

Orbiting the Giant Hairball

By Gordon MacKenzie

Reviewed by Jack Skalican

As you can tell from the title, this is not your average business book. Written by a thirty-year employee of Hallmark cards, the book is both a treatise and a how-to guide for rising above mediocrity and making a difference within large organizations. Using colorful illustrations, descriptions of his own corporate career, and stories, MacKenzie creates an experience that will change the way you view your own role at work.

The author provides an accurate description and useful metaphor with “the Hairball” that illuminates what happens inside large organizations. From there, he offers alternatives in a way that’s funny, optimistic, creative and honest, for thriving within these organizations. As he says early in the book, “... [this] is what I was made for: disruption of routine. Not pointless disruption. Disruption with purpose.”

Mackenzie shares details of his long experience as a corporate employee that touch on the role of creativity in making organizations successful. He clearly shows how leaders know that creativity is important, but also how the organization itself will work to discourage anything new and different. His is not, however, a blanket condemnation of the corporation. He also shares delightful successes that teach and inform. Most important, he holds sacred the power of the individual to change things. As he says in Chapter 19, “Orville Wright did not have a pilot’s license.”

The book culminates in the story of his last several years within Hallmark. He tells how he rises within the organization to achieve his final position, where his title was Creative Paradox. It would spoil the story to tell you more; it’s inspiring to know that he made a positive difference to the organization and individuals from this near-the-top position.

In *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*, Gordon Mackenzie has created a fun-to-look-at, inspiring-to-read storybook that calls readers to rise above normalcy and numbing routine to make more of themselves and their world. It’s an autobiography, business strategy manual, leadership guide and cartoon all combined into one. If you’re ready for a fresh look at how to live within an organization, treat yourself to this work.

