

# Foreword to *Leading Geeks* By Paul Glen

By David H. Maister

This is an important and useful book. Paul Glen not only tackles a frontier topic in business, but he does so in a way that makes a significant contribution to our understanding not only of “geeks” but of professional people in general.

His articulation of the manager’s tasks (providing internal facilitation, managing ambiguity, nurturing motivation and furnishing external representation) is an innovative and insightful contribution to what real-world managers must do and how they serve their teams. Glen’s years of practical experience are clearly reflected in the text and make this book a practical guide to action.

Every manager of technical professionals (inside corporations or in service provider firms) will find both concrete suggestions and (perhaps as valuable) new ways of thinking offered here. Glen does not recycle conventional thinking but offers his own stimulating thoughts. Experienced managers as well as neophytes will find something here for them.

The book will also be of value to those who must hire and deal with technical teams or interact with them in other ways, such as venture capitalists and other financiers who must decide whether or not to fund technical enterprises. The old phrase, “knowledge is power,” is not quite correct.

*Understanding* is power, and that’s what Glen provides.

Much of what is written about management and leadership attempts to be universal, providing lessons drawn from diverse contexts and organizations with diverse objectives. We have been invited to consider the leadership secrets of military, political, royal and religious leaders, as well as leaders of businesses of all kinds from industrial to retail to consumer service industries.

Glen, appropriately, rejects the universalist approach. His careful analysis of the special characteristics of technical work, the individuals who choose to do that work, how they function in groups and what all this implies for how they can be managed is a framework that others could productively follow.

Although his focus is on geeks, much of what Glen has to say parallels the situation of other professional settings. Although not written explicitly for them, I would recommend this book to those who must lead other knowledge workers in a wide variety of professional settings. The book raises fascinating questions about what skills managers should possess and how they should be selected.

The test of a worthwhile book is that it forces you to stop reading and consider what the author has said. *Leading Geeks*

passes this test repeatedly. While its style is breezy and accessible enough to allow a quick read, it is filled with challenging assertions that contain myriads of implications. Glen doesn't hedge his views; he states them boldly. You don't have to accept all those views to be forced to think, "I wonder if he's right? If he is, then what follows from that?" No author can provide the reader with greater value.

[Buy \*Leading Geeks\* at Amazon.com.](#)



David Maister is the author of *Managing the Professional Service Firm* (1993), *True Professionalism* (1997), *The Trusted Advisor* (2000) (coauthor), *Practice What You Preach* (2001) and *First Among Equals* (2002) (coauthor.)

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