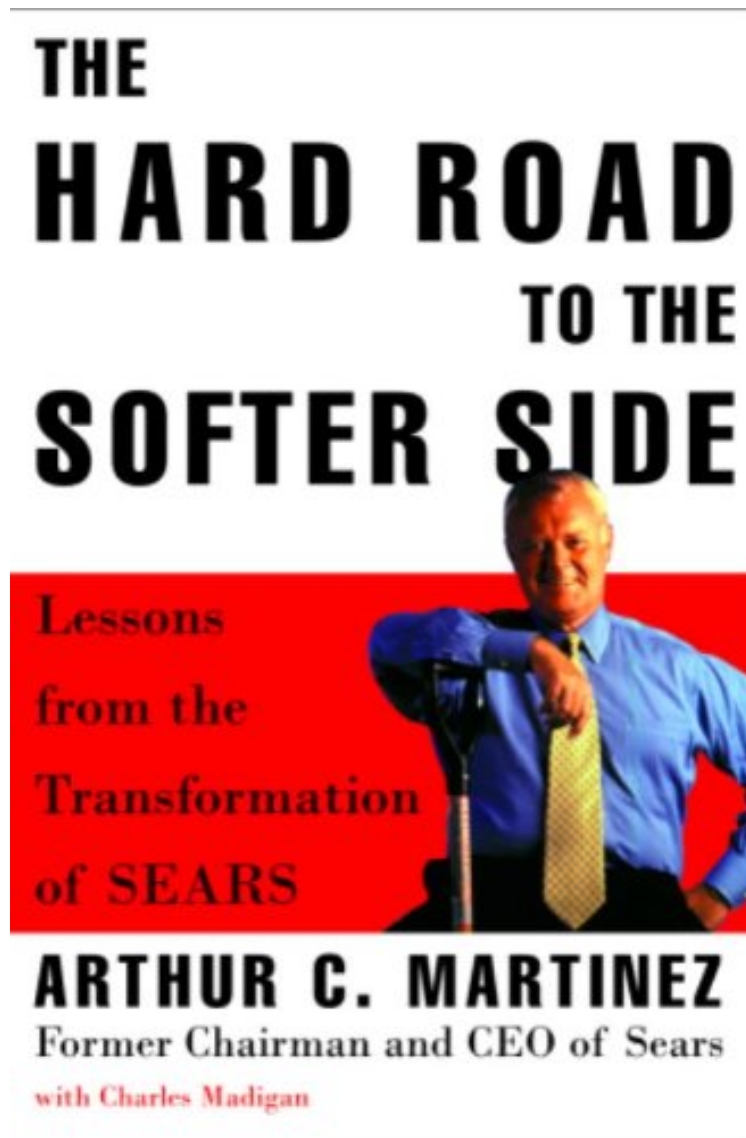


The Hard Road to the Softer Side: Lessons from the Transformation of Sears

Arthur Martinez, Charles Madigan
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Arthur Martinez, Charles Madigan : The Hard Road to the Softer Side: Lessons from the Transformation of Sears before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Hard Road to the Softer Side: Lessons from the Transformation of Sears:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. AS THE WORLD TURNED SEARS KEPT SPINNING IN ALL THE WRONG PLACESBy richard e whitelockA fine effort by a very talented manager. This book is not detailed as The Big Store was. The personalities that grew Sears from its infancy and later were shown the door in the late 1970's

