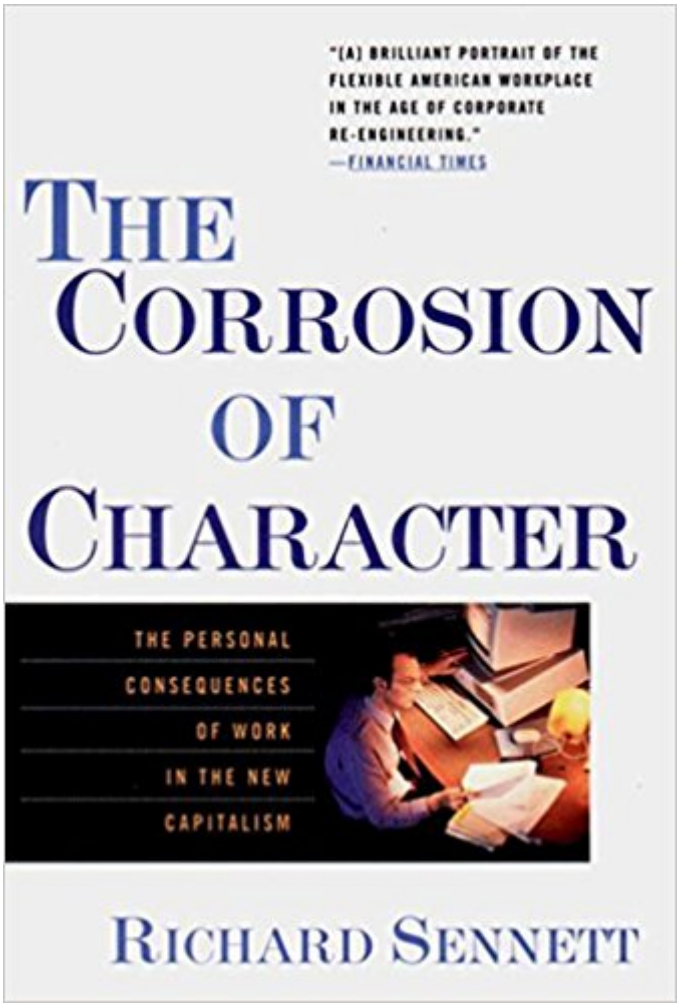
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The Corrosion Of Character: The Personal Consequences Of Work In The New Capitalism



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Synopsis

A Business Week Best Book of the Year.... "A devastating and wholly necessary book."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Studs Terkel, author of Working In The Corrosion of Character, Richard Sennett, "among the country's most distinguished thinkers . . . has concentrated into 176 pages a profoundly affecting argument" (Business Week) that draws on interviews with dismissed IBM executives, bakers, a bartender turned advertising executive, and many others to call into question the terms of our new economy. In his 1972 classic, The Hidden Injuries of Class (written with Jonathan Cobb), Sennett interviewed a man he called Enrico, a hardworking janitor whose life was structured by a union pay schedule and given meaning by his sacrifices for the future. In this new book-a #1 bestseller in Germany-Sennett explores the contemporary scene characterized by Enrico's son, Rico, whose life is more materially successful, yet whose work lacks long-term commitments or loyalties. Distinguished by Sennett's "combination of broad historical and literary learning and a reporter's willingness to walk into a store or factory [and] strike up a conversation" (New York Times Book Review), this book "challenges the reader to decide whether the flexibility of modern capitalism . . . is merely a fresh form of oppression" (Publishers Weekly, starred review). Praise for The Corrosion of Character: "A benchmark for our time."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Daniel Bell "[A]n incredibly insightful book."Ã¢â ¬â ¢William Julius Wilson "[A] remarkable synthesis of acute empirical observation and serious moral reflection."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Richard Rorty "[Sennett] offers abundant fresh insights . . . illuminated by his concern with people's struggle to give meaning to their lives."Ã¢â ¬â ¢[Memphis] Commercial Appeal

