

Beware of simplistic (not: simple) argumentation. Simplistic argumentation is misleading most of the time. This applies in particular to the books of ‘business gurus’. These best-selling books are often based on a number of argumentation and presentation ‘tricks’ that make the argument persuasive, but also often very flawed. So you need to know how to distinguish a good ‘guru’ book from a bad one. The table below is compiled from an article in the Financial Times and reveals, in a humorous manner, how you could write a ‘best-selling’ business book (see also B18 on ‘coping with academic opportunism’). If you, as a reader, are aware of the simplifications needed to write such a book, you will also be capable of reading these ‘how to’ books more cautiously.

Table C.8 How to write a best-selling business book

Book characteristics: how to write	Problems associated: how to read
The book must be simple: plentifully peppered with memorable anecdotes, vignettes and stories.	No problem if you believe business life is simple.
The book must underscore the point that human behaviour is changeable.	Well it is, but only within certain limits, and at great cost. Ask any dieter, stutterer or technophobe.
The book must emphasise the individuals as the unit of analysis and change.	The book must be psychological in its focus on people and underplay organisational, economic and political factors that self-evidently shape organisational success.
The book must stress the techniques which increase and improve a manager’s control.	Again, fair enough if you believe in hands-on autocratic rather than empowering management.
The book should provide a list of steps and principles.	A road map to management or a simple guide to how to achieve success is fine as long as one is encouraged to make judgements as well.
The book must suggest the ideas have universal application and appeal.	None of this multicultural, diversity nonsense in a best-seller - the idea is that the secret formula works everywhere for all groups.
The book must have some demonstrated or claimed short-term pay-off or benefit.	The idea that one manager can do something better and more cost-efficiently than another has enormous appeal, but the immediacy of the benefits is probably an over-exaggeration.
The book should provide lists of happy customers and those who have successfully adopted the ideas.	They are usually the author’s friends or clients.
The book must not be counter-intuitive. Self-confirming approaches endorsing prior ideas and beliefs are essential.	Here is the rub: the book cannot have radically new ideas if the readers already hold them.
The book must espouse a unitary perspective where boss and employee, management and union have ultimately shared goals and mutual benefits.	If only.
The book should suggest ownership through personal contributors. This invites readers to adapt the principles to their own situation and needs.	That this contradicts some of the above points is swept under the carpet.
Finally, the book must stress the nature of business leadership as a romantic, heroic enterprise.	And this perhaps says it all - the more like a fairy-tale it is, the better readers like it.

Source: based on Adrian Furnham, Financial Times, July 14, 1995