift this book turned out to be!

Ringer contends that success does not require superior intelligence or gifts, formal schooling, or even, necessarily, hard work. He argues instead that success is determined by one's ability to faithfully and consistently practice the habits of Reality, Attitude, Perspective, Present Living, Morality,

Human Relations, Simplicity, Drain People Elimination (a personal favorite), Self-Discipline and Action.

The lightning-fast pace at which surface finishers move day-in and day-out leaves us prone to losing sight of the overall direction in which we need to move our businesses. Whenever I feel as though I need a bit of perspective or that we are beginning to wander somewhat as an organization, a review of *Million Dollar Habits* quickly gets me back on track.

Predicting the future, taking calculated risks, focusing your management team and managing your mind to stay on course. Are you ready to formulate your plan for future success in our industry?

Get reading!



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