



How Excellent Companies Avoid Dumb Things: Breaking the 8 Hidden Barriers that Plague Even the Best Businesses

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Companies make headline news all the time for decisions that make many of us scratch our heads in wonder, even those companies that are smart and successful. Here, *New York Times* bestselling author Neil Smith, with more than 20 years of experience leading large-scale performance improvements, reveals the hidden barriers that cause excellent companies to do dumb things and cause smart people within companies to act in dumb ways. Drawing on his years of experience working with CEOs and helping transform top global businesses, and insights to CEOs around the world, Smith has identified eight barriers that prevent organizations from both achieving and maintaining sustainable success. Rich with anecdotes and case studies, Smith outlines a fast and proven process in which 12 principles of business transformation can break down the barriers holding companies back.

How Excellent Companies Avoid Dumb Things: Breaking the 8 Hidden Barriers that Plague Even the Best Businesses Details

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From Reader Review How Excellent Companies Avoid Dumb Things: Breaking the 8 Hidden Barriers that Plague Even the Best Businesses for online ebook

Suzanne says

I won this book in a Goodreads First Reads giveaway.

"Business nerds" like me will appreciate this book. It points out some of the most common sources of bureaucracy and bad business practices, shedding light on how these develop. It is easy to understand and gives a lot of case studies and examples from businesses that Neil Smith has worked with as a consultant. He lays out his entire process for transforming businesses, so theoretically executives could follow these steps themselves, but it seems like this kind of complete change would be very difficult in practice without bringing in outside consultants. Regardless, this is an interesting read, and it contains a lot of good business lessons.

Rob Slaven says

As usual I received this book for free in exchange for a review. This time it was from LibraryThing but I will give my scrupulously honest review below.

The nutshell view of this book is pretty simple. It outlines 8 ways that companies screw up and cost themselves money. Each of the sections is laid out in more or less this format:

1. Some personal anecdote from the author about this problem as he's seen it in the field.
2. Examples of the problem at companies the author has worked for.
3. Specifics on how to determine if you have this problem
4. What to do about the problem once you find it
5. A summary

The book outlines 8 problems ("barriers") but really they boil down to a handful of core problems

1. Poor communication between managers/managed or between departments
2. Failure to think properly about the scale of problems when coming to a resolution or do proper analysis.
3. Unwillingness to change the status quo, "we've always done it THIS way"

Every "barrier" described is a corollary of one of those three things.

On the positive side, the text is very readable and the author brings things to light in a detailed and relatable way. He doesn't just preach from the hilltop, he gives candid examples of these problems as he's seen them in the field. Having worked in a few companies over the years I've seen every one of them in action and he's

spot on with his descriptions.

To the negative, it does seem things are rather padded. As I noted the book numbers '8' barriers but really they're pretty closely related to each other. None of this is ground-breaking new material either. Detractors of this book have claimed all of this 'obvious' and for the most part it is but such problems are always obvious to those on the outside looking in. It's for those on the inside that this book is written.

In summary, this is a good intro-level business book so if this is your first stab at the topic then it'll teach you a lot. However, if your shelf is already full of management books then this book is probably just a rehash.

Jacob says

First thing I did when I got the book was quickly skim through it to find the "8 hidden barriers that plague even the best businesses". After finding them I was disappointed. They seemed so obvious, almost felt like a scam, but I had committed to reading the book so I pushed through and did. And it turned out to be a case of something that is right in front of you may be the hardest to see.

I really like the book. The barriers the Smith talks about are insightful. They are presented and supported really well. The way he begins each chapter with a non-business example of the barriers I thought made them much easier to swallow and appreciate.

I am currently studying Finance and Economics preparing for a future career in business. It is insights like the ones in this book that make the difference between theoretically understanding how a company works and realizing what it actually takes to run a "real world" company.

Heather Berkowitz says

I got this book for free as a Goodreads First reads giveaway...

