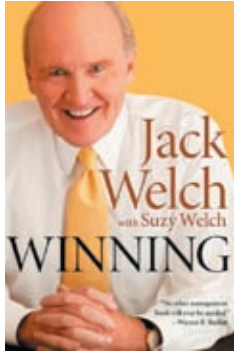


In transit, our ever-so-slightly messianic business traveller **Callum Laing** finds a quiet corner of the airport lounge in which to review some inspiring corporate titles.

**Winning, by Jack Welch, Suzy Welch (Harper Business)**



Jack Welch was one of a relatively new breed of celebrity CEOs in the 1990s: Not a hotshot 20-something from a sexy ‘paradigm-shifting’ new dot-com, but a 50-something head of a decidedly un-sexy old economy conglomerate called General Electric (GE). But the media were hungry for business heroes, and a man voted CEO of the year for consecutive years by other global CEOs was impossible to ignore.

I read his autobiography *Jack* in late 2000 when I was starting up my first business. Although not inspiring in the vein of entrepreneur start-ups like Bill Gates or Richard Bransen (Welch was always a corporate man), his easy-to-read style of writing combined with amazing experience and clear-sighted lessons left a huge impression on me.

Since that time, a raft of books about “Jack” or co-written by him have come out, none of which I’d read until someone sent me a copy of *Winning*. The premise of the book is straightforward and interesting. Having retired from GE after a highly distinguished career, Welch has done the lucrative speaker circuit; the essence of this book was distilled from hundreds of Q & A sessions.

Each chapter addresses key management concerns such as *Vision*, *Crisis Management*, *People* and even *Work Life Balance*. While certain chapters may not bear much relevance to your own business situation the book is definitely one to be read in its entirety before returning to specific topics. And if reading your average business book can feel like wading through treacle as the author struggles to support every point with dull data, Welch’s straightforward, no-nonsense style is ever refreshing. What he brings to the book is an ability to see past the fog of irrelevance that often clouds business issues. (That’s not to say he over simplifies; in fact, he is critical of those who do.)

The clincher is the stories he uses to illustrate his points. Generally speaking, authors of business books employ illustrative stories in one of two ways: They either use big-name examples (“Coco-Cola’s failed attempt at New Coke”; “Nike’s use of sweat shops”) that are too assuming and generic to be insightful; or, they rely on studies about smaller companies familiar to them, which, though insightful, are too isolated to warrant effective conclusions.

Neither of these criticisms can be levelled at Jack Welch. The examples he sites are all ones that have been in the business pages (if not the front page) of our daily papers, yet the insights he gives are those of someone who was actually present and at the heart of it. He has the candour and willingness to identify his mistakes and say what he would do differently, given the chance. And even where his examples are unrelated to GE businesses, Welch maintains a high standard of detail and insight. (Remember, this is a man who counts former presidents and top global CEOs as his golfing buddies.)

Warren Buffet, one of the most respected business investors in the world, is quoted on the front cover as saying, “No other management book will ever be needed.” While I think that does great disservice to the many other great management books out there, *Winning* is a book that, if you have any interest in furthering your career or in succeeding in business, should be close to your desk.

**Asia’s Star Brands, by Paul Temporal (Wiley)**


Branding is a fuzzy concept, and hard to nail down. It is synonymous with level of service, values and differentiation. Perhaps it is for this reason that as the West strives toward service and knowledge-based economies, and as the East gobbles up the manufacturing side of things, branding in Asia has remained pretty low key.

Until now, that is: Asia’s markets and businesses have become increasingly global in recent years, inspiring business writers like Paul Temporal to identify the rising stars and look at the how’s and why’s of their success.



Temporal’s studies span many sectors and countries: from Red Bull to Raffles, and from Samsung to the city of Shanghai. And while every case is informative for anyone with any interest in brand strategy, some in particular provide intriguing insight, and hint at the high level of access granted to Temporal. For this reason alone it deserves a place on the bookshelf of anyone with any interest in business and branding.

One draw back is that with rising star companies, it is too early to make conclusions (a fact admitted by the author) about their strategies and successes. However, Temporal’s extensive knowledge of Asian business allows for comparisons to past brands or Western brands trying similar strategies.

From all this comes a clear message: in order for customers to fully experience a brand, the company behind it must let its personality shine through. 

*All titles reviewed on this page are available from Kinokuniya: kinokuniya.com.*