

• EDITORIAL & COMMENTARY

Monday, June 16, 2007

The Deadline: A Novel About Project Management

Book Review

by Tom DeMarco

Reviewed by Kevin Lee Elder

Biography: Dr. Kevin Lee Elder is an associate professor of Information Systems in Georgia Southern University's College of Business Administration. He teaches in the areas of Management of IT and IS, and his research interests are in IS Education, Web Usability, Enterprise Architecture, and Information Assurance and Security. Dr. Elder may be reached by e-mail at kelder@georgiasouthern.edu.

As a business person you are more than likely told of many books that you should read in your spare time. First off, who has spare time? Secondly, who wants to read a boring business, marketing, or sales book if they do have some spare time? Enter Tom DeMarco. DeMarco has been a successful Information Technology and Information Systems consultant for many years. He is also a college professor who loves to teach at every opportunity. DeMarco decided a good way to teach business people about Project Management was to write a novel, rather than a boring book. The Deadline is the result of his efforts.

The inspiration for this novel was a University of Colorado physicist and writer in the 1930s, George Gamow. Gamow wrote a series of short stories about physics. In the stories a bank clerk named Mr. Tompkins has an interest in physics. He would regularly attend evening lectures at the local university concerning various physics topics. During each lecture Mr. Tompkins would fall asleep, presumably from the boring nature of the professor's presentation. When Mr. Tompkins awakened one of the principles of physics would be altered. In one of these stories, for example, Mr. Tompkins awoke in a universe where the speed of light was only fifteen miles per hour. That meant he could observe relativistic effects on his bicycle: the city blocks became shorter in the direction of travel as he accelerated, and time on the post office clock slowed down. I recommend these short stories to any parent struggling to help their teenager grasp the basic physics principles.

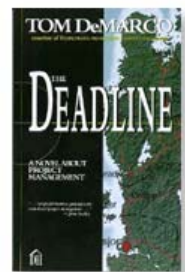
With the inspiration from Gamow, DeMarco created the character he also called Mr. Tompkins. Mr. Tompkins is a project manager in a large telecommunications company that is being downsized. He is sitting in a back row of an auditorium being lectured about all the great possibilities that being downsized will present to him. Suddenly an attractive lady appears next to him when he awakens from a dream. Turns out the attractive lady is no fellow employee. She is a spy from another country who knows all about Mr. Tompkins, including his favorite drink which she has spiked. Next thing he knows he is on a plane, being whisked away to the country of Morovia. In Morovia, the Dictator has decided his country will become a first rate producer of packaged software. He hires Mr. Tompkins to manage the six projects to develop knock-off versions of PhotoShop, Quicken, Paint, etc... Similar to the Gamow stories, various principles that govern project work will be altered in this new kingdom.

Mr. Tompkins is given a journal to write down what he learns from each new experience managing these projects in this altered world. There is probably not enough sex and violence in the book to make it on television. However, if you need to learn the basic principles of project management what better way than reading a novel with spies, dictators and foreign intrigue? The reader will be in for a different experience from other business and management books.

Project management is a tool every business person should have in their possession. This is a novel way to acquire some of the necessary knowledge. I think you will at least enjoy the first half of the book where the intrigue and various characters are presented. The second half of the book has more project management principles that you need to learn about, and less intrigue. Will Morovia become the next Silicon Valejit. What does the beautiful Lahksa Hoolihan really want? Who is ex-General Markhov? Where do you find the expertise to manage projects and what expertise do you need? Can you really run a company as a tyrant telling your employees they will literally lose their heads for failing? What can 200 CMM-2 certified software engineers do in the face of a seemingly impossible deadline? Read the Deadline and find out. This is a fun read for anyone involved in software development projects and that applies to most everyone in business at some point in their careers.



Kevin Lee Elder



The Cover Story

Title: The Deadline: A Novel About Project Management

Authors: by Tom DeMarco

Number of Pages: 320

Area(s) of business: All

Readability: Light

Time needed to read: 4+ hours

Why Should I Read This Book? It is a book written for all areas of the organization to come to grips with software project management or anyone wanting a good summer novel.

Overall rating: 4 Light Bulbs