...and absolutely loved it! I have an MA in Integrated Marketing Communication and have taken a good handful of management classes, and this is the best one of the group. Amazing how simply by changing the way you think and approach things, you can change the way your company - and thus, your employees - perform. Would recommend this to anyone in the field!

Jeff says

I won this book from goodreads giveaways and I was pleasantly surprised that even though the topics in this book seem pretty basic and it seems that everyone should already know them, we either don't know them or we don't think that it is worth our time to do them. It was a very quick read and gave some really good insights about things we all can do to better our companies and make them more efficient. I recommend this book to anyone who would like to improve their business, job or organization and make it more efficient and a better place to work while being more profitable. I am looking forward to implementing some of these

ideas in my business so I can stop wasting money and create ways to be more profitable.

Jennifer says

We know that change is good, but it's not always clear as to how we can successfully implement it. As a result, things continue on as usual, and our businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organizations – and yes, that includes churches – continue to waste resources, miss grand opportunities, and struggle to build a lasting, effective community. Where do we continually go wrong?

Neil Smith, CEO of Promontory Growth and Innovation (PGI), and Patricia O'Connell, former Management Editor at Bloomberg Businessweek.com, have the answer. In the awkwardly titled *How Excellent Companies Avoid Dumb Things: Breaking the 8 Hidden Barriers that Plague Even the Best Businesses* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), they identify reasons why the improvements you want to make never leave the drawing board. These barriers include your management being risk adverse, trying to avoid controversies that will inevitably rock the boat; poor prioritization of activities; and even the way your company's departments are organized.

But all not hopeless. The "PGI Promise" can help you knock down these 8 Barriers with 12 Principles and successfully institute a change-friendly culture in your business. Smith shows how to get executives involved in a non-threatening way, managers committed to enforcing changes, and employees eager to contribute their revenue-building and cost-saving ideas. Be forewarned though: You might have to weed through some lesser-quality material to get to the helpful parts. In fact, you might just want to scan the Introduction and Chapter 9 and call it read. The book suffers from repetitive content; cheesy personal life examples that take away from the relevant real-life business examples; and a lot of PGI promotions. Worse still, the long quoted passages from clinical psychologist Richard Levak seem to indicate that Smith doesn't feel entirely confident in his own qualifications. Working with Bank of America, Heinz, and MasterCard isn't enough. Apparently, he has to rely on someone else to give him credibility.

So, should you read *How Excellent Companies Avoid Dumb Things: Breaking the 8 Hidden Barriers that Plague Even the Best Businesses*? If you're having trouble implementing change in your business, then this book might be a great place to start. At the very least, it can help get the conversation going, and that has a lot of value in and of itself.

Disclaimer: I received a copy of *How Excellent Companies Avoid Dumb Things: Breaking the 8 Hidden Barriers that Plague Even the Best Businesses* through LibraryThing's Early Reviewers program. I was not required to write a favorable review.

Sarah Pantoja says

This book lays out eight barriers that commonly plague businesses and then proceeds to explain how to bar and to break each barrier. It also includes a 100 day plan for implementing change within companies. The first eight chapters are very interesting and include real examples from work that the author has done with actual companies that achieved positive results. The barriers could occur in companies of any size and the suggested solutions could be modified to fit any organization. Many of these could be adjusted even to make a household run more efficiently. Any company that desires changes that allow for efficiency could benefit from this book. It would be a useful tool as a supplementary text in a college level management class as well.

Dana says

Encouraging and implementing ideas in businesses can lead to all kinds of good changes, such as increasing simplicity, efficiency, and profitability or decreasing wastes of time, funds and products. So how come all businesses aren't constantly churning out ideas for improvements and eagerly implementing these ideas? Neil Smith's book explores the structural and behavioral barriers that stifle the idea generation and implementation process, leaving businesses to stagnate instead of thrive.

