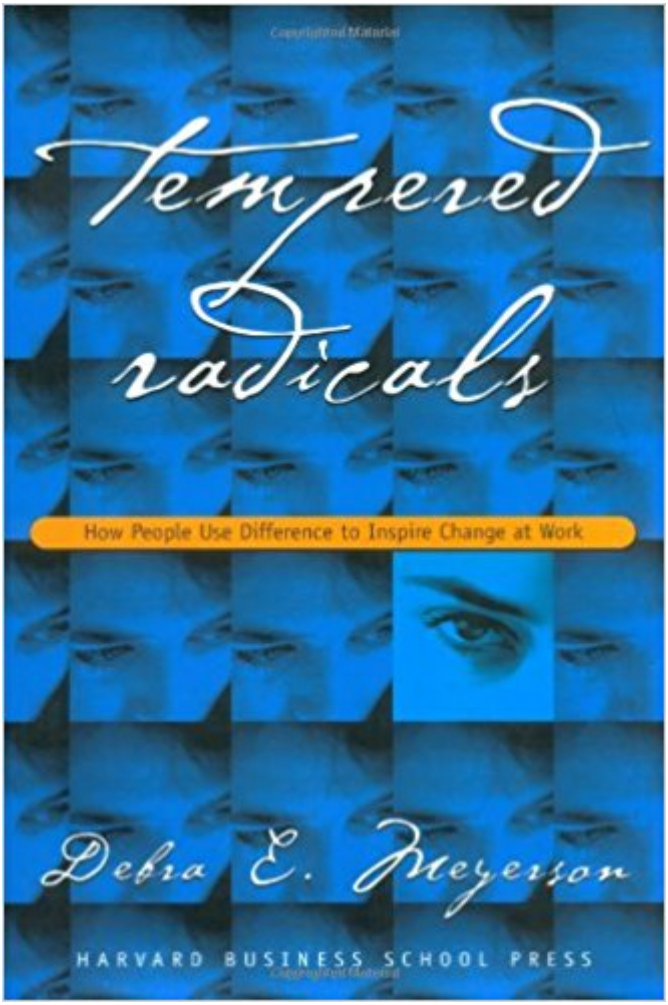
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Tempered Radicals: How People Use Difference To Inspire Change At Work



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Synopsis

Nearly all of us feel at odds with the organizations we work for at one time or another. Managers who are also parents struggle to succeed - and be there for their families - in companies that don't offer flextime. Women and people of color want to make their organizations better for others like themselves - without limiting their own career paths. Environmentally conscious workers seek to act on their values and climb the executive ladder at firms more concerned with profits than pollution. While many who don't 'fit in' with the corporate culture choose to assimilate or leave, "Tempered Radicals" offers an inspiring alternative. In this provocative book, Debra Meyerson argues that this tension-between expressing our 'whole selves' and building careers in companies that leave little room for differences-can pave the way for learning, leadership, and positive change in organizations. Based on fifteen years of research and observation, "Tempered Radicals" reveals that adaptive, diverse, family-friendly, and socially responsible workplaces are built not by revolutionaries but by those she calls 'tempered radicals' - people who successfully walk the tightrope between conformity and rebellion. Whereas 'untempered' radicals use drama and heroics to effect change, these individuals work toward transformational ends with incremental means; whereas radicals lead episodically, tempered radicals lead every day - with conviction, patience, and courage. Through stories of tempered radicals from doctors to teachers to CEOs to entrepreneurs, Meyerson illustrates how these 'everyday leaders' stick to their values, assert their agendas, and provoke learning and change without jeopardizing hard-won careers. Whether one's difference stems from race, gender, sexual orientation, values, beliefs, or social perspectives, this book presents a spectrum of effective responses to the pressure to conform that range from resisting quietly to leveraging 'small wins' to mobilizing others in legitimate but powerful ways. Putting self-realization and change within everyone's reach, this book shows how to turn threats to our identities into opportunities to make a positive difference in our companies and in the world. Debra E.Meyerson is visiting Professor of Organizational Behavior at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, and at the Center for Work, Technology, and Organization within Stanford's School of Engineering. She is also affiliated faculty at the Center for Gender in Organizations at the Simmons Graduate School of Management. She lives in Northern California.

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Customer Reviews

"Tempered radicals" may not sound like the type to start revolutions or topple corrupt governments, but in the corporate world, it is often these quiet change advocates that get the ball rolling and policies changing. In her thoughtful study of employees whose differences place them outside the mainstream organizational culture, Debra Meyerson uses this term for those who want to succeed in their organizations without compromising their ideological beliefs and personal lives. People who hope to "fit in without selling out" operate on a fault line, says Meyerson. While contributing to their companies' success, they support agendas that are often at odds with the dominant culture. This can involve their social identities, such as race, gender, or sexual orientation, or their philosophical values and beliefs, such as a concern for social justice, environmental sustainability, or family-friendly working conditions. They are not radicals in the sense that they want to enact a marked departure from the traditional, but tempered radicals in that they both challenge and uphold the status quo, working "within systems, not against them." Seeking to map the space between conformity and extreme radicalism, Meyerson conducted in-depth interviews with almost 200 people in three very different organizations (though both interviewees and companies were given pseudonyms, the companies are easily identifiable). The result is an insightful look at the way these people effect change, including the varieties of ways to stay true to oneself (through psychological, self-expressive, and behind-the-scenes resistance), how to leverage small wins, and how to organize collective action. There's also a lengthy chapter on the difficulties these tempered radicals face, from the psychological stress of constantly straddling a duality to the incremental lures of co-optation. Having taught in MBA programs at both the University of Michigan and Stanford University, Meyerson is an accomplished business professor; this book shows her to be a methodical researcher, sensitive interpreter of results, and well-organized and fluid writer, as well.

