

Partners in Learning
Learning to Lead Change: Building System Capacity
Leadership for Change Library

The Southwest Airlines Way: Using the Power of Relationships to Achieve High Performance
Jody Hoffer Gittel
New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005
320 pages

As with Liker's book on Toyota, Gittel does a great job of getting inside an organizational culture and explaining how and why it has achieved sustained annual economic success over 30 years in the volatile airline industry. The "secret ingredient" that accounts for the success is Southwest's ability to build and sustain high performance relationships among managers, employees, unions, and suppliers.

The four success factors were: leadership, culture, strategy and coordination. Leadership focused on creating relationships which developed shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect. A culture of diversity, inclusiveness and team play dominates. The strategy specializes in quick turnaround with high levels of coordination. Everyone identifies with performance and sharing in success; and with quick problem-solving communication. As with so many of our books, a commitment to solving problems as they occur is basic to all action-oriented cultures.

Southwest's 10 practices for building high performance relationships have predictable overlap with Toyota's 14 principles:

1. Lead with credibility and caring
2. Invest in front line leadership
3. Hire and train for relational competence
4. Use conflicts to build relationships
5. Bridge the work/family divide
6. Create boundary spanners
7. Measure performance broadly
8. Keep jobs flexible at the boundaries
9. Make unions your partners
10. Build relationships with suppliers

These 10 practices produce 'relational coordination' resulting in "quality performance" and "efficiency performance".

Gittel closes with guidelines for implementing the 10 practices to create high performance relationships in your organization.

Why We Like This Book

Everyone can relate to Airlines, their performance and how they relate to passengers. This book compares Airlines by name showing how much better Southwest is on every dimension - customer satisfaction, lost baggage, on time flights, low cost airfares. The 10 practices make sense in combination. Once again we see hard, focused work to establish cultures of relationships which mobilize people's investments to achieve high performance and gratification from team work and success.



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