Eight distinct barriers to ideas and change are discussed, with three real life mini case studies used to illustrate each, as well as twelve ways to break down these barriers. Each chapter on the eight barriers ends with a helpful summary and questions businesses should be asking themselves to probe for where change is needed. A 100-day plan for businesses to initiate an overhaul and permanently transform their culture into a dynamic, idea-friendly one is also covered in-depth.

The many examples, clear and detailed writing, and psychology-based explanations for the barriers make this book easy to understand and compelling. It's inspiring to learn that hundreds to thousands of ideas come up in the businesses Smith has worked with once ideas are requested and a process for making changes is in place.

I've seen reviews that complained everything in this book is "obvious." Well, it's really easy to complain that something's obvious *after* you've just read it—but could these reviewers have listed the eight barriers and the twelve ways to unblock them *before* reading the book? The "obvious" impression probably comes from the barriers and solutions making so much sense that they seem like they *should* be obvious, but, in reality, it can be hard to identify and fix problems without anything to spur and direct your thinking. This book pushes and guides you to start thinking and scrutinizing business environments in a way to find problems or ways to improve.

Overall an insightful and interesting book. I'm sure I'll be rereading it, or lending it to a supervisor/manager/coworker in the future. Recommended for anyone who runs or works for an organization, or who manages people.

Ben says

I find it would be a helpful premise and guide to businesses. I believe it is lacking in exactly the greatest details to deliver, and like any sales-pitch book, its overly preachy and "my way is perfect"; when nothign is, and most likely not even fantastic.

The fact that he goes to an elaborate way of removing likenesses to companies with his examples, and then gives a list of companies he's done this project with in the back is a bit odd as well.

I definitely felt like there could be a lot more depth to this book, and a lot more could have been packed in there even in the 217 pages of actual text (minus spacer pages and chapter pages, and other break-ups). But for a book about how to deliver huge changes to big companies, it definitely needed a lot more depth and body to it. Possibly more examples, more illumination on how/what ideas worked, why they worked, how the process really works for companies, instead of a few final chapters on how/why you should get him as a

client and to do this project/process.

[Written as a review for LibraryThing/GoodReads. Book given away as a 'Early Reviewer' copy.]
[Rated 2 stars on GoodReads and 2 and 1/2 stars on LibraryThing].

Lynn Chin says

Love this book as it always reflect about my thoughts and observation after spending all these years working in small, medium and large size enterprise businesses. Worth to read!

Shelly Donaghey says

If you are reading this review there is every chance in the world that you have, either at home or at work, shelves stocked with books that cover every aspect of management; how to do it, how to do it correctly, cost effectiveness, supervising personnel, and the list goes on. Every bookstore has a broad selection of titles on the topic and looking at them can cause glassy-eye syndrome and the need for excessive amounts of caffeine. But here, in HOW EXCELLENT COMPANIES AVOID DUMB THINGS, there is a simple guide to reviewing where your company is and how to make it better. This applies to any company, any division of that company and any process within that division. From top to bottom, any company can gain from this book, but only if it is implemented throughout and all hands are on board with the changes in thought that must occur.

Neil Smith and Patricia O'Connell have boiled down their work in assisting companies to gain success into 8 chapters describing barriers to greater success, one chapter dedicated to the "Twelve Principles for Breaking Barriers" and they also provide "A 100-Day Process for Breaking Barriers", all within 226 pages. Unlike many other books in this genre, AVOID is very reader friendly, offers examples and anecdotes from the authors history in working with companies of all sizes to improve the bottom line by up to as much as 25%. Not bad when you consider many of these corporations were already leaders in their respective fields. There is one caveat to worry over. This book only works to the same degree as the effort used to implement the required changes, but with the built in reward system, compliance should be forthcoming at all levels. I did win this book through Goodreads.

