

'CliffsNotes' Book Club Recap

DO YOU LOVE BOOKS ON LEADERSHIP, NEUROSCIENCE, AND BUSINESS, BUT NOT HAVE TIME TO READ ALL THE BOOKS?

Join the '**CliffsNotes' club**—where there's no pressure to pre-read the book, no membership required, no cost, and lots of discussion in just 90 minutes. Each month, you will hear a **summary of highlights** from a recently-published business book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. We'll keep you "in the know" on the latest and greatest concepts and models. **Register here** for upcoming events.



June 2024

The Friction Project:

How Smart Leaders Make the Right Things Easier and the Wrong Things Harder

By Robert Sutton and Huggy Rao

Discussion Highlights

Presented by Laura Mendelow

Overview

- Friction = “The forces that make it harder, slower, more complicated, or downright impossible to get things done in an organization”
- Why and when friction is destructive, useful or a little of both – **You need the gas and the brakes**
- How to think and live like a “friction fixer”
 - o I am accountable for friction fixing, and so are you
 - o We are trustees of how people spend their time (employees', customers', and citizens' time)
 - o Friction fixing is a craft that we learn, practice, develop, teach, and spread to others
- Too Much Friction
 - o Hawaii Pacific Health records system was too complicated. Implemented GROSS (Getting Rid of Stupid Stuff program)
 - o Healthcare CEO wrote complicated wordy emails that no one read. Nickname Dr. TLDR (too long didn't read)
 - o Michigan Department of HHS – benefits form with more than 1000 questions, 42 pages
 - o 300,000 hours / year preparing for weekly ExCom meetings
 - o Parkinson's Law (1957): “coefficient of inefficiency” – “Once a committee grows to more than 8 members, it becomes less efficient with each new member added, becomes useless once it hits twenty.”

- Not Enough Friction
 - o Sending “reply-all” emails
 - o Children ordering products from Alexa
 - o Google Glass prototype – overconfident leaders
 - o Creative processes (e.g., Pixar)
 - o Dutch supermarket – “Slow checkout lanes”
 - o Labor of Love (e.g., IKEA, Betty Crocker) – the more we suffer, the more we value it

Elements of Friction Fixing

- A Trustee of Others' Time (e.g., Rohm and Haas implemented “Five Voices method” to slow down for important decisions (customer, employee, owner, community, and the process, e.g., BlueCross Blue Shield of Massachusetts made it more difficult for physicians to prescribe opioids)
 1. It's like Mowing the Lawn
 2. Organizations are Malleable Prototypes – treat organizations as imperfect and unfinished prototypes
 3. Celebrate and reward Doers, Not Posers
 4. Focus on Fixing Things, not Who to Blame
 5. Honor People Who Avert Friction Fiascoes, Not Just Firefighters (proactive)
- Friction Forensics: The easy way or the hard way
 - Is it the right – or wrong – thing for you to do?
 - Do you have enough skill and will to do it well?
 - Is failure cheap, safe, reversible, and instructive?
 - Is delay wasteful, cruel or downright dangerous?
 - Are people already overloaded, exhausted, and burned out?
 - Does it require people to work alone or together?
 - Will reducing friction for some make it harder for others? (paraphrasing)
 - Is the human and financial toll worthwhile? (paraphrasing)
- How friction fixers do their work: The Help Pyramid (Dealing with the symptoms of friction)
 - Reframing (helping others reframe as less daunting and distressing)
 - Navigating (helping other find the best path through the system)
 - Shield (deflecting and absorbing friction troubles)
 - Neighborhood Design and Repair
 - System Design and Repair

The Friction Traps: Intervention Points for Friction Fixers

- Oblivious Leaders: Overcoming power poisoning
 - Privilege that spares you from the hassles, humiliations, and barriers heaped on everyone else...**absence of inconvenience** (John Amaechi, NBA player). They're oblivious or downplay the emotional and financial costs.
 - Belief that because you are powerful and a connected insider, you automatically know everything that matters about your organization.

- Selfishness. People who are puffed up with self-importance are prone to devote little attention to the burden they inflict on others, and to care little about the plight of people with less privilege.
 - As a result...
 - Executive Magnification – pursue leaders instructions more forcefully than intended
 - Multiplication Madness – don't realize or care about the burden they place on others
 - Decision Amnesia – revisiting and reversing tough decisions made during a team meeting. Patty McCord, Netflix's Chief talent officer asks, "Have we made any decision in the room today, and if we have, how are we going to communicate them?"
 - Cookie Licking – taking resources, projects, and decisions away from others
 - Sham Participation – pretend that others input matters
 - Hurting by Trying to Help – some leaders with expertise and power may not have the ability to help, so their sincere efforts to help end up backfiring.
 - Antidotes to Cluelessness
 - Less Transmission, more reception (Talk less, listen more) – don't be a hippo; be an elephant
 - Ride Along, Help, and Do the Work
 - Downward Deference
 - Flex the Hierarchy
 - Mark Templeton, former CEO of Citrix, "You have to make sure you never confuse the hierarchy that you need for managing complexity with the respect that people deserve." (i.e., low on hierarchy does not equal low respect)
 - Addition Sickness: Putting the subtraction mindset to work
 - Good Riddance Reviews
 - Identify "stupid stuff" (and "green tape" – effective rules)
 - Figure out the value and cost of your meetings
 - Measure the burdens imposed by performance measurement
 - Catalog sources of email overload
 - Observe and interview users
 - Build a journey map
 - Try a perfectionism audit
 - Broken Connections: On preventing coordination snafus
 - Powerful people ignore, dismiss, denigrate, and even undermine people and groups they need to mesh their work with
 - Powerful people devote little attention to solutions for coordination problems
 - Coordination Neglect – fixate on parts of the organization and ignore how the parts ought to work together
- Strategies
- Ask, "Do people get ahead by doing great work AND helping others succeed?"
 - Encourage "Learn-it-all's" not "know-it-all's"
 - Leaders to squelch "bad behaviors" when interactions turn nasty or wasted time
 - Turn goals into "hot causes" to emphasize shared anger or pride

- Onboard people to the organization, not just the job
- Get up close and personal with people who make the system tick (Home Depot p.166)
- Good stories stoke coordination
- Build roles and teams dedicated to integration
- Fix handoffs
- Coordinate on the fly
-
- Jargon Monoxide: On the drawbacks and (Limited) virtues of hollow and impenetrable babble
 - Convoluted Crap
 - Meaningless Bullshit
 - In-Group Lingo
 - Jargon Mishmash Syndrome
- Fast and Frenzied: When and how to apply good friction
 - Burnout
 - Selfishness
 - Bullying
 - Bad Decisions
 - Kills Creativity
- Hitting the brakes
 - Pause to start Right
 - Ask questions that make people stop to think
 - Where's your Times Square?
 - Do a relaunch
 - Use friction to create a cadence
 - Communicate a lot or not at all
 - Take time to end things right

Other Publications by the Same Authors

- [Scaling Up Excellence](#) (Book)
- "How Bosses Waste Their Employees' Time" (The Wall Street Journal)
- "Too Many Teams, Too Many Bosses" (Gallup.com)
- "Our To-Do-Lists Can't Grow Forever. It's Time to Try Subtraction" (Times Higher Education)
- "Why Your Job is Becoming Impossible to Do" and "How do You End a Meeting?" (LinkedIn)
- "Meeting Overload is a Fixable Problem" (Harvard Business Review)

About the Book Club In this monthly club, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, neuroscience, or coaching. Membership is not required, and there's no obligation to pre-read the book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For the full set of discussion summaries, [click here](#).