

WHY GOOD PEOPLE CAN'T GET JOBS

THE SKILLS GAP AND WHAT COMPANIES CAN DO ABOUT IT

By Peter Cappelli

Wharton Digital, \$6.99



Essential reading for anyone who's involved in hiring or who intends to work in the future or . . . really, just read it. This brief, brisk online book by Wharton professor Cappelli demolishes most of what you think you know about the U.S. workforce—and leaves readers with answers, not just questions. The problem, he sets out at the beginning,

is not that there's a skills gap—in fact, “when we look at the facts, there is no evidence to support” the existence of a skills gap. The problem is the supply/demand hiring disconnect, “a crippling employer-employee standoff” that is hurting society in both the short and long terms.

Expanding on a series of *Human Resource Executive* columns and a pair of *Wall Street Journal* articles “exploring the evidence for the claim that employers simply could not find candidates with the skills to do the jobs they needed to fill,” Cappelli goes after the real culprits: employers with demands that range from unrealistic to ludicrous. HR departments are told to hire only candidates with high-quality educational degrees and years of directly relevant experience—and a willingness to work for peanuts. When they come up empty, CEOs grouse about failing schools, a substandard work ethic, and, yes, a skills gap.

Widening the divide “between employer expectations and applicant realities,” companies add unnecessary hurdles to the hiring process (e.g., résumé-scanning software that disqualifies half of applicants) and routinely discriminate against older workers “despite their skills and experience—which are exactly what employers say are in short supply.” In many cases, a failure to fill skilled positions “simply means that employers are not paying the market wage.”

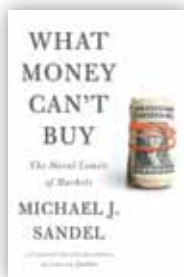
Like many of Cappelli's points, this is commonsense but routinely unmentioned in workforce-planning discussions, making *Why Good People Can't Get Jobs* an invaluable conversation-starter in HR departments. And no one will object to being assigned the book for next week's meeting: Using a minimum of charts and zero jargon, Cappelli's presentation is plainspoken, authoritative, and engaging. It's an hour well spent with your Kindle or Nook. —MATTHEW BUDMAN

WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY

THE MORAL LIMITS OF MARKETS

By Michael J. Sandel

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$27.00



Should we allow companies to advertise in schools and prisons? How about permitting solo drivers to pay to use the carpool lane? And why not let universities auction off a number of spots to the highest bidders? Should anything—everything—come with a price tag? Sandel, a Harvard political philosopher best known for teaching

arguably the nation's most popular college course, “Justice,” explores these and other thorny questions in his new book. Once upon a time, only material goods could be bought and sold. Today, Sandel argues, almost everything has a price. “Do we want a society where everything is up for sale?” he asks. “Or are there certain moral and civic goods that markets do not honor and money cannot buy?”

Sandel doesn't exactly rail against capitalism—rather, he worries about our unchecked reverence and reliance on it in our everyday lives and policies. We've come to take for granted that, to a large extent, markets govern health, education, criminal justice, and other social goods. “When we decide that certain goods may be bought and sold, we decide, at least implicitly, that it is appropriate to treat them as commodities,” Sandel writes. Consequently, he complains, this has led to greater inequality, as well as corruption of our values. For example, he explains, we do not allow children to be sold for adoption, since doing so would promote the wrong way of valuing them.

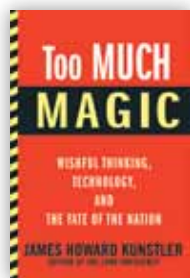
At times, Sandel seems to draw on our ethical intuitions, rather than logical reasoning, to support his claims. Why, for instance, is it wrong to value babies as commodities? Similarly, why can you sell your labor but not your kidney? Where to draw the line?

