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Review: 'Stretch', by Karie Willyerd and Barbara Mistick



Emma Jacobs

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Leonard Nimoy, who played Spock in 'Star Trek', ignored his father's suggestion that he learn to play the accordion

I read this book believing it was something else. The title suggests the authors know which jobs will be in demand in the future. Great, I thought, this might help me guide my three-year-old into becoming a robot adviser, or whatever the new growth area is going to be. But sadly, the authors do no such thing. Perhaps it is for the best — who takes their parents' advice after all?

That point is illustrated in the book by a story about Max Nimoy who advised his son to gain a practical skill to serve him well throughout his life. But Leonard Nimoy ignored his father's suggestion that he learn to play the accordion and instead went on to become an actor, most famously playing Spock in *Star Trek*.

This is a book for anyone who has used the new year to take stock of their professional development and plan their next move. A point brought home to me personally with the opening anecdote about a washed-up journalist, who despite winning multiple Pulitzer prizes and reporting all over the world, failed to read the signs about social media and personal branding. He was sacked and found himself unmarketable.

What he needed, say the authors of this book, was “stretchpertise”: “the professional ability to creatively restructure and repurpose in order to adjust to changing environmental demands.” We all need to learn on the fly, the authors argue, to be open, create a network and gather diverse experiences. As Marshall Goldsmith, the executive coach, is quoted as saying: “What got you here won't get you there.” The authors say the question is not whether you have a sell-by date. (You do.) Rather, it is how to extend the shelf life of your skills. After all, work is unpredictable and always changing because of emerging technologies, globalisation, short-term contracts and part-time work.

This book leads you step by step through appraising your working future. There are tips such as to check in with yourself quarterly. Set calendar reminders such as “lead a project team by July 15th, 2016”.

They suggest stretching your abilities. Such tips are reminders rather than being particularly surprising — do not sit back and rest on

your laurels; ask for unvarnished feedback from people who do not feel bullied into being nice about you; build diverse networks that might refine your thinking about jobs and career development.

Although exercises such as finding five people who can help you “become a better person” might be a step too earnest for some readers, I particularly liked the suggestion of practising ways to feel comfortable in new environments, such as eating new cuisines. Rebranding a takeaway as a career development tool is new to me.

There are chapters too on resilience and anecdotes designed to make you feel good — for example, Jack Ma’s application to the newly opened Kentucky Fried Chicken in his home town. Twenty-four people applied for jobs. Twenty-three were accepted. Yep, you guessed it, poor Mr Ma got turned down. Yet it turned out well for the founder of e-commerce site Alibaba, who is now one of the richest men in China.

I doubt he did it through reading a book such as this, but it is a worthwhile guide on how to refresh your career and skills.

The reviewer is a writer for Business Life

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