

**Platform Leadership: How Intel, Microsoft and Cisco Drive Industry Innovation.**  
By Annabelle Gawer & Michael A. Cusumano.  
Harvard Business School Press, 305 pages. \$29.95.

This book has an intriguing fundamental thesis: that a few large and highly successful technology companies have become "platform leaders - companies that provide the technological foundation on which other products, services and systems are built." In general, it explores how these companies fashioned their strategies rather than certifying their dominance.

It's hard to argue with the choices made by Gawer and Cusumano, business professors at INSEAD and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, respectively, but the book is a bit lopsided: Three long chapters are devoted to Intel, where the authors did extensive interviews, versus just one chapter for Microsoft and Cisco combined. Clearly, the level of cooperation at Intel was far higher; the few comments from executives at Microsoft and Cisco come from speeches, their Web sites or other public sources. Another, shorter chapter looks at "wannabe" leaders like Palm Inc. and Linux.

Platform Leadership offers a detailed look at the strategies and the technologies that have taken these three to "the Holy Grail of high-tech industries," but it's a sometimes-uneasy marriage of strategy book and narrative covering a series of product developments that isn't fully successful at either approach. When the narrative gets into a thicket of individual product decisions, it's difficult to sense the overarching strategy.

**Powerful Leadership: How to Unleash the Potential in Others and Simplify Your Own Life.**

By Eric G. Stephan and R. Wayne Pace  
Financial Times/Prentice Hall, 258 pages. \$27.

Powerful Leadership fits squarely in the niche of professional self-improvement books, tying advice and appeals about how leaders should operate with the kind of warm and fuzzy blandishments doled out in books like the Chicken Soup for the Soul series. The authors, professors at Brigham Young University, present a framework for creating an ideal modern leader who's in touch with his or her emotions.

Certainly, there's nothing revolutionary about the ideas they present - which essentially call for a leader who is non-controlling, supportive, involved, quick to praise, ethical and at peace with himself or herself. They package these concepts into seven "essential changes" that the unenlightened leader needs to make. Certainly, there's nothing revolutionary about the ideas they present - which essentially call for a leader who is non-controlling, supportive, involved, quick to praise, ethical and at peace with himself or herself. They package these concepts into seven "essential changes" that the unenlightened leader needs to make.

The softest of these concepts, "Stay on the Peaceful Path," is an exhortation to seek balance between leisure and work; it suggests that inner peace and calm can be enhanced through steps such as improved sleep patterns, "choosing to do only the important things," eating and exercising properly, etc. The authors even suggest that relaxation and meditation techniques can improve the immune system.

Apart from a reader quiz near the end, the book has very few graphics, relying on lists and bullet points to get its message across. Stephan and Pace write well, and there's an active sense of humor evident throughout the book; it isn't preachy or tendentious, which makes it easy to digest.

### **Building, Leading, and Managing Strategic Alliances.**

**By Fred A. Kuglin, with Jeff Hook.**

**Amacom, 272 pages. \$39.95.**

Leave no stone unturned: That seems to be author Fred A. Kuglin's philosophy as he weaves practical advice, theory and personal recollections around the central theme of building business alliances.

Kuglin takes readers through the life cycle of an alliance, from structuring it, implementing it with inter-company teams, maximizing growth, to anticipating and dealing with its decline and its eventual unwinding.

Kuglin, a vice president in the supply chain practice at Cap Gemini/Ernst & Young, draws successfully on his personal experiences, many overseas, in exploring the issues that makes alliances work or fall apart. In fact, a good deal of the book is written in the first person, which doesn't always mix well with drier assessments of varying industries and text-book style discussions of how to construct agreements and memos of intent.

The book employs quite a few charts and graphs; some, however, are very complicated and have small text in dark boxes that is difficult to read. Kuglin bounces around between industries as varied as telecommunications and trucking, but readers will find a wealth of good advice and informative experience to learn from.