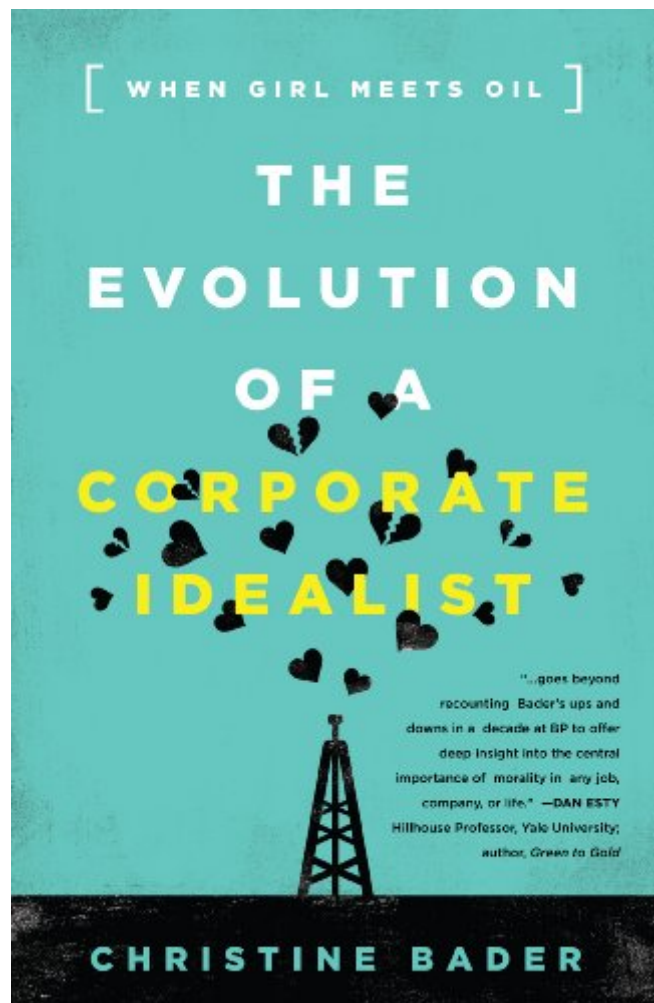




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The Evolution Of A Corporate Idealist: When Girl Meets Oil



Synopsis

There is an invisible army of people deep inside the world's biggest and best-known companies, pushing for safer and more responsible practices. They are trying to prevent the next Rana Plaza factory collapse, the next Deepwater Horizon explosion, the next Foxconn labor abuses. Obviously, they don't always succeed. Christine Bader was one of those people. She loved BP and then-CEO John Browne's lofty rhetoric on climate change and human rights until a string of fatal BP accidents, Browne's abrupt resignation under a cloud of scandal, and the start of Tony Hayward's tenure as chief executive, which would end with the Deepwater Horizon disaster. Bader's story of working deep inside the belly of the beast is unique in its details, but not in its themes: of feeling like an outsider both inside the company (accused of being a closet activist) and out (assumed to be a corporate shill); of getting mixed messages from senior management; of being frustrated with corporate life but committed to pushing for change from within. *The Evolution of a Corporate Idealist: Girl Meets Oil* is based on Bader's experience with BP and then with a United Nations effort to prevent and address human rights abuses linked to business. Using her story as its skeleton, Bader weaves in the stories of other "Corporate Idealists" working inside some of the world's biggest and best-known companies.

Book Information

File Size: 1900 KB

Print Length: 266 pages

Publisher: Bibliomotion, Inc. (March 25, 2014)

Publication Date: March 25, 2014

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00I2ZW46S

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #460,901 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #61

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Customer Reviews

Do you need to check your ideals at the door when you start working for a large corporation? In her new book, *The Evolution of a Corporate Idealist: Girl Meets Oil*, Christine Bader answers that question with a firm NO! But, she warns, don't expect it to be easy. Ms. Bader started at BP Oil as a starry-eyed business school graduate expecting to change the world. Her book provides a balanced account of both failures and hard-won successes as she struggled to promote corporate responsibility. Her writing style is light and breezy, as she interweaves her BP experience with the experiences of other corporate idealists and the lessons she learned. But her message is deadly serious. In light of events like the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the Rana Plaza Factory collapse in Bangladesh, the lessons in Ms. Bader's book, and the ideals it embraces, have never been more important.

