



A Book Review by Robert L. Weinberg, Ph.D.

*Orbiting the Giant Hairball: A Corporate Fool's Guide to Surviving with Grace* by Gordon MacKenzie

I just finished a brilliant book on organizational culture which I highly recommend.

It's called *Orbiting the Giant Hairball: A Corporate Fool's Guide to Surviving with Grace* by Gordon MacKenzie, 1996, Viking Penguin Books.

It's a funny and poignant examination of traditional corporate culture and its impact on those who work in one.

His analogy is that the traditional organization is a Giant Hairball. Our job, as sane, creative individuals who are out to contribute, is to stay out of the hairball, yet sufficiently connected to it (in Orbit around the hairball) to benefit from it and to contribute back to it.

It's a short and breezy narrative, with stories, drawings and cartoons, and some brilliant insights (many familiar from the work GLG does in organizations). His little stories and illustrations make real for people many of the points we help them see about their companies.

The book provides a very clear picture of the cultures we go into and the kinds of challenges we and our clients are facing. If Picasso drew Dilbert cartoons it might come out like this book!

Here's what the cover notes say:

Gordon MacKenzie worked at Hallmark Cards for thirty years, where he inspired his colleagues to slip the bonds of Corporate Normalcy and rise to orbit - to a mode of dreaming, daring and doing above and beyond the rubber-stamp confines of the administrative mind-set. In his deeply funny book, exuberantly illustrated in full color, he shares lessons on awakening and fostering creative genius. He teaches how to emerge from the "giant hairball" — that tangled impenetrable mass of rules and systems, based on what worked in the past and which can lead to mediocrity in the present.

Having flunked out of the University of British Columbia in the early 1950's, MacKenzie stumbled into a job as a cartoonist and writer for the Vancouver Sun. At Hallmark Cards, he evolved into a self-styled corporate holy man with the title of Creative Paradox.

Since 1991, he has been giving workshops on maintaining creativity within bureaucratic environments. He lives in Shawnee Mission, Kansas.

At the risk of copyright violation, here are 2 quick samples I enjoyed:

Chapter Nineteen: Orville Wright (entire chapter), "Orville Wright did not have a pilot's license."

From Chapter Fifteen: "Milk Cans Are Not Allowed, "...a new survival strategy:

Any time a bureaucrat (i.e., a custodian of the system) stands between you and something you need or want, your challenge is to help the bureaucrat discover a means, harmonious with the system, to meet your need."

Read this book. Enjoy it and share the stories and examples to support colleagues and friends in their commitments!