and early 1980's don't play much of a part in this book. I would have enjoyed working for Martinez. As a Sears executive for over 25 years, I recognized his passion and good intentions to right the ship. He simply failed to tap his most important resource for the turnaround and that was the division managers and salespeople in the 900 remaining stores. Martinez wasn't working for Sears in the 1950's, '60's and part of the '70's. He didn't have the historical concept to recognize what was required for sales success at Sears. It was all wrapped up in the local store personnel, some mighty fine territorial staffs, group managers that were literally the best of the best, and dedicated employees who were their foot soldiers and knew the terrain like the back of their hands. Martinez presents his managerial style as being direct, informed and associate oriented. He simply didn't go to the sources that could have assisted him in his attempts to be led out of the wilderness. He relied too heavily on Parent personnel to formulate and initiate his programs. That same staff was too embedded and stuck in the old ways of the General, Metcalf, and Telling. And the kid, Ed Brennan didn't help the situation when he was the president of the merchandising group and finally the CEO. He meant well but he couldn't get the work done through his staff so he worked himself to the bone and just about worked everyone else to their graves. He was so involved in merchandising that he lost sight of the support troops that simply weren't able or unwilling to do their jobs in the best interest of Sears. Brennan was like George Patton. He was a great general but he laid waste everything in his path. Patton didn't leave a great deal in his path to help resurrect the countryside once the war was over. Brennan left a lot of bodies and destroyed stores, groups and territories in his wake. He destroyed the culture and initiatives that made Sears so great. All the while he thought he was doing well. And suddenly he was left with the same people in Parent who were responsible for bringing down The Big Store as well as the Territorial and Group kings that were put to pasture. Martinez, according to his book, at least showed compassion and recognized where the true strength of Sears could be found. Unfortunately he didn't spend enough time on the sales floor talking to what old timers remained about what made Sears so great in the earlier decades. I recognize him for his leadership style and attempts he made to turn the Big Store around. As an outsider, he lacked the historical perspective to make it work or even recognize who in the organization would have been of help to him. There were many resources left in Parent and the field who never got the chance to put forth their knowledge of Sears that had been accumulated over many decades of active participation. When you talk about Sears culture, you aren't addressing the recent leadership brought in from the outside. You are talking about the long term employees who have seen and lived it all and knew how to get the job done if only allowed. Much of Sears failure was self-inflicted. And I am afraid that the price will be too great to be able to turn the Big Store around. But I recognize Martinez and his efforts as being well intentioned and directed. And for that I recognize his good intentions. Too little, too late. Read "The Big Store" first if you have an interest in Sears retailing. Otherwise I don't think you will ever get through the first third of the book before you turn it into a door stop. For all those Sears employees who built the company and the few that became an integral part of its demise, this is a must read for you. It's like thumbing through your high school annual. and remember those young and innocent faces when times were good and experiences oh so sweet. Gone are those days, but there is no reason why you can't relive them just a little. Brennan was brilliant but such a stiff. Martinez missed the grand opportunity to turn the great ship around. They forgot the reason why Sears was so great. It was their leaders, territory men, group managers, store managers, store staff and the many thousands of employees that manned the salesfloor on a daily basis and maintained the favorable compact between employee and customer. It was such an easy "fix." If only the "suits" had asked the right question to the right people. The Great Store would be pumping out records today that would have made yesteryear look so old. Too bad- you missed the boat once again. And you were paid millions to fix the problem and get it right. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A PhD Program on Leadership in One Book !!! TRULY OUTSTANDING !!! By Mr. Gadget I was doing a doctorate in leadership and found that this book essentially boils down everything I studied into one book. This is absolutely the very best book on leadership you can find on the shelf, outside that of the Bible. Look up Arthur Martinez on the web and you'll find that he's truly a master with a very long resume running big companies. Truly an outstanding resource. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Interesting book By David Margulies Although the information is a little dated it confirms what others have written about the dysfunctional nature of Sears. Martinez talks a little too much about himself but does offer interesting insights.

For the better part of a century, Sears, Roebuck and Company touched the lives of almost everyone in America. A stunning tale of marketing and savvy, the company started selling watches and quickly became an essential source of goods for the American home. Sears brought the Christmas dreams of distant children to life; introduced the American homemaker to a collection of appliances that stripped much of the drudgery from daily living; and put solid, dependable tools in the hands of strong, eager men. At the same time, it forged a solid relationship with its customers, earning that most valuable business asset of them all: loyalty. And then, when it could least afford to, Sears lost its way. It gradually forgot about its customers. It no longer understood (or cared) who its competitors were. It shifted its focus inward, to the interests and needs of its huge bureaucracy, all at the expense of the customers who found themselves in declining, dismal stores. The greatest retailer in world history had become a company with a great past, a disappointing present, and a dismal future. *The Hard Road to the Softer Side: Lessons from the Transformation of*

