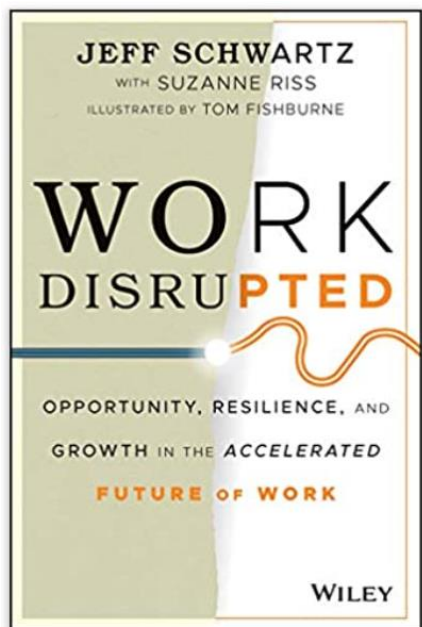




Book Review



Work Disrupted: Opportunity, Resilience, and Growth in the Accelerated Future of Work

By Jeff Schwartz with Suzanne Riss, Tom Fishburne (Illustrator). Wiley, 2021.

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There is no doubt that the global COVID-19 pandemic has and is still affecting nearly every aspect of our daily lives, not to mention, the way we work. Before the pandemic began, “in survey after survey, business leaders consistently reported they did not feel ready for the future of work” (p. 2), but then the pandemic happened and “an abrupt fast-forward to the future of work” (p. 2) is taking place. The book, “*Work Disrupted: Opportunity, Resilience, and Growth in the Accelerated Future of Work*”, written by Jeff Schwartz with Suzanne Riss and illustrated by Tom Fishburne, could not come at a better time, when everything about work as we know it, is drastically changing. The author presents the coronavirus pandemic as a time “to reimagine how we work, our educational institutions, and how we build our careers, our companies, and our communities” (p. xix) and states that “adopting new mindsets and building new capabilities may be one of the critical challenges of our time” (p. xx). Schwartz provides more than just a theoretical book but rather a very thoughtfully organized guide for individuals, business leaders, and society, around three key areas: opportunity, resilience, and growth, to empower people at different levels and provide them with practical tips to shape what lies ahead and thrive, as we continue to navigate the journey into the future of work (p. 18).

“One of the paradoxes of robots, artificial intelligence (AI), and machine learning is that we want them to make our lives easier...but we are terrified they will one day replace us” (p. 24). Schwartz believes that AI as an opportunity “to augment workers, not replace them” (p. 27) while ensuring that new value is created instead of focusing solemnly on greater efficiency and cost savings. The author goes on to say that humans and machines “can complement one another’s strengths and counterbalance each other’s limitations” (p. 28) to create what is referred to as “Superminds”. Most importantly, the author states that embracing a “growth mindset” and

moving away from a “fixed mindset” is what “will be critical to workplace success in the future” (p. 35). For business leaders, there is an opportunity to provide job security and benefits to those who choose or have an alternative work arrangement such as freelancers, self-employed and independent contractors, rather than a full-time traditional job (p. 49). “The many long held assumptions about work” were turned on their head as we sheltered at home and provided an opportunity to transform the way we work (p. 52). According to Schwartz, “technology has allowed us to explore the limits of space and workplaces” (p. 53) and this opportunity will just continue to evolve as new technologies, such as virtual offices, and virtual and augmented reality, continue to be enhanced. Technology will provide an opportunity to “really diversify our teams in lots of new and interesting ways because the access to jobs is going to be a lot broader than perhaps it’s ever been” (p. 53). At the same time, organizations will need to prioritize and rethink “how they build a strong culture and meaningful team connections” (p. 59) in order to “redesign remote work so that it can offer new ways to collaborate that are even more effective than before, integrated in our lives as we work anywhere, anytime” (p. 62).

The author suggests that “we all need to become lifelong learners, [and be] prepared to transform throughout our lives” in order to survive the future of work (p. 66). In other words, the linear career model where one gets an education, goes on to obtaining a job and stays at that same company until retirement will be obsolete (p. 66-67). Schwartz states that the future of work involves having 50-to-60-year careers, where “learning and work [occurs] simultaneously in the flow of our lives” (p. 67). “Reinvention will be the rule, not the exception” and “to thrive in our future world of work will require resilience” (p. 82). Schwartz points out that “organizations no longer need to be structured around control” (p. 85) and team-based thinking must be adopted so that employees can collaborate, not just across teams, but also across ecosystems, functions, the globe (p. 89), and equally important, along machines (p. 90). In order for organizations “to survive and thrive in the era of technological disruption...,[these] must be designed for agility, innovation, and customer centricity” (p. 91); organizations must change or will be forced to cease its business. Business leaders will also need to transform their management approaches and their relationships with technology in the new world of work, to inspire and engage employees (p.96), to “build [effective] teams, understand the implications of technology on business, adapt to the speed at which business is happening, operate at a high level and a low level simultaneously, and build trust across the organization to get things done (p. 104). In all of those changes, resilience at all levels will be a key to future success.

Perhaps, most compelling, the author provides three different sets of very useful key mindset shifts for individuals, business leaders, citizens and communities that offer the reader an opportunity to truly capture the essence of this book in short concise segments, along with action items that can help one adapt and grow to be better prepared for what the future of work holds and at the same time help us achieve those broader seven key mindset shifts. Because as Schwartz describes it, “this is not the time to leave matters to chance but to take deliberate action” (p. 12). Embedded throughout the book, the reader will also find humoristic cartoons depicting the ideas presented about the future of work, along with additional resources to help readers be better prepared for what lies ahead.

Overall, this book can be beneficial for leaders, employees, students, and just about anyone who engages in any industry type of work, and especially for those “facing critical staff shortages, such as the healthcare industry” (p. 30); for those seeking employment, or know that they will eventually be employed, since technology will or is already impacting the way work is done and there is no going back to pre-pandemic times.