

FIT TO LEAD: THE 8-WEEK SOLUTION FOR SHAPING UP YOUR BODY, YOUR MIND, AND YOUR CAREER (BOOK REVIEW)

BY: JENNIFER L. JONES, MS, ATC, DIRECTOR OF MAX-A-LIFE FITNESS CENTER AT MCCOLLOUGH INSTITUTE FOR APPEARANCE AND HEALTH

Neck, C. P., Mitchell, T .L., Manz, C. C., & Thompson II, E. C. (2004). *Fit to Lead: The 8-week Solution for Shaping Up Your Body, Your Mind, and Your Career*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

With 60% of the American population not participating in regular physical activity, it is no secret that there is a need for change. There is a need for change not only in physical and long-term health benefits, but an improvement in business and financial success as well. This book is based on the premise that by becoming a fit individual, one not only possesses individual health benefits but also has the stamina and psychological tools to become a more diversified and efficient leader.

It is important to note that this book does not advocate a "fad" diet or promise fast, amazing results. Rather it focuses on an 8-week program geared at getting individuals in shape to become better leaders. There is no special diet or medication that needs to be followed or taken. Instead, the focus is on making diet and exercise part of the "work-week." In other words, an individual should stick to the nutrition and physical activity plan Monday through Friday. By the time the weekend rolls around, a little "cheating" is allowed. As far as the diet goes, this book makes a very interesting point about the unrealistic goals that dieters set for themselves. The "rules" become so stringent that adherence often becomes a problem. In turn, these problems often seep into the work environment making cohesion difficult.

In addition to a positive mental outlook, the physical health and message a leader portrays also have effects on the work environment. Particularly in the health field, clients or employees often find difficulty with entrusting their business to an individual that displays hypocritical behavior. For instance, by telling employees that it is important to participate in moderate physical activity on a consistent basis and then have the leader completely disregard this advice sends the wrong message. It is also difficult to persuade a client or business to trust an individual who says one thing but physically displays another.

Another important tool for a successful business is focus. Over the past thirty-two years, the Cooper Clinic has tracked the success of more than twenty-five thousand executives who have participated in Executive Lifestyle evaluations. Michael Mangum, president and CEO of the Mangum Group, a diversified, closely held business with interests in highway construction, asphalt paving and equipment management which employs more than 350 and generates over \$80 million in annual revenues offers a testimonial of the premises of this book. He says the following about regular participation in exercise:

"I do believe fitness impacts my job. I usually exercise during the middle of the day, say, one to four p. m. or so. I find that my energy level is much enhanced when I return from a workout. Further, I find that because I choose to go during the day, my thoughts toward work while exercising. I have some of my most creative thoughts when exercising" (p.4).

However, testimonials are not the only basis for this book. The information contained within the text is based on hundreds of well-controlled studies that determine fitness improves job performance for both employee and employer.

The book begins with information regarding facts and figures about exercise and job-related performance. As it moves into the heart of the program, a chapter is set aside for body fitness (cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength and flexibility), nutritional fitness, and mental fitness. These three components comprise the bulk of the 8-week plan. The benefits of cardiovascular endurance include a boost in mood that is more effective than prescription drugs, stress relief, increased levels of brain chemicals (endorphins), less fatigue, and more energy at the end of the day. These are all components that can "make or break" and executive in the business world. In addition to all these benefits, 30 minutes or more of exercise on most days of the week also results in better sleeping patterns, further

exacerbating the beneficial nature of cardiovascular endurance. Strength benefits include the muscular strength to continue participating in the cardiovascular endurance activities in addition to participation in ADL 's (activities of daily living). The prevention of bone loss and osteoarthritis are also benefits of a regular strength training program. This book discusses the benefits of flexibility as a great stress-fighting agent. By maintaining the integrity of the joint, muscles and surrounding structures are provided with greater elasticity as well as a faster and more efficient rate of healing. All three of these components of the physical fitness prepare the body to be more efficient and healthy so that the business executive may be adept at handling the stresses of everyday life as well as missing less work due to a healthy immune system.

With regards to nutritional fitness, the book discusses several ways in which to make healthy choices whether at a fast-food restaurant or buying items at the grocery store. The mental fitness program involves an 8-step process. Step 1 consists of observing and evaluating yourself. By understanding the behavioral decisions one makes, they are better able to determine the cause of the decision and comprehend why others might make particular choices. Step 2 involves goal setting. Both long term and short-term goals are important in a successful business strategy. Steps 3 and 4 discuss removing negative cues and increasing positive cues. Attitude is an extremely important part of being a leader. Individuals following a leader are more successful if they are surrounded by a positive environment. Finding natural rewards is step 5. At some point during the 8-week plan, there needs to be a metamorphosis from simply exercising, eating right and becoming mentally healthy to actually enjoying these practices. This step is important in that it increases the success rate for adherence. Step 6 is a practice often used to help with mental clarity for business executives and the like. It includes the use of mental imagery. Mental imagery is a technique in which the focus is on positive thoughts to assist in the motivation of making those thoughts become reality. Step 7 is to listen to one's self-talk. This includes uncovering and dealing with negative self-talk. The final step of mental fitness is to challenge your individual beliefs. To think of the world and the choices we make in black in white is a simplistic mistake. Failures are destined to happen, however it is challenging the negative thoughts behind these failures and continuing to strive for realistic goals.

Overall, this book is quite practical due the collaborative nature in which the information is presented through emphasis on physical, mental, and nutritional fitness. It is easy to see how the combination of these three components aid in the process of successful leadership. This book was not only an interesting read, but it serves as a source for providing valuable insights for individuals desiring to be successful in leadership endeavors in current or future places of employment.