

Review of *Squirrel Inc. : A Fable of Leadership through Storytelling*

Author: Stephen Denning

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Reviewer: Dr. John P. Girard

Seldom does a fable capture the attention of organizational leaders around the globe, but that is exactly what has happened with Steve Denning's new book entitled *Squirrel Inc. : A Fable of Leadership through Storytelling*. Denning is an acclaimed organizational storyteller, who reinvigorated interest in the ancient craft of storytelling when he was director of Knowledge Management at the World Bank.

Squirrel, Inc is the story about a company operated by a dray of squirrels. An innovative young executive doe comes up with the *nutty* idea to transform the company from a nut burying company to a nut storing company. Of course such revolutionary change is not accomplished without great debate, emotion, fear, and a myriad of stories; all of which Denning chronicles in a witty, yet educational manner.

Denning suggests that seven unique types of stories exist – each is suited for a different task. He brilliantly illustrates each category of story through the cast of *Squirrel, Inc*. Readers will witness squirrels telling tales to achieve organizational goals including: using mockery to defeat rumors; sparking action through springboard stories; communicating corporate ideals; nurturing collaboration (not a straightforward chore in the cutthroat nut business); sharing

knowledge and leading people – well actually squirrels – into the future.

Though some dismiss storytelling as mere recreation best left to the community libraries and children's bedrooms, Denning reminds us that storytelling is serious business. A well told story might be a catalyst for change; however, not surprisingly an unrehearsed or poorly delivered narrative often results in disappointment.

Like many classic fables, *Squirrel, Inc* is an easy read; however, it includes some extremely important messages about leadership, change, knowledge sharing and organizational life in general. All too often we forget that there are a number of ways to learn; Denning's creative style reminds us that learning can and should be enjoyable.

Overall *Squirrel, Inc* is a great work; it is imaginative, interesting, intriguing, and impressive, but best of all, it is a great story with which most organizational leaders will associate. Readers will identify with the cast of storytellers, including: Diana, the energetic executive; Whyse, the communicator extraordinaire; Mocha, the rumor slayer; Hester, the king of collaboration; Mark, the value transmitter; Howe, the knowledge sharer; Sandra, the skilful futurist; and the ultimate raconteur who is, of course, the local barkeep.

Take a break from the countless over-complicated books littering the knowledge management domain and read this great story about leadership in action. Denning's fable is a first class work, which will be of interest to all organizational leaders and particularly those involved in change or transformation initiatives.