

Book Review: Amplifying Your Effectiveness: Collected Essays
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If you are looking for a step-by-step method for “how to” amplify your effectiveness, this book is not for you. *Amplifying Your Effectiveness (AYE)* is a book full of interesting, thought provoking and somewhat disjointed essays from a group of successful consultants that resulted from the first *Amplifying Your Effectiveness* Conference.

AYE is in an almost “sound-bite” format, the longest contribution is sixteen pages and the shortest only two. As such, the book almost begs the reader to pick it up, read a single essay and then put it away and just think for a while. “How does this idea fit into what I am doing?” “How can I translate that thought into something useful in my environment?”

When I read a book, I use a highlighter to mark the passages that I find interesting, informative or thought provoking – the one that I want to come back to and reread later. Then I judge the book by the amount of yellow you see as you flip through the pages. While this book didn’t have the depth that I would have liked/hoped to find, I did find a lot of interesting ideas – lots of yellow. Some of my personal favorites included:

Don Gray’s *Solving Other People’s Problems* - which outlines basic principles that should be kept in mind when trying to solve problems. For example, his Pay Attention principle tell us that “critical information about the problem will hide in plain view” and his Passion Principle warns us “Don’t care more about solving the problem than the other person does.”

Gerald Weinberg’s *Congruent Interviewing by Audition* – reminds us “in the end, credentials aren’t what counts, for software development is not an academic subject – it’s a performing art.” He recommends including either a written test, a problem solving exercise or even a code-reading exercise as part of the interviewing process. This is not a new idea, I had read about it years ago in his book *The Psychology of Computer Programming*, but it is one worth repeating and remembering.

Ester Derby’s *Modeling Organizational Change* – illustrates that “systems, even small ones, are very complex” and that “your job in designing an organizational change is to understand the interplay of factors and to identify ways to guide the system in the direction you desire.” This essay provides an excellent example of how to use a simple diagram of effects models to evaluate potential change ideas.

James Bach’s *Good Practice Hunting* – emphasizes that: “The goodness of a practice is not an intrinsic attribute. Goodness emerges from the conjunction of a practice and its particular context.” He supplies us with a useful checklist of questions to ask ourselves before we adopt a practice.

The reader will not find personal value in every essay in this book. For example, I personally found Kevin Fjelsted’s, *A Brief History of Accessibility of Computers by Blind People*, interesting but basically irrelevant to my work. And while Bob King’s *Life as a Software Architect* does a good job of defining the role of an architect that is not where I spent my time. However, there is enough diversity in this book that everyone should find something useful – even if it is just an idea that gets your to think outside your normal areas of concern.

I will leave you with my favorite of Rick Brenner’s *Ten Project Haiku*

We think about risks.
We have contingency plans.
Oops ... but not for that.