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Executive Life

After the Shouting, Books That Soothe

By **CHRISTOPHER S. STEWART**

THERE was a time, back in the days of the stock market bubble, when books by executives like Jack Welch, Sumner Redstone and Michael Eisner extolled their own triumphs, or at least promised to let readers in on the secrets behind the miracles they worked.

But with blatant displays of corporate greed undercutting the status of chief executives in general, there is another prototype emerging: executives who, instead of focusing on themselves, are writing books that offer pragmatic, even humble, suggestions on how to succeed. And, in some cases, "success" may not even be defined in terms of business performance.

Many of the new books by executives are "less on personality and more on nuts-and-bolts issues," said Steve Ross, publisher of Crown books. "There is much more of an interest in proven principles than the thinking you had a couple years ago."

In the latest crop of executive books, many of the successes seem to be found in understanding what has gone wrong in the business world and using that knowledge to try to improve things. "What was going on in corporate America and, really, culture in general started to grate on me," said Charles Patrick Garcia, founder of the Sterling Financial Group and a recent author. "The message seemed to be: Lie, cheat and steal and you come away with a million dollars." He said he started thinking, "Is there a general ethical malaise here?"

Mr. Garcia, a decorated naval officer and a former White House fellow, says he wrote "Message From Garcia," a collection of success stories from people of various backgrounds, as an antidote to the business world. "It's not a finance book," he said. "It's about being successful in life. Success



Andrew Itkoff for The New York Times

Charles Patrick Garcia has written a book that is less about chronicling his own business success and more about life lessons he has learned.

is not about money, but about pursuing your calling." Published in September, the book spent the last week of October at No. 6 on the business best-seller list of The Wall Street Journal.

Jeffrey W. Brown, vice president for business publishing at John Wiley & Sons, which published Mr. Garcia's book, said that there were larger trends at work as well. "Part of the growth of self-help books is an

age issue, with boomer executives who reached a certain level and are wondering what to do next," he said.

"You also have the downturn and the Enrons," he added. "A lot has happened in the last few years. And people are writing about how to get through the tough times."

Mr. Brown says he has seen an increase of roughly 30 percent in proposals for self-help business books since the late 1990's,

when publishing lists for business books were full of day-trading guides and cult-of-personality memoirs.

According to Bowker's Books in Print, the business memoir peaked in 2001, at 142 books. Last year, the number was down to 104.

For example, Mr. Welch's book, "Jack: Straight From the Gut," was a marketing phenomenon that made it to No. 1 on many best-seller lists in 2001. Yet a tale of the corporate success of another prominent executive, "Softwar: An Intimate Portrait of Larry Ellison and Oracle" (Simon & Schuster), which came out in October, has failed to catch fire and now ranks below 3,000th on Amazon.

Bennett Neiman, senior vice president of Partners International, an outplacement firm in New York, says he wrote his business book, "Slay the Dragons — Free the Genie" as a way "to codify what I believe in." He says that there is too much negativity and cynicism in the business world.

"I had a sort of midlife crisis," said Mr. Neiman, explaining how he had come to write the book, which he will publish himself next month. That crisis also resulted in his selling his advertising firm in St. Louis and getting a divorce, he said. "There is just something fundamentally wrong with

how grown-ups act in work," Mr. Neiman said. "When you get into the business world, you check your hearts at the door."

Publishing experts say that there are probably many executives who, like Mr. Neiman, turn to self-publishing after finding that mainstream publishers rarely accept the works of someone who is neither famous nor well known on the speaking circuit. No one tracks self-published business books specifically, but Xlibris, a print-on-demand company, has noticed an increase of about 40 percent in the overall self-help category in the last year.

Jan Miller, a literary agent in Dallas who represents big sellers like Phil McGraw, known as Dr. Phil, said she was approached recently by a number of executives who wanted to purge their pasts.

"We've already received calls from guys who have served time for corporate greed and want to write about it — how large is that market?" she said. "A book about how not to steal from your company? How it feels when you get out of jail for fraud?" Ms. Miller said she did not take on the men as clients.

WILL WILLIS JR. is hoping that his book will clean the slate, in his case over his pattern of adultery, which ended two of his marriages

while he was a division president of the Mennen Company and, later, president of the Jeno's Frozen Pizza Company. He blames his own deceptiveness rather than his high-powered career, and he has written a book telling women how to keep an eye on the highflying executives in their lives.

"A couple times I stopped writing because of how embarrassing the things were I was writing," said Mr. Willis, now president of On-Site Analysis Inc., a Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., manufacturer of diagnostic instruments for cars. "But I had to write this. I wanted women like my daughters to see what man not to marry."

The book, "Secrets Men Don't Want Women to Know," which Mr. Willis published himself in October, is meant to help women navigate bad relationships by giving them clues to what men are thinking and doing when they are unfaithful, he said. So far, it has nearly sold out of its first printing of 7,000, he says, and he has ordered an additional 10,000 copies.

Why would anyone want to read such a book? "Why do software companies hire hackers to develop software?" he asked rhetorically. "The reality is I know how to break the code. The only way to know about something that went wrong is to talk to a guy who's been there. I'm living proof."