**Book Reviews**

**Thinking Forward: Six Strategies for Highly Successful Organizations**  
John R. Griffith and Kenneth R. White, with Patricia A. Cahill  
*Health Administration Press, Chicago, 2003, 266 pp., $56.70 (paperback)*

Although *Thinking Forward: Six Strategies for Highly Successful Organizations* is the story of one Catholic health care system, the lessons to be learned from it are transferable beyond health care management. The authors, John R. Griffith and Kenneth R. White, PhD, have, in selecting Catholic Health Initiatives (CHI), Denver, as their subject, chosen an award-winning system with an impressive record of success. “Thinking forward” is the phrase that Patricia Cahill, CHI’s former president and CEO, used to describe how the CHI associates approach their work. It is a process that constantly seeks to improve professional services delivered and personal growth.

Griffith and White choose an engaging format for presenting their findings. It is a combination of background information, data, and interviews with CHI associates, who bring the healing ministry of Jesus to those they serve. This ministry business model identifies CHI’s role as advancing the mission, vision, and values of CHI as a national Catholic health ministry.

In their analysis of CHI’s processes, the authors have focused on six critical areas of operations:
- Governance
- Service lines
- Complex case management
- Prevention
- Support services
- Service excellence

It is interesting to note that many of those areas also have been the focus of CHA’s Envisioning a Future Health Care Delivery System task force.

CHI was formed in 1996 by 10 Catholic congregations of women religious, through the merging of three existing health care systems. Expanding in 1997, CHI now operates in 64 communities in 19 states, with 66,000 associates. The 64 communities are organized into 47 “market-based organizations” (MBOs). The national organization relates directly to the MBOs. CHI’s operating model involves five elements: commitment, accountability, support, stewardship, and value (p. 5). The CHI model is an empowerment model and a learning model. Its culture is maintained by five foundational elements:
- Commitment to core values
- Measurement and goal setting
- Strategic and financial planning activities
- Centralized services and resources
- Rewards management

The consistent application of these elements encourages managers and associates to strive for continuous improvement.

The authors go to great lengths to detail how CHI has embedded within the system effective use of what the system calls a “balanced scorecard.” The balanced scorecard is a conceptual framework for translating an organization’s vision into a set of performance indicators, which are distributed among four perspectives: financial, customer, internal business processes, and learning and growth. Some indicators are maintained to measure an organization’s progress toward achieving its vision; other indicators are maintained to measure the long-term drivers of success. Through the balanced scorecard, an organization monitors its current performance (finances, customer satisfaction, and business process results) and its efforts to improve processes, motivate and educate employees, and enhance information systems—its ability to learn and improve.

“We believe CHI has built a model that has the power to transform 21st-century healthcare and promote healthy communities,” the authors write. “CHI’s model is not unique, but we believe it is effective. The strength of the model is its ability to identify and build an environment that is attractive to both customers and provider stakeholders. Communities that adopt the model will find they have a vehicle to find solutions to the problems of healthcare that other approaches cannot” (p. 237).

CHI was founded “to nurture the healing ministry of the Church by bringing it new life, energy, and vitality in the twenty-first century... by transforming traditional health care delivery and creating new ministries that promote healthy communities” (p. 3). In highlighting CHI in this book, Griffith and White have given health care in general and Catholic health care in particular a road map for excellence.

**Matthew Thibeau**  
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**The Wisdom of Top Health Care CEOs: A Guide to Success in Medical Management**  
Scott Ransom, ed.  
*American College of Physician Executives, Tampa, FL, 216 pp., 2003, $35 (members), $45 (nonmembers)*

In the Preface, Scott Ransom, DO, the editor of this book, summarizes the many and varied challenges currently facing leaders of health care organizations. It is clear that responding to these challenges will not only require strong and
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tices," a constant striving for new and improved ways to yield better outcomes. "Best practices" rely heavily on new technologies to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in operations.

But here is a nagging question: Have we failed to include the human factor in our "best practices"? Have we gone too far in promoting technology and forgotten our roots?

Better Together: Restoring the American Community seems at first to be another "feel-good" book from academia, which often tries to guide the business world in new ways to look at people and widgets. However, as the underlying themes of the book's varied stories are developed, it becomes clear that the social science arena may have stumbled upon the need to resurrect an old "best practice": the forming of "community" among our associates in our businesses.

This book was written as a sequel to another work, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, in which Better Together's principal author, Robert D. Putnam, described the late-20th century deterioration of America's social institutions. Better Together demonstrates the rediscovery of civic renewal through community.

The many stories that fill this very readable study offer proof that the "old" ways can work better than some of our "new" ways. While the authors do not posit this work as a "best practice" (or talk about "old" versus "new" ways), they clearly have stumbled across community as itself a "best practice."

A dozen organizations are reviewed. In each case, the authors walk the reader through the process used by the organization to develop a sense of community, describing both successes and disappointments. However, even when some of the organizations initially appeared destined to fail, they succeeded by developing a community spirit that strengthened them in the long run.

In each of the organizations described, small communities form the backbone of whatever success is achieved, the authors say. Although Better Together focuses on local community activists—ranging from a Rio Grande Valley barrio to a middle-American schoolchildren's group in Wisconsin—it draws upon a broad perspective. The authors include stories about small communities: a mega-sized church in Southern California; a joint venture involving a New Hampshire shipyard and a local dance team; and a successful union-organizing campaign at Harvard University, among others. In each of these cases, success came from the development of hardworking personal relationships, not out of a top-down or technological culture.

Business leaders may find an especially effective story in the community-building process at United Parcel Services (UPS). It is interesting that the leaders of UPS, a business that depends on speed and technology, have become so astoundingly successful partly by slowing themselves down enough to spend time with and relate to each employee in the company. Hospital leaders will be especially interested in stories that describe how volunteer communities formed by retired citizens have helped improve operations in both Chicago's public library system and Philadelphia's metropolitan school system.

Such communities create what the authors call "social capital." They are quick to point out that the benefits of social capital spread beyond those involved in the actual work. Small communities built within larger organizations stimulate an infectious attitude that tends to spawn positive relationships throughout. This book is intended to "raise the bar" (or perhaps put it back to where it formerly was) of civic renewal. But the lessons learned can be applied to the business world—just ask UPS.

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