
Review Essay

A Journey to the Center of the Self

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Erica Ariel Fox. *Winning from Within: A Breakthrough Method for Leading, Living, and Lasting Change.* New York: Harper Collins, 2013. 384 pages. \$28.99 (hardcover). ISBN: 0062213024.

The Inner Negotiator

Erica Fox's new book, *Winning from Within: A Breakthrough Method for Leading, Living, and Lasting Change*, arrives amidst a cresting wave of interest in the subjective reality of negotiation and decision making. It follows Daniel Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence*, numerous books on the application of neuroscience to conflict resolution, and articles by Leonard Riskin (2013) and David Hoffman (2011) on how negotiators manage the interaction between their "inner" and "outer" selves. Recognition of the critical role of self-awareness in negotiation and conflict resolution has been increasingly legitimized.

The founder of the Harvard Negotiation Insight Initiative at the Program on Negotiation, Fox has had a long-standing interest in the integration of the world of action and the world of reflection. For a number of years, she studied and brought together people from such diverse disciplines as psychology, theology, neuroscience, and the creative arts to look at the theory and practice of negotiation in new ways.

In this book, Fox has made a valiant effort to cull together ancient and more recent wisdom about the inner life into a practical and systematic guide to help businesspeople to be successful on their own terms. Utilizing a basic, accessible method that she has honed through her work with individuals and organizations over several years, Fox's intention is to open a door for

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businesspeople into the rich insights of their inner world. The group who could most benefit from this book, I believe, would be those who have dismissed their own inner lives as irrelevant to their workplace effectiveness and who have created walls separating the personal from the professional in their daily lives. Recognizing the often ineffective prescriptions offered in popular books for achieving success through focus on changes in external behavior, Fox takes on the far more challenging but satisfying task of helping people make lasting change through self-awareness.

Using terms that should be familiar to most managers and executives, Fox shifts the focus from strategies for dealing with others — which are often exercises in frustration — to the many opportunities that she argues are available for managing the often complicated terrain of our inner lives, experienced by many as foreign, chaotic, and scary territory. She reconceives of the management challenge as the challenge of getting to know the many different parts of ourselves that can sabotage our efforts to work successfully with others. By identifying the various components of ourselves that need to work in harmony for us to be whole people, she offers numerous examples of how we sabotage ourselves, but argues that getting to know our inner selves offers an alternate way to resolve both inner and outer conflicts.

Using a term that Fox calls “the performance gap,” her book asks readers to assess the difference between their current reactions to a situation and what an optimal reaction would be. She defines competency as a set of four interlocking skills: vision, people, analysis, and execution. Noting the familiarity that most businesspeople have with external negotiations, Fox invites her readers to recognize the various parts of themselves that can get in their way, but which, when effectively utilized, also can help them succeed.

Fox asks readers to become aware of their inner lives, which requires a willingness to climb over, at least for some, lifelong barriers that have kept the doors to those parts of themselves shut. She promises that once these barriers are identified and overcome, readers can close their “performance gaps” and success will be at hand. She also argues that even externally oriented people are more familiar with negotiating with themselves than they might realize.

Meet the Big Four

The book next introduces readers to what Fox calls the “Big Four” — based loosely on derivatives of Jungian archetypes, these characters represent the different aspects of our personalities that are both universal and central to optimal performance. They are the Thinker, the Dreamer, the Warrior, and the Lover, and they constitute an internal leadership team that needs to learn to work together. “The Big Four,” Fox writes, “represent your capacity to dream about the future, to analyze and solve problems, to build relationships with people, and to take effective action” (p. 55). Throughout the

book, she provides numerous examples of how these different parts of ourselves function.

Fox seeks simplicity in her explanations, so that little or no psychological sophistication is necessary to understand her basic ideas, using business analogies and language whenever possible. But at the same time, she suggests the depth and complexity that underlie her basic rubric.

After providing us with multiple examples of conflict between these inner selves, Fox introduces us to a higher order of self-examination, represented by another three entities that she calls the “Three Transformers” — the Lookout, the Voyager, and the Captain — all located beyond the ego at the core or center of our being. These transformers can be called on to observe the inner drama of the Big Four and orchestrate a working relationship to create more internal unity and the ability to “win from within.” The Lookout is the internal observer, the Captain functions as the coordinator of the Big Four so that each has its place in decision making, and the Voyager brings perspective from the larger context of our life’s adventure.

