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Book Review: 'The Melting Point: How to Stay Cool and Sustain World-Class Business Performance,' by Dr. Christian Marcolli

by CIPHERT

Among the trove of new business books out there, the ones that truly stand out are the ones that provide not only a revelation, but the tools to follow it through. Such is the case with *The Melting Point: How to Stay Cool and Sustain World-Class Business Performance*, by Dr. Christian Marcolli.

The author, an international performance coach with a long roster of clients including Olympic athletes and top executives, studied high achievers to see what they all had in common. Their X-factor, as Marcolli asserts in this enjoyable, crisply written book, is actually not really an X-factor at all. It's not magic, it's not a mystery, and it's not even innate natural gifts. Even a Wimbledon winner — Roger Federer consulted Dr. Marcolli early in his tennis career — has to draw on more than his talent to sustain high performance game after game. What

sets the best-in-class apart is something else: coolness. And even superstars in the boardroom have to work on maintaining that coolness and getting better at it, day after day.

Keeping one's cool has always been a notable strategy for gaining the upper hand. Marcolli explains why, and it makes perfect sense. Certainly recent events have given up a few remarkable examples of those who do, and those who don't — you can insert your favorite names yourself. The ones who never break a sweat convey a certain power and grace. The ones who don't — well, they don't.

As the book's title implies, we all have a breaking point — that threshold at which point our nerves unravel and our concentration is shot. At that moment, the quality of our performance usually plummets as well. Marcolli calls that the melting point. As he writes,

... we no longer fully control our thinking, our emotions and our behaviors ... We start to internally derail. ... It becomes very clear that we are far from being at our personal best; those errors — and the stress that caused them — may even force us to walk away, because the pressure seems to be simply too much to bear. Ultimately, reaching the Melting Point may stop us from achieving our key goals and ambitions.

And that's where this book becomes even more useful. Who among us has not lost control at some point in a critical situation, and then deeply regretted it? The price of having a so-called short fused may be a lost tennis match, or it may be a stalled career. But we can't take it back. Further, as Marcolli points out, most of us we don't work on a desert island, but in teams, with others. Tension is contagious. In a work setting in which a team has come together to get a job done, nothing blows it apart faster than a leader or team member having a meltdown.

The good news is there are solid techniques here we can all practice and get better at. Coolness is a skill and a learning process. Marcolli pragmatically notes that we're all going to make mistakes, and we should expect to. But if we can learn from those mis-steps instead of cringe and try to forget, we'll gain rather than lose each time. Adaptability, it turns out, is a key part of learning how to stay cool. And if you can chalk up a minor disaster to a learning experience, you don't tend to combust quite so completely. Another key: taking care of yourself. Disconnect from all that technology and get a solid night's sleep. When you're feeling tense, check in with yourself to find out why.

These are undoubtedly high-stress times: endless disruptions, quicksilver turnaround times, intense competition in a global economy, shortened attention spans. It's enough to wear anyone down.

But if you want to become a world-class executive, or a world-class anything for that matter, you'll need to be able to carry on no matter what. Dr. Marcolli's *The Melting Point* is a terrific and realistic guide to navigating your own road to high performance under any kind of pressure.

For more about Dr. Christian Marcolli, visit marcolli.com.