To Sandel's credit, he doesn't seek to create concrete boundaries around market influence. Instead, he aims to provoke serious contemplation about our values, and here he succeeds beautifully. By raising questions that you might never have considered, he leaves it up to you to ponder the answers. —VADIM LIBERMAN

TOO MUCH MAGIC

WISHFUL THINKING, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE FATE OF THE NATION

By James Howard Kunstler
Atlantic Monthly, \$25.00



For some years now, urbanist Kunstler has been scaring the hell out of his legions of blog readers, and in *Too Much Magic* he pulls together all manner of terrifying trends and predictions—terrifying, that is, if you're looking forward to life being more of the same for the foreseeable future. The author bases his forecast on a peak-oil case

that companies and consumers will soon find themselves with far less energy than they need to function. And he scoffs at techno-enthusiasts who trust that scientists will come through with a “magic” solution, and at “ongoing fantasies about a technological rescue from the very predicaments already spawned by the misuse of technology.”

Kunstler has run into plenty of resistance; he describes speaking to audiences who “were clamoring desperately for rescue remedies that would allow them to continue living exactly the way they were used to living, with all the accustomed comforts ranging from endless driving to universal air-conditioning, cheap fast food, reliable electric service, NASCAR, Disney World, Walmart, and *good jobs* with a guaranteed comfortable retirement. They didn't want to hear anything that suggested we might have to make other arrangements for everyday life in this country.”

Building on arguments laid out in 2005's *The Long Emergency*, Kunstler calls for Americans to prepare for a violent shift in the way we live, and his vision of the near future is beyond unsettling: a land of abandoned skyscrapers and wasted suburban moonscapes, with people congregated in smallish city centers, reminiscent of life in the nineteenth century, for better and worse. “I have a feeling that whatever we can do with wind turbines, solar electric rigs, and the other systems will be a transitory phase of history,” he writes. “Our longer-term destination is a society run at much lower levels of available energy, with much lower populations, and a time-out from the kinds of progressive innovation that so many have taken for granted their whole lives.” Every reader will turn pages wondering about her place in the economy of the 2030s—and likely come away with much to ponder but, alas, no action plan.

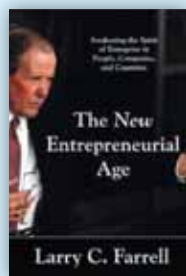
There's more than a little Howard Beale in Kunstler, and sometimes his paragraphs pull together too many barely-

connected rants about everything from suburban anomie to the crimes of Angelo Mozilo. But he's a terrific writer, colorful and pointed, and it's hard to shake the feeling that he just well may be right . . . in which case we're all doomed. Still, at book's end, he strives to strike an upbeat note: “A fortunate person will come to terms with the anxiety that being alive in this world presents.... The way to become hopeful is to demonstrate to yourself that you are a competent person who can understand the signals that reality is sending to you (even from its current remove offstage) and act intelligently in response.” —M.B.

The authors of the following two books should sound familiar to *TCB Review* readers. Both have written columns for the magazine, and both have penned new books expanding on many of the ideas they've explored in these pages.



In *Future Work: How Businesses Can Adapt and Thrive in the New World of Work* (Palgrave MacMillan, \$30.00), current columnist Alison Maitland and co-author Peter Thomson detail how technology and increasing competition to attract and retain skilled employees are creating anything but your grandfather's organization. Today's workplaces require flexible arrangements and new forms of leadership. Unfortunately, Maitland and Thomson argue, many companies fail to recognize the need for change. For companies still stuck in the past, *Future Work* may be just what they need to move forward.



Larry Farrell explored entrepreneurialism in his 2004-08 column, “Entrepreneur,” and in his latest book, *The New Entrepreneurial Age: Awakening the Spirit of Enterprise in People, Companies, and Countries* (Brick Tower, \$26.95), he shares decades of experience helping people and organizations tap into their entrepreneurial strengths. Most organizations, Farrell writes, go through four stages: start-up, high-growth, decline, and survival. But it doesn't have to be that way, he insists. Having worked with companies like IBM, Citibank, DHL, and other big names, he offers equally big ideas to boost your business using the principles of entrepreneurship. —V.L.