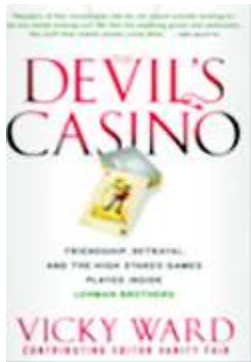


Book Review

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The Devil's Casino: Friendship, Betrayal, and the High Stakes Games Played Inside Lehman Brothers

By Vicky Ward

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THE DEVIL'S CASINO: FRIENDSHIP, BETRAYAL, AND THE HIGH STAKES GAMES PLAYED INSIDE LEHMAN BROTHERS

In 2008, the business world witnessed major economic crises and with the fall of 150 year old financial institution, Lehman Brothers. This ignited the great recession and one is still not sure about whether it is over or not, even today. In brief, firms that once stood for trustworthiness in the financial world teetered and then fell. What were once considered to be rock solid institutions showed craters due to their management functioning and the leadership issues characterized by greed and ineffectiveness of their senior management.

This situation highlighted one fact very clearly: "Gone are the days of the hagiographic profile in newspaper, book or magazine of the slick billionaire who made his bones pushing numbers around on a spreadsheet and cutting heads with a chainsaw. Instead, a new growth industry has emerged to satisfy an acute craving for tales from the fiduciary crypt." (Bing, S in <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/16/AR2010041602033.html>).

In this present day situation where there is a primary emphasis on corporate transparency and responsible corporate citizenship, this timely book by Vicky Ward exposes the weaknesses of large corporation engulfed by excessive greed and unending quest for profit at the cost of ignoring responsibilities towards their business stakeholders in particular and society, at large. The book systematically chronicles a period of 25 years over which deals, transactions and decisions were taken within the company less seriously and more in the lines of a fashionable and fascist corporate golfing culture which serves to satisfy the greed of corporate bosses in the name of bottom-line concept, largely overlooking vital stakeholder issues.

The book also brings out the meteoric rise of some key individuals who in their own ways were ultimately responsible for the fall and demise of this large organization. The author especially targets the chief executive, Richard Fuld who in spite of all atrocities committed by him continues to enjoy the media glamour after the recent release of a 2,000-page investigative report on Lehman's questionable behavior during his regime.

It is interesting to note that Vicky Ward's heroes

are as guilty as the villains at Lehman. The book highlights that in the end of it all corporate success and reward rest on dubious practices designed to satisfy the needs of corporations to fill in their treasuries by creating an ecosystem where one wants to make money from everything. Nothing comes in the way and all equations are geared to manipulate the system where favors can be given or taken at the wink of an eye and rules can be broken or tempered at convenience, if it serves the powers that be and their needs glorified in the name of corporate growth.

Finally, talking about the illusion of corporate discipline and trying to diagnose the same the author, despite having access to valuable written material from corporate sources, takes recourse to views of those unattributed quotes from those who once worked there and eventually and after having got removed opened to tell their versions of what was happening at the company. It all emerges that those who supported the willful acts of decision-makers who vacillated conveniently between agreement and denial did better in the company than those who did not.

The book serves as a caution to all connected to the business world that fooling stakeholders and satisfying vested interest in the short run can yield impressive results in the books of profit and create an illusionary world of corporate success. However, in the long run, sustainable business would be the key to corporate survival and growth. The cat and mice game between statutory and regulatory authorities and the corporate world continues to throw up new challenges for all. Instead of diverting valuable energy and resources towards creating manipulative systems, processes and procedures to elude stakeholders and their well being,

business entities would do well in preserving, and using their energies to create a sustainable business venture characterized by openness and transparency and trust. This is important since it takes a while to build trust and once broken may be irreversibly damaging to business.

About the author:

Dr. Nilanjan Sengupta has more than 17 years of working experience as an educator and practitioner in the field of management. He has worked as a teacher, trainer, researcher and management consultant in national level management institutes like, NIBM Pune, EDI Ahmedabad, IMT Nagpur, and has held important academic and administrative positions in his career. He has taught in the management programs offered by foreign universities in India, like University of Michigan, Lubeck University Germany, and Cambridge University UK (British Council Kolkata). He has also worked in the corporate sector covering both the manufacturing and IT sectors in managerial positions.

He has consulted with international bodies like TheWorld Bank, E.C. and IFAD (Rome) and OXFAM (India) in a number of international and national projects. He has an impressive track record of publications with more than 30 papers in national and international journals, conferences and seminars and 5 books in the areas of management and social sciences, respectively. He is in the Editorial and Advisory Boards of several prestigious journals. Dr. Sengupta is a registered PhD guide at VTU, Belgaum. He is also an empanelled consultant at TRI, Mumbai and ConnectEd, Thailand. The Author can be contacted at nilanjan@sdmimd.ac.in