Sears is the story of how Sears recovered from this downfall, told by the visionary who built the team that forged the company's rebirth. When Arthur Martinez took charge at Sears in 1992, he found a once-great company facing a loss of \$4 billion, with a Soviet-style bureaucracy, little idea of its target customer, and an army of 300,000 disheartened employees. Many experts thought Sears was too far gone to save. But save it Martinez did, putting Sears in the black by 1994 and sailing on through 1997. It wasn't easy. Almost everything the company had become needed to change. Fifty thousand jobs disappeared. The Sears catalog, which had become so much a part of the company's mythology, was put to rest. More than 100 stores were closed. But what rose from all of that turmoil was a new commitment to customers and a strategy that should have been apparent: in the American family, the mother is the chief financial officer. With a boldness and determination backed by billions of dollars in renovations, Sears revived its connection to its customers and, at the same time, brought its own people back to life. The advertising sent the message, the sales staff opened its arms, and the customers came back. The new Sears was keeping its eye on the marketplace, its focus on the customer, and its interests firmly connected to the financial health of its shareholders. Then Sears hit the wall again with new aggressive competitors, a huge ethics problem, a war for talent, and a slowdown in sales. The story of how Martinez and his team worked their way through not one but two crises is compelling and highly instructive, especially for anyone working in a company with an entrenched corporate culture or a long tradition that needs to be updated in order to stay competitive.

.com When Arthur C. Martinez moved from vice chairman of Saks Fifth Avenue to the top spot at Sears in 1992, his immediate duty was clear: use his outsider's perspective to remake a stodgy and floundering 19th-century retailer into one prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. The problems he uncovered ran deeply enough to require two complete transformations, sandwiched around corporate legal problems that led to millions in direct damages and an incalculable loss in consumer goodwill. The *Hard Road to the Softer Side* tells how Martinez went about this conversion during his eight-year reign, the book's title playing off the ad campaign central to his efforts to reposition the company from a dowdy purveyor of tools and appliances to a modern outlet for fashion and fun. The key was recognizing that Sears's primary customer had shifted over the years from the man of the family to the woman, and that everything from store design and brand selection to prices and marketing efforts had to reflect that reality. To effect these changes, he unflinchingly confronted a succession of sacred cows--the most notable of which, the venerable Sears catalog, was losing so much money he was reluctantly forced to kill it. He also closed dozens of unprofitable stores, shed longtime affiliates like Coldwell Banker and Allstate, oversaw a cautious entry into e-commerce, and even adopted some concepts used by aggressive competitors. The specifics won't apply to many companies unless they also do \$40 billion-plus in annual sales, but the story of Sears has always been the story of American retailing, and the principles behind its 1990s resurgence (focus intently on the customer, keep a close eye on the competition, don't be afraid of change) are generally applicable to enterprises of other sizes and types as well. -- Howard Rothman
From *Publishers Weekly* A couple of factors save this book from being just another stroll down CEO lane. First, the turnaround of Sears, Roebuck is far from complete. Although the company is in better shape than when Martinez, formerly vice-chairman at Saks Fifth Avenue, took over, it is still not on a par with either of its main competitors, Wal-Mart and Target. Thus it provides a snapshot of Martinez's participation in a continuing turnaround effort; he left the company last year after eight years as chairman and CEO. The second distinguishing factor is the interweaving of Sears's history. Martinez and Madigan, a senior writer at the Chicago Tribune, not only provide fascinating background information, but also explain why the company floundered. Martinez cites the three elements by which Sears "helped [its customers] leave": ignoring them, disregarding competitors and "[f]ocusing almost all of [its] energy on the construction of a magnificent, frustrating bureaucracy." Martinez offers predictable management lessons: "The Customer Is Everything"; "Your Employees Are Golden." But however obvious such tenets may be, Sears clearly lost sight of them. Despite flowery writing ("Everyone in that world had to understand that the customer is the sun at the center of our solar system"), the story of how Sears lost its way is engaging, even if readers aren't certain it will regain the right path. Part management guide, part cautionary tale and part historical recap, this book should appeal to the ever-growing management and executive crowd. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.
From *Booklist* Martinez was the chairman and CEO of Sears from 1992 to 2000. In 1992 the company lost \$3.9 billion. By 1994 its earnings were in the black, with a profit of \$1 billion. By 1998 Sears again was in financial trouble, and again Martinez revived the company. In this very readable book, Martinez (with coauthor Madigan) tells how he did it, stressing the importance of the customers and employees. Know your enemy, he advises, and know the history that created your company. And in a competitive, changing marketplace, time is not your friend, he warns. Business leaders and managers will find his words absorbing; workers on the bottom rung of the ladder will get a glimpse of the machinations at the top; and all readers of business books will find much to ruminate over. George Cohen
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