

Book Review, *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*, 2016, Paula Asinof**Book Citation Information**

Ken Coleman, *The Proximity Principle*, 2019. Ramsey Press, Brentwood, Tennessee, USA

Book Purpose, Theme and Intended Audience

This book provides readers at any stage of their careers with a strategy that will lead them to doing the work they love.

Summary of Content

The Proximity Principle, as defined by Coleman, is simple: “The right people + The right places = Opportunities”, broadly translated “In order to do what you want to do, you have to be around people are doing it, in places where it’s happening.”

The book is organized into three main sections: The People, The Places and The Practices (or “You have to do something to make it happen.”). There are five categories of people – professors, professionals, mentors, peers and producers. Each is discussed in its own chapter, describing who they are and why they are important. This is followed by identifying five Places – the place where you are, a place to learn, a place to practice, a place to perform and a place to grow. Similarly, each place has its own chapter, describing what it is and why it is important. Finally, there are four practices, each of which notably starts with a verb that prompts action. The Practices are creating a web of connections, making your connections count, seizing the opportunity and adopting a proximity mind-set.

Through a series of short “stories”, Coleman sets up each point he wants to make and provides a motivational scenario for the reader. Some of the stories are about famous people and others are about everyday people that he has met through his work or his life. Most of the stories start with the subject’s challenge or obstacle and end up with a significant success. The story illustrates a point, which is then driven home with a memorable statement – the kind of affirmation that can be written on a Post-it and posted somewhere as regular reminders of their importance. For example,

“You’ll climb faster and further by surrounding yourself with people who are focused, driven and motivated to reach their own goals.”

“Relying on feedback to practice and improve isn’t just for rookies.”

“It takes a lot of hard work to appear effortless.”

Each chapter is a steppingstone to the next. Chapters end with a summary of two or three things (some with subcategories) to do to move through the step that was described in the chapter. These are specific “to-dos” to help the reader accomplish the goal. The book ends with encouragement to the readers to “press on” through fear and setbacks in the journey to reach their full potentials.

Most Useful Information for Career Services Professionals

The audience for the book spans individual job seekers, people who want to advance or accelerate their careers, career counselors/coaches and post-retirement advisors. For the career advisors, career strategy and

networking are key to their work with clients – and are two of the important themes of this book.

Strategy: While nearly everyone has heard that “if you follow your dream, the money (or whatever) will follow”, this book provides a more realistic view of dream chasing. While defining and going after dreams is central to Coleman’s message, it is tempered with reminders of the baby steps and hard work that are necessary to achieve the end goal. It provides guidance to career advisors in adding realism to the process and increasing the probability of their clients’ successes as they create career strategies.

Networking: It is now conventional wisdom among career advisors that networking is an essential tool in job search and in managing careers. Networks need to be developed strategically and continuously. Yet, even with – or perhaps because of – that perspective, networking remains vague and scary for many of their clients. And, they get stuck. This book provides an engaging, easy to grasp, easy to implement framework and steps for getting un-stuck. It is a kind of “silver bullet” for taking on the challenge and ultimately making networking an integral part of life.

Critique

As one of Dave Ramsey’s success coaches and a Ramsey “Personality”, Ken Coleman has attracted a national audience through his affiliation with the Ramsey brand and its marketing reach. Typical of their products, the book is a fast and easy read, following the principles of motivational speaking and writing. It is written for a broad audience and, except for Dave’s Forward, stays clear of evangelical Christian overtones.

Most people reading this book will find it either turns on a lightbulb or is too simplistic. The material is not new and there are too many stories. The less you already know, the more impactful the content. What makes this book unique and exceptionally useful for everyone is the idea – proximity – that creates an actionable organizing concept. This concept, which initially drew me to the book, captures an entire paradigm, and the book will undoubtedly be one of my continuing resources.