(Full disclosure: Christine Bader and I went to college together (overlapping one year) and she is a friend.) Christine Bader has written an engaging, brutally honest, thought-provoking book about her experiences, first with BP and later with the United Nations, as what she calls a Corporate Idealist. (This term is used throughout the book and always capitalized, as if it were an official title.) She defines the term in her prologue as referring to members of "a global army of people fighting for better social and environmental practices inside multi-national companies -- with mixed success." I came to the book a decided skeptic about whether major corporations ever see it in their best interests to commit resources towards socially and environmentally responsible practices, particularly when there is often such an obvious profit motive in ignoring such issues in favor of doing everything as efficiently (i.e. cheaply) as possible. Bader, as one would expect, makes a convincing case that corporations ignore these concerns at their peril, and does a fine job outlining the hidden costs of ignoring the social consequences of corporate actions. (She frequently uses the example of how much money can be lost when business operations have to be shut down, even just for a couple of days, due to protesters who are objecting to the business' practices.) The detailed accounts of her work for BP in Indonesia and China are fascinating and, at times, inspiring, as the reader sees how Bader and her fellow Corporate Idealists were able to achieve concrete successes that served both the interests of BP and the communities in those countries in which it

was operating. I still count myself somewhat skeptical on the issue, but Bader shows that it can at least be done on a micro level. By the time the Deepwater Horizon disaster thrust BP into the international headlines, Bader had moved on to a position at the United Nations. Although her disappointment in BP's response to that incident is palpable within the pages of the book, I myself was disappointed not to read a more detailed criticism of the way in which BP addressed the disaster and what it said about the company in general. It's possible I wanted more inside politics than Bader was willing to deliver. The final chapter of the book, in which Bader surveys several of her fellow Corporate Idealists in a sort of State-of-the-Revolution summary, reads like a manifesto for anyone interested in this line of work, and indeed for anybody who is frustrated that more companies don't seem to pay attention to any motivation other than the almighty bottom line. The statements of Bader and her other CI's are candid about how difficult and frustrating it can be to battle against corporate policies and practices that have been in place for decades or even centuries, but these declarations are tempered with appreciation of how far this movement has come. You don't have to be an idealist (corporate or otherwise) to enjoy this book. Christine Bader has a lot to say about how major corporations should operate and the obligations they owe to the communities in which they operate and the world at large. Even if you don't agree with what she says, she will force you to think about the role of corporations in contemporary society. It ought to be required reading at business schools around the country, if not the world.

The authenticity of the author's passion for this work shines throughout this book, which makes it a very easy and compelling read. Bader expertly walks that fine line - providing insight without being preachy, inspiring without sounding out of touch. Her experiences, from the hallways of BP to the UN and then advising companies on human rights cuts to the core of these issues: they are complex, evolving, huge and tangled - and no one institution will solve them alone, let alone one person. Her call to action, for a movement of "corporate idealists" to take on the hard work of working from within to create change really resonated for me. The tangible examples help to ground some sophisticated policy maneuvering in reality and practice. This is a must-read for anyone who thinks that large, bureaucratic institutions are immovable or needs the guidebook/manifesto to spur them into action.. this should be required reading for every MBA, MPP, communications and engineering program out there - corporate idealists are needed throughout the business world and Bader's book is a perfect jumping off point.

When Girl Meets Oil in some respects is a valuable exposé, providing the layman with an

insider's 'warts and all' view on how large corporations are grappling with what can seem like contradictory objectives of growing profits and doing good. However, as another reviewer has pointed out, they're not mutually exclusive, but rather interdependent. If corporations take a long term view, and if institutions - as the US government did in Deepwater - levy costs for damaging common goods, responsibility can become a prerequisite for doing right by shareholders. I personally find it comforting knowing that there are people in companies working to do good, and that companies are changing, one hopes largely for the better. But call me an idealist. In other respects, the book is a guide to people already working in business, and it is here that it truly excels. At a most basic level, it is reassuring to see how one person has found a personal story with meaning in a corporate career, which is not necessarily an easy thing to do. The book is also inspiring, and a call to arms, in showing how so many people have caused positive change in large, slow-moving companies. Finally, it provides some useful tools for thinking about issues, whether you work in apparel, natural resources or the most innocuous of industries, in growth economies or developed ones. Christine Bader's engaging style makes accessible a topic that could easily be academic. All in all, a great read and important book.

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