Tempered Radicals is sure to be a beacon of inspiration for those wanting to make a difference from within and an inspiration to those who might have assumed that changing one's environment means changing one's job. --S. Ketchum

Meyerson, a professor of organizational behavior, offers insights into how people who have encountered difficulty at work because of politics, personality, ethnicity, etc. can alter their workplace behavior. With real-life examples from unnamed companies, the author shows that the key to success is in making the appropriate response, based on timing, stakes, likelihood of success and consequences of failure. Pitched toward managers and human resource professionals, the book includes a number of intriguing, practical approaches that should help employees navigate sticky situations. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

First, let me start by saying that I liked this book and have been recommending it to others. As a "tempered radical" I wish that I had read this book early in my career. I had the wrong impression that hard work and results were enough as long as there were no bodies along the way. Young, naÃƒÆ'Ã Â ve, and idealistic. Consequently, I am recommending this book to people starting their careers so that they get the reality of work as well as to others who just do not get that their approach is a major irritant to the powers that be.I also liked this book because the author used her premise to package her ideas so that her tempered radicalism around race, gender, and other legally protected groups could be better heard by others. I came from academia too (and even received my PhD from Michigan where she had an early appointment in her career) but left that environment because of the oppression of free thinking and any kind of difference. This background added to my wish that this book had been around 10 years ago. I might have better succeeded in that environment if I had had this framework from which to work.Although I like this book, I did not give the book 4 or 5 stars because the best of her book and the most important aspect of her premise was saved until last - the downside of the "tempered" approach. I do believe that revolutionary results can be achieved by evolutionary steps - small steps can achieve great things as they add up without the major heartburn or resistance that a revolution can cause. However, maybe evolution is not the best means to the ends and that cannot be decided until one decides whom they are and what they are about and decide whether tempered or full scale radicalism is what they want to do. This is a choice and is worthy of exposing at the beginning of the book. So although I may have succeeded in academia if I had had her premise from which to work, I would not have been happy because I would not have been true to me and the essence of who I was or

am.Evolution vs. revolution. To choose one must first know what one is willing to give up.

Love this book! Perfect for individuals looking to make lasting change within organizations today.

Book was very helpful with my research.

I first came across Stanford Organizational Behavior professor, Debra Meyerson’s work as I was gathering research for the Responsibility for Choices chapter of my book,Ã Â The Leader’s Digest: Timeless Principles for Team and Organization Success. Her fifteen years of research on how "everyday leaders stick to their values, assert their agendas, and provoke learning and change without jeopardizing hard-won careers" fit perfectly with the focus of this timeless leadership principle.In her October 2001, Harvard Business Review article, "Radical Change, the Quiet Way," Meyerson finds that at "some point, many managers yearn to confront assumptions, practices, or values in their organizations that they feel are counterproductive or even downright wrong. Yet they can face an uncomfortable dilemma: If they speak out too loudly, resentment may build toward them; if they remain silent, resentment will build inside them." She discovered that the best leaders "learn to rock the boat without falling out of it."This book is full of inspiring examples, solid research, practical how-to sidebars, and sound advice on leading change from positions of little or no formal power. Debra provides a powerful "evolutionary’s manifesto" to being a Leader rather than just Follower or Wallower of change, injustice, or bad management from above (terms from my most recent book,Ã Â Growing @ the Speed of Change: Your Inspir-actional How-To Guide For Leading Yourself and Others through Constant Change)."Tempered radicals...mitigate their anger and use it to fuel their actions. In the world of physics, when something is ’tempered’ it is toughened by alternately heating and cooling. Tempered steel, for example, becomes stronger and more useful through such a process. In a similar way, successfully navigating the seemingly incongruous extremes of challenging and upholding the status quo can help build the strength and organizational significance of tempered radicals.""The first and most important characteristic of encounters turned into opportunities is that people see that they have a choice in how to respond. The second critical characteristic is that people recognize a variety of productive responses fall between the extremes of silent submission and aggressive confrontation. Being prepared to look for these alternatives in any encounter is critical to making effective choices in the moment.""Tempered radicals inspire change. Yet their leadership resides equally in their capacity to inspire people. They inspire by having courage to tell the truth even when it’s difficult to do so, and by having the conviction to stay

engaged in tough conversations. They inspire by demonstrating the commitment to stay focused on their larger ideals even when they suffer consequences or get little recognition for doing so. Their leadership does not rely on inspiring through periodic heroism and headlines. Their leadership inspires - and matters - in big and small ways every day."

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