Johanna Sawyer says

I have to say I liked the authors approach in this book. I have read a lot of safety books that deal with people based safety in the workplace and I found that this approached another subject in the workplace that needs exposing. Hidden barriers, and in lean times like the ones we are experiencing now, it goes to show that we need to be educated on how to help the company as much as possible. I'm not talking about eliminating jobs but there are things we can do as workers to help the company grow. The most recent economic downturn has equated a lot of job loss, and this book helps us identify many things to help build up business. Many companies need to restructure so that they can grow. Breaking those barriers can help avoid some of the disasters some companies have been forced to face. Every person who works for a company is needed to help move toward that success. I liked this book, and I'm going to hand it over to the manager running our Fortune 500 company and see if he likes it. Thanks goodreads for a free read in exchange for a review.

Kate says

How Excellent Companies Avoid Dumb Things is an excellent book! Smith & O'Connell discuss the eight barriers that prevent companies from executing good ideas and improving performance. These eight barriers include: avoiding controversy, poor use of time, reluctance to change, organizational silos, management blockers, incorrect information and bad assumptions, size matters, and existing processes. This book provides insightful examples to help organizations prevent repeating the same mistakes over and over again. Also, these insights will assist managers by helping them take their organizations to a new level of profitability. This is a must-read management book! Thank you Goodreads and the publisher for sending me a copy of How Excellent Companies Avoid Things: Breaking 8 Hidden Barriers that Plague Even the Best Businesses. I have gained tremendous insight on ways to improve organizational performance.

Zachary Roner says

I received this book for free from a Goodreads First Reads giveaway.

In this book the author attempts to explain eight barriers that are keeping companies from succeeding as much as they could. In reading this book I could see a clear pattern. The author would share an anecdote from his life. Next he would talk about examples he has seen in different businesses of the particular barrier. After that there would be a brief section on the psychology behind the barrier and lastly he would show how the different businesses overcame the issue (with his help).

Personally I did not feel that this subject deserved an entire book. It felt like something that should have been a multi-page web article. It was interesting, but not several hundred pages worthy. Also at times it felt like the author was trying too hard to get you to hire his company. It took me out of the reading a bit.

All in all for a business book it wasn't bad, but it wasn't great either. It rated a solid meh on my radar.

Eric says

I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

Neil Smith's book, How Excellent Companies Avoid Dumb Things: Breaking the 8 Hidden Barriers that Plague Even the Best Businesses, is a tricky book. Why? Because the author is a consultant who works with companies in performance improvement and thus a good amount of the book is about his personal experiences. Though this can be a good thing (and Smith does an excellent job of illustrating his ideas using real-world examples), it also means the author is constantly selling his services and his company's products. Smith doesn't do a hard sell in the book, but you are reminded in nearly every chapter that his company offers some type of service to counteract the discussed issue.

With that said, I thought the book was both informative and interesting. Smith's main contention is that each company has "hidden gold" in the form of employee ideas to save money or develop new business. For example, he discusses how a UPS driver discovered that if the trucks only made left turns when delivering, which made the route slightly longer, they could actually make their deliveries faster. Though this idea seemed counterintuitive to the UPS driver's managers, it was proven to be correct and was eventually

adopted company-wide.

The "dumb things" discussed the book form the acronym APROMISE:

Avoiding controversy
Poor use of time
Reluctance to change
Organizational silos
Management blockers
Incorrect information and bad assumptions
Size matters
Existing processes

And though Smith is adamant these are all different "dumb things" I'm not sure he convincingly makes the argument. There is a lot of overlap in some of these concepts and Smith takes a pedantic approach of differentiating them when most of us might simply group them together (like organizational silos and management blockers). The best part of the book is really this in-depth discussion of how all companies encourage these "dumb things" to occur and how to identify them. The least useful part, though, is the solution (a "100-day process for breaking barriers") that is intimately related to Smith's consulting business.

Overall I think the book is a good read for any high-level manager to understand why certain issues exist in their business and how to identify the core issues. It won't be a guide for resolving the issues, though, unless you are interested in hiring the author's consulting business.