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Customer Reviews

In the brave new world of the "flexible" corporation, Richard Sennett observes, workers at all levels are regarded as wholly disposable, and they have responded in kind, ceasing to think in terms of any long-term relationship with the organizations they work for. This, he argues, has tremendous negative consequences for workers' emotional and psychological well-being. Even in menial jobs, we extract much of our self-image from the idea of a "career"--a life narrative rendered intelligible by specific loyalties, which is to some degree self-invented but also in some respects predictable. Innovations like "flextime" and bureaucratic "de-layering" seem to promise more freedom to define one's career, but in fact they create jobs in which there's less freedom than ever to be had. The Corrosion of Character is a short, anecdotal book, and while one might wish that it included a discussion of the social and psychological costs of the sheer increase of work time in the average worker's week, Sennett has created a pithy, disturbing picture of the cost of the corporate world's much-vaunted new efficiencies. --Richard Farr --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The American company today ostensibly offers a more humane environment than in the era of "Fordism," when work on the assembly line had a deadening, routine character. However, Sennett, professor of sociology at New York University and the London School of Economics, believes this improvement is illusory. His argument is that the modern workplaceAwith its emphasis on short-term, episodic labor; projects and flexibilityAdoes not allow people to shape their experiences or build a coherent narrative of their lives. Most important, the new adaptability in business militates against the formation of character. Character depends on stability for virtues such as loyalty, trust, commitment and mutual helpfulness to develop. And rather than giving workers greater freedom, the flexibility model allows another kind of power to be imposed from the top: from 1980 to 1995, between 13 million and 39 million workers became unemployed owing to downsizing. Even flextime contributes to the fragmentation and disorder, and teamwork only emphasizes "mutual responsiveness rather than personal validation." Sennett makes his case in well-crafted prose with references not just to luminaries such as Adam Smith, Diderot, Nietzsche and Rousseau, but to the immediate experiences of blue-collar workers and folks in bakery shops and bars. He challenges the reader to decide whether the flexibility of modern capitalism offers a better context for personal growth or is merely a fresh form of oppression. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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Sennett’s evocation of the nature of work in postmodern capitalism is spot-on in recognizing and explaining the alienating factors at play in a de-centered, job-based not career-based working world. In fact the book, a long essay, was in places hard to read because he evoked some memories of my own encounters with this world. It was harder to read also knowing that the research and the ideas driving the work were in place during the time of writing. Much has changed in ways that only amplify the alienation felt by workers. If, as Sennett claims, that the breakdown of the corporate structure is bad news psychologically for the worker -- where there is no clear antagonist in the workplace -- then the alienation is exponentially more evident in a world with ten percent unemployment. This essay was true when he was writing and the US economy was creating over a million jobs a year. The issues he explores are only more true now.

Written in a very relatable manner, it poses questions to modern developments and how human these are. It gives very good and developed insights into these. for myself as a product designer/innovator and teacher, these are very valid and meaningful questions, I highly recommend it.

I am struck by the visceral and reactive comments in some of the reviews, but this only demonstrates that Sennett has touched a vulnerable nerve among those who have a vested interest in the juggernaut of globalization and commercial frenzy of the Internet. Isn’t it interesting that the most volatile reviews come from those in the heart of Silicon Valley? Sennett has succeeeded in illuminating the universal in the particular, yes, through what his critics denigrates as "just anecdotes"? But anecdotes are grounded in human experience, not rarefied abstractions of traditional positivist sociology. His critics ought to go back to read C. Wright Mills’ classic The Sociological Imagination, who takes these posivist parasites to task. Sennett also does a stellar job of stripping away the corporate speak and propaganda about "change, teams, reengineering" --the stuff that has made management gurus and their parrot of consultant-followers rich, while the ordinary Joe is the mere anecdotal recipient of such social engineering schemes. Sennett also succeeds in showing how the superficiality of corporate life is bleeding over to the family, eroding away depth and character..this is a sore spot that most managers would rather ignore. As C. Wright Mills, the great sociologist taught, "the political task of the sociologist...is to translate personal troubles into public issues, and public issues into the terms of their human meaning for a variety of

indivdiuals" The public isn’t moved by barren statistics, it is moved by real stories of real human beings.

Great

Despite the title it is a must read to understand the shift in management strategy and how is the current "leader" culture (instead of the boss culture) mostly benefit your leaders and not you.

Very insightful long essay. Contains many interesting thoughts - I wonder what Sennett makes of the period after this book first appeared?

Sennett grapples here with serious and deep problems in modern American culture and economy, but does not really get a grip on them. Given that he sees the problems, but doesn’t really offer new thoughts on their causal structures or solutions, too much of the book deteriorates into repetitious whining. Should have been an essay, not stretched into a book.

Got it within a week, much earlier than expected! Great quality, just as described! Thanks :)

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