# Reviews

Getting Ahead of the Curve
Corporate Strategies That Address Climate Change
Andrew J. Hoffman
(University of Michigan, 2006)

An Inconvenient Truth, the film about Al Gore's distressing PowerPoint presentation on the imminent dangers of climate change, ultimately forces viewers to ask the question: "What can I do to stop global warming right now?" The answers–drive a hybrid car, turn off your lights, write your government representative–are frustratingly unsatisfying at the individual level. And God help you if you're running a corporation. Faced with the inevitability of more and more climate-based regulatory constraints upon companies, business leaders need to do far more than propose a "Ride Your Bike to Work" day.
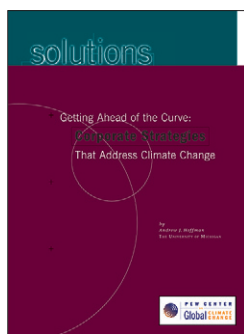
Andrew J. Hoffman, the Holcim Professor of Sustainable Enterprise at the University of Michigan, has taken on this challenge. Working in tandem with the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, Hoffman has put together a highly practical and comprehensive report–a how-to manual for companies interested in developing effective climate strategies. The publication–which you can download for free at www.pewclimate.org–is based on a survey of 31 companies by Hoffman and the Pew Center. Readers will find a three-phase umbrella approach consisting of eight specific steps they can use to develop a comprehensive plan for addressing climate change.

Hoffman recommends that companies begin by conducting a general evaluation of their greenhouse gas emissions. They should follow up by identifying options for reducing emissions and then setting reduction targets. Corporations should also look at financial instruments, such as emissions trading, and make sure that their workforces are actively engaged in achieving environmental sustainability goals. Additionally, businesses will want to become involved in policy discussions at the state, national, and even international levels. By taking such steps, your firm gains both a jump on the competition and a seat at the regulatory table. (For more on what it takes to assess risks and possible advantages related to global warming, see "Competitive Advantage on a Warming Planet," by Jonathan Lash and Fred Wellington, in this issue of HBR.)

Almost any report of this kind makes for arid reading, but Hoffman's material is surprisingly engaging. Particularly useful are case studies from half a dozen U.S. and European multinationals, including Swiss Re, Whirlpool, Alcoa, Shell, and DuPont. The profiles describe the unique challenges each company faces, which range from regulatory issues to customer needs to shareholder pressures. The report also outlines the steps these firms have taken so far and how their strategies are evolving. Unfortunately, the case studies occasionally take on rather too celebratory a tone (one CEO's "leadership style infuses the corporation with a strong focus on stakeholder engagement and transparency"), making them sound suspiciously like pages torn from annual reports. Nevertheless, given its otherwise useful and detailed content–and its unbeatable cover price–"Getting Ahead of the Curve" warrants a considered look.

–Bronwyn Fryer

Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything
Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams
(Portfolio, 2006)

Linux and other popular open-source software programs have long captured the imagination of businesspeople eager to attract the efforts of diligent outsiders. Now, as consultants Tapscott and Williams effectively explain, mass collaboration on the Web is possible for nonhigh-tech businesses too. The authors survey a broad landscape that includes not only consumer examples such as Wikipedia but also the innovation intermediary InnoCentive and the sophisticated value chains behind airplanes. Collaborative technology may yield the greatest benefits within companies: As more of the routine jobs are automated, employees increasingly work on loosely organized projects rather than individual tasks. Like its title, the book's prose can fall into breathless hype, but it delves usefully into the main challenge of mass collaboration– how to be open and transparent enough to attract outsiders while restrictive enough to capture economic value.

Growing Great Employees: Turning Ordinary People into Extraordinary Employees
Erika Andersen
(Portfolio, 2007)

More than any other business activity, the management of people gets at fundamental tensions of human life. Business is hard enough without the insecurities of both boss and employee. So it's refreshing to see a book that delivers current thinking on personnel practice while prodding managers to recognize the tensions. Andersen, a consultant, likens managing people to gardening and puts the art of listening to others–and to oneself–at the heart of each step. She challenges managers to reflect on how much they truly seek the success of their employees separate from the demands of their own egos. This well-illustrated book still has the relentless optimism of most advice books, but managers who read carefully will take a sobering message to heart.

–John T. Landry

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