

Beyond Survival

Beyond Survival, by Leon A. Danco. Cleveland, Ohio: The University Press, 1975. 187 pages, \$19.95 hardcover.

by Paul Hanke



Beyond Survival is about management for succession, i.e., the transfer of power in a family business from its founder to competent hands that will ensure future survival.

Leon Danco begins with a thumbnail sketch of the role of small entrepreneurs in the U.S. economy. He notes that 99 percent of all construction firms are in the hands of small entrepreneurs, so their success and survival are important in a broader economic context.

Danco offers a portrait of the typical small-business owner. He notes that this person often fails to share his knowledge and information with subordinates, a central theme of the book. He also traces the stages of

managing people, with the advice to share your knowledge, train your managers, and develop an organizational chart with clear job descriptions. Danco talks about managing money, finding competent advisors, and teamwork. Another chapter covers creating an effective board: Who should serve? How many? And what about responsibilities, payment, and meetings? Oddly, the six-page chapter devoted to time management focuses almost entirely on the importance of maintaining your health.

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small-business development and quips that 30 years of experience in a rapidly changing world may really amount to just ten years of experience learned three times!

Chapter 4 sketches who's who in the family-business structure, and the interrelationships. There is the son-in-law, always good or bad, never average, and the daughter ("as long as there is a son as successor, nobody really expects a daughter to do anything except inherit a portion of the stock," although, Danco notes, this may be changing). Among other things, he points out that family members are not necessarily competent to be in managerial positions.

Subsequent chapters are devoted to

of breaking your kids into the business, and the dangers of working for the family business. Danco's discussion of estate management is equally important.

I'm always somewhat skeptical of people whose main business seems to be selling their own books and seminars. On the other hand, *Business Week* magazine is quoted as calling Danco's organization (The Center for Family Business) "the leading consulting firm for family companies."

The focus of this book is on management *succession*, not on small-business *operation*. It's easy reading—breezy and supportive—but probably of limited appeal due to the specialized subject matter. ■

Subbing Work

How to Subcontract and Supervise Hired Personnel, by NAHB. National Association of Home Builders, 15th & M Sts., NW, Washington, DC 20005, 1978. 38 pages, \$5 members, \$6.25 nonmembers, plus \$2.50 postage and handling.

Before deciding whether to sub work out, ask yourself: "Can I adequately supervise my own crew? Do I enjoy it?" This publication from the NAHB contains important advice on the pros and cons of subbing work, and has tips on selecting subs—such as, check their credit rating, and watch a framing crew to see if they work well together.

The main focus of this pithy booklet is on supervising for quality. You'll learn why a working foreman isn't necessarily a good supervisor, what *does* make a good "supe," what motivates individual crew members,

and how to treat disciplinary problems promptly and fairly.

You will also pick up advice on how to handle common complaints regarding subs. The booklet suggests you give as much advance starting-date notice as you can to help avert no shows, have complete written specs, and make sure you get a full crew—not just one person—so your job will get done on schedule.

This is an informative and useful reference for anyone who has an expanding business or wants to improve his or her own supervisory skills or staff. ■

Architects & Residential Work

Designing Your Client's House, by Alfredo DeVido. New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1983: 206 pages, \$27.50 hardcover.

Many architects are shy about doing custom residential work, unless it's a luxury job or has publication potential. The reluctance is usually based on the assumption that they won't be able to make money on houses, even if their firm is otherwise profitable.

In the foreword to *Designing Your Client's House*, by Alfredo DeVido, Walter F. Wagner urges architects to do houses—even, "damnit," good, "properly detailed" Colonials. He notes that much costly client contact is involved in such jobs, and recommends DeVido's book to make the required client/architect/builder teamwork more effective.

DeVido is an award-winning architect who has designed more than 125 completed homes. He argues for residential design services but notes that good *design* is not enough—architects must also meet the client's needs and budget.

The architect's first job is to determine the client's needs for both shelter and design services, and whether these needs can be met within the proposed cost limits. DeVido also cautions designers to beware of "budget-busting ideas"—their own or the client's. He further recommends keeping drawings "simple and clear," and drawing to "builders' standards" wherever possible, a theme that recurs throughout the book.

Having sketched out how the program should enable the designer to know the client, site, builder, and budget, DeVido offers a compendium of cost-saving techniques for newcomers to residential work. These range from sitework (be sure to budget decks, etc., as an "extra"), using grids and modules, and choosing materials (avoid custom doors and windows if you can). As to structural systems, he recommends considering the infamous OVE techniques (a subject of much previous debate in these pages).

DeVido offers advice on project management and documents, finding the right contractor ("Have you worked with architects before? Do you mind working with them?"), and providing only what the contractor needs to know ("Draw no more than is necessary"). Cost-saving measures, such as putting specs on the drawings, are offered, along with the sanguine advice that "builders frequently have experience [that] architects lack."

Following this section, DeVido offers a portfolio of architect-designed homes for both private individuals and builders. Interesting projects include a split-level tract house improved with a few "unusual" features, an "experimental" builder's house, and one of Frank Lloyd Wright's houses, along with 32 ideas from the master. There are also houses by the author and other, more design-oriented, architects.

These projects are mostly for visual inspiration, but each one is analyzed for use of the cost-saving techniques mentioned earlier. The floor plans and photos are clear and sharp, but the few illustrations taken from construction drawings are virtually

illegible.

The book concludes with a final thumbnail analysis of how to make a profit. Here DeVido reviews various fee options (percentage versus lump sum versus hourly versus square-foot pricing), and discusses fee negotiation, tips for improving productivity, how to budget time during each phase—and when to walk away from a job.

I liked this book. I liked the houses and I learned a few things about managing a design practice. It's not an incredibly detailed look at business management practices, and it offers a lot of eyewash along with the practical advice. But it should provide a measure of support and encouragement for those unfamiliar with the vagaries of designing residences. ■