Once having introduced the system, Fox illustrates with many examples, drawn from people she has worked with, famous people whose stories readers will be familiar with, and her own life, in which she reveals both successes and failures. In these stories, she interweaves awareness and action, often pointing out with remarkable poignancy the gap between a person’s inner dialogue and what she or he actually says, analyzing the consequences when people ignore the wisdom of any of the Big Four. Her core message is that we must access our inner wisdom and integrate all ourselves to achieve a balanced life. Fox also brings a forgiving touch to her inquiry, recognizing the pervasiveness of people’s endless capacity to judge themselves and others, and the self-destructiveness — and workplace dysfunction — that results.

Least convincing are her analyses of public figures’ inner lives. Lance Armstrong with his drug denials, Larry Summers with his bumbling assessments of the capacities of women scientists and mathematicians, and John Edwards with his marital infidelity — she chalks these up to a lack of paying attention to their inner thinkers, which would (she implies) have changed their actions. She attributes arrogance and even deception to the lack of balanced thinking.

Questions of Right and Wrong

My own experience of both myself and those I have worked with closely suggests that the system Fox expounds can serve as a wonderful introduction to a personal search that could open the door for many readers who might otherwise never engage in any serious self-reflection. When I think more deeply about the complexities of human life, however, I find that

Fox's system is difficult to apply and that it lacks texture, depth, and complexity. Like many other popular books, it seems, I think, to promise more than it can deliver.

The book places little emphasis on the key question of right and wrong, which is a fundamental underlying dynamic of so many difficult situations. A section entitled "Remember You Could Be Wrong" includes an instructive story about an executive whose failure to recognize there could be points of view other than his own cost him a client, but Fox candidly admits that she was unable to help him. It would have been interesting to have her detail the efforts that she made to reach him, beyond his stonewalling or her rather gentle question "Is it possible that you're missing something?"

Our relationship to right and wrong is so fundamental to so many of the internal and external conflicts that permeate our lives that it is surprising that Fox pays so little attention to providing us with guidance about how to deal with this issue both internally and externally. Blame, attack, defensiveness, rigidity, and polarization occur too commonly in our communications with ourselves and others that unless we find ways of dealing with those attitudes, both internally and externally, we run the danger of undermining ourselves as well as our relationships. While Fox does give us some examples of how we can address our own tendencies to judge both ourselves and others, she only hints at the complexity that underlies such an effort. It might well be overwhelming to some, but the way she describes it is almost so facile that I find it misleading.

But on the other hand, as I have suspected about many self-help books, I sense that the people who could most benefit from the kinds of insights that this book provides are the people least interested in reading such a book. For this reason, Fox's efforts to open the net so wide might actually reach readers who are "turned off" by books with a much more specific worldview. The people whose experiences she cites in this book represent as wide a spectrum as one could imagine — they range from Sarah Palin to Jennifer Lopez, John McCain to Nelson Mandela, Pablo Picasso to J. K. Rowling, and Jeremy Lin to Jane Goodall, to name just a few.

I would also have liked the book to explore the issue of emotions more fully. The section called "Connect with Emotions," in which she discusses the role of the Lover, is a good introduction to the importance of relationships and emotional intelligence. The distinction Fox makes between going through the motions and operating with real authenticity is particularly impressive. She describes one of her students at Harvard Law School who received feedback from his peers that "much of my rapport building comes across as inauthentic and disingenuous" and he wondered why. He pondered what he could do to "appear more natural and genuine" (p. 194). "His confusion points to an essential truth about building and maintaining trust. He won't progress by trying to 'appear' more genuine — that typically

backfires. Building rapport to set the stage to take advantage of people later is not actually building rapport. It is theater, at best. Fostering trust means you do not aspire to appear genuine but rather are genuine” (p. 194).

Beyond Winning and Losing

I find the title of the book misleading and unfortunate. Using the term “winning,” while capturing the concerns of the corporate culture, perpetuates a needless dichotomy that undermines the main message of the book. The key conflict resolution thinkers and writers, whose shoulders Fox stands on, have made great efforts to escape the winning versus losing paradigm. Such seminal books as *Getting to Yes* (Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991), *Difficult Conversations* (Stone, Patton, and Heen 1999), and *Beyond Winning* (Mnookin, Peppet, and Tulumello 2004), among others, make important advances in coaching negotiators to think more broadly and move beyond the winning and losing framework to realize the far more satisfying goal of collaboration in negotiation.

From the book’s beginning, Fox makes it clear that she, too, seeks new paradigms, so those attracted to the title’s promise of victory will be disappointed to find that the book’s orientation is not at all adversarial. As she frames it, the victory is over the parts of ourselves that threaten to prevent us from achieving a more integrated self.

The book offers little insight on how to negotiate with others because the exclusive saboteurs of negotiations whom Fox focuses on are our inner selves. While she provides many examples of how readers can reach an inner balance that should help them become more effective in dealing with others, the book offers little in the way of actual instruction as to how to use that knowledge in negotiating with others. So the major challenges that have been posed in recent negotiation books, such as Robert Mnookin’s *Bargaining with the Devil* (2010), are not addressed here at all.

A problem with the book’s failure to grapple with the questions of negotiating with others is that it tends to reinforce the division between one’s inner and outer worlds — so the book comes perilously close to delivering the misleading message that if we are successful in dealing with our inner conflicts, the outer conflicts will automatically be resolved. A paradigm that depicts the inner and outer worlds as dichotomous risks obscuring the reality that it is the *interaction between* one’s inner and outer worlds that is critical to successful negotiations. Knowing Fox’s extensive experience as a negotiation consultant and trainer, I found myself wanting to have her demonstrate (as she does so effectively when describing inner conflict) how her paradigm translates to external negotiations. I hope her next book will take this step, which would make it truly a breakthrough book — and readers would not feel forced to choose between focusing on the inner or outer life when confronted with difficult situations. Developing compassion for both ourselves and others, for

example, is a critical skill: it enables us to feel integrated in ourselves and open to our negotiating partners without either compromising ourselves or seeing ourselves as better than our counterparts.

For many people, accessing their inner selves while on the job may indeed be difficult. Fox tells a wonderful story of responding to a rocket scientist who insisted that he “never feels anything” (p. 38):

“Are you married?” she asked.

“Yes, for twenty-eight years.”

“How did you know you wanted to propose if you had no feelings?”

“That’s easy,” he said. “Because she was the girl of my dreams, and I knew I would go crazy if I couldn’t be with her.”

Fox continually reminds readers that there is no “quick fix” and that the book is only opening a door, and the book offers minimal advice on how to access one’s inner self beyond reflecting on the questions that appear at the end of the chapters describing the Big Four or taking one of Fox’s workshops. In the final chapter, she does state that “everyone should have a centering practice,” such as meditation or other contemplative practices, or even active practices such as running, talking to a dear friend, singing, cooking, and “so much more.” This undercuts the seriousness and effort that it requires to engage in self-reflection. She also refers to the importance of finding support for entering the “dark places” in our lives where we “discover the good stuff.” Our own experiences of pain and fear, Fox argues, once they are faced and understood, offer great promise for liberating us from the constrictions that prevent us from achieving our potential.

But while the book prescribes the benefits of encountering our inner selves, it offers precious few examples of how to actually make that happen. Fox exhorts readers to use her method in order to “wake up” from the trance that she thinks many of us are in.

You wake up by starting to recognize what really motivates you, what hooks, and what opportunities show up that you never noticed before. You wake up by embracing qualities of each member of the Big Four: your Dreamer’s hope; your Thinker’s insight; your Lover’s warmth; and your Warrior’s conviction. You wake up by discovering your transformers, learning that you *can see yourself in action and you have power to shape your leadership and your life*. You realize that when you spot your familiar Performance Gaps looming in front of you, *you can choose to go another way*. (p. 336)

The gaps I have noted are arguably proof of the book’s strengths: the taste that Fox provides of the method she uses to help people create inner balance makes the reader hungry for more. She raises important questions about what people want for their lives and argues convincingly that the

examined life is the only life worth living — this is a fundamental achievement. I hope that readers are inspired to forget the book's title and instead decide to make an effort to become more familiar with their inner lives as a key to their own satisfaction and success.

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