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Author(s): Breck A. Harris, Eleanor Nickel.

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# JOHN KOTTER & HOLGER RATHGEBER

**Our Iceberg Is Melting: Changing and Succeeding Under Any Conditions**  
ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, 2005. 147 Pages

In the book *Our Iceberg Is Melting: Changing and Succeeding Under Any Conditions*, John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber create a fable about a group of 268 emperor penguins in Antarctica who must face their resistance to change or risk possible extinction if they continue to live on their iceberg home. In this short and very easy-to-read book, Kotter and Rathgeber illustrate that change for any organization is an eight-stage process. This process was first introduced by Kotter with his two best-selling books on the subject of change, *Leading Change* in 1996 and *The Heart of Change* in 2002, co-written with Dan Cohen (140).

The fable begins with an outsider named Fred who is the first penguin to recognize that their iceberg home is melting. Fred tries in vain to warn other penguins of the colony about this danger. Even after being informed of the possible danger by Fred, most of the penguins initially refuse to leave their melting iceberg because their home is surrounded by a sea rich in food and they have grown accustomed to the shelter provided there (6). Fred finally persuades Alice, a member of the Leadership Council for the penguin colony, to recognize the possible threat. The Leadership Council later calls for an assembly of all the penguins where Fred ingenuously uses a model of the iceberg and the vocal support of other members of the Leadership Council to illustrate the first of the eight steps of Kotter's change process, which is "reducing complacency and increasing urgency" (43).

The second of the eight steps of Kotter's change process discussed in the fable is "pulling together a team to guide the needed change" (55). This occurs when a strong core of five very diverse members of the Leadership Council unite to help guide the penguin colony through the process of facing the danger of their melting iceberg home.

The third step of the change process discussed in the fable occurs when, after talking to a seagull, one of the Leadership Council members "creates a vision" of a new future for the penguin clan, where they can learn to be a nomad colony versus a colony where all penguin members are fixated on permanently living on only one iceberg (69).

After a dramatic and influential speech to the penguin colony by Louis, the leader of the Leadership Council, that encourages them to embrace a new nomadic way of life and leave their melting iceberg home, other members of the council decide to put up posters to constantly remind the other penguins of Louis's message. This process demonstrates the fourth change step by Kotter, which is "communicating the new vision" to all members of the organization (81).

Members of the Leadership Council then work to help overcome fear about the change by some members of the colony and continued strong resistance to the change process by one loud penguin appropriately named "NoNo." Key to this process is step five of Kotter's change process, which is "making everyone.... feel empowered" (97). In the fable, all members of the endangered penguin plan are given different responsibilities and duties, such as scouts who travel off the endangered iceberg to search for potential new iceberg homes for the colony (100). Even the penguin children are empowered with responsibilities as they are given the task of feeding the hungry scouts when they return from their travels.

The returning scouts begin to tell other penguins of the colony amazing stories about "swimming long distances, and about new icebergs they had seen" (105). This demonstrates the sixth step of Kotter's change process, which is to create "a short-term win" (107). As further explained by Kotter, a short-term win is one that, related to the change process, helps "create some visible, unambiguous successes as soon as possible" (131).

The seventh stage of Kotter's change process is "not letting up" (117), which is continuing relentlessly with your change process "until the vision is a reality" (131). The eighth and final stage illustrated in the fable is to ensure that change becomes a new part of your culture and ensure "that the changes would not be overcome by stubborn, hard-to-die traditions" (123).

After the conclusion of the fable, the authors include additional content on Kotter's eight step process of successful change, the important role of thinking and feeling and resources such as recommended books and websites about change. Though based on a fable, *Our Iceberg Is Melting: Changing and Succeeding Under Any Conditions* offers important lessons to any organization that seeks to implement effective change in the work setting.

*Breck A. Harris*

*Fresno Pacific University*

# RICHARD ARUM & JOSIPA ROKSA

**Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses**  
**UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 2011. 259 Pages**

In Spring 2011, Fresno Pacific University President D. Merrill Ewert invited a group of faculty to read and discuss *Academically Adrift* because it is making such a splash in the field of higher education. I was one of the last to join because I was hesitant to take on yet another project, but I am extremely glad that I did. Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa focus on the poor work habits and lack of demonstrable learning among American college students, but they also made me realize how much I have drifted from the academic standards that I held just ten years ago, worn down over time by the decline of student preparedness, motivation, and performance. I now find myself telling every professor I know about this book because its call to action seems so clear and reasonable: resist the “college for all” mentality by admitting only those students who have demonstrated academic success and give them rigorous courses that require them to spend more time studying than socializing.

The authors’ findings are based on a study of over 2,300 students at a diverse group of four-year colleges and universities. They present information about the students’ racial, ethnic, and family backgrounds and their responses to surveys, but most significantly their scores on the Collegiate Learning Assessment, a high-quality test of writing and critical thinking that students took during their first semester and at the end of their sophomore year. The most sobering finding is that students improved their scores on average by only seven percentile points, while 45 percent of the students did not improve at all.

Arum and Roksa blame this on a culture that encourages virtually all students to attend college, even if they are not prepared or highly motivated, and on a lack of rigor in college classes. On average, students reported spending only twelve hours per week studying, with 37 percent spending less than five hours per week, yet their average GPA was B+. Given these realities, the authors’ rhetorical question is convicting: “If students are able to receive high marks and make steady progress towards their college degrees with such limited academic effort, must not faculty bear some responsibility for the low standards that exist

in these settings?” (5). The authors argue for “modest requirements” in each college course: forty pages of reading per week and twenty pages of writing overall. This amount of reading seems more than fair to me as a literature professor, but twenty pages of writing seems quite high—for each class of forty students, the professor would have to grade eight hundred pages.

Before I become too defensive, I must acknowledge the steady decline in my expectations for students over time. In my first Introduction to Literature class at Fresno Pacific in 2003, I assigned 1,300 pages, or 86 per week. I have confidence that students did the reading, since most of them received an A average on the detailed daily quizzes and the average course grade was B-. When I last taught the course in 2010, I assigned only 250 pages, or 16 per week. I am teaching *over a thousand fewer pages*, yet the average course grade has gone down to a C. My writing requirements have declined in many of my courses, as I replaced a ten-page Shakespeare paper with a short performance and a ten-page creative nonfiction essay with an in-class exam. When I am honest with myself about why I have made these changes, it is not lack of time so much as lack of will. When students consistently come to class without doing the reading and the research papers are horrible, it’s natural to want to cut back. *Academically Adrift* made me realize why this is not acceptable. If we have already drifted this far, where will it end?

The academic culture described by Arum and Roksa will not change without wide-ranging reforms by thousands of college administrators, professors, staff members, parents, and students. Yet every professor can take a step in the right direction when we add rigor to our courses instead of taking it away. You can be sure that my students will be reading two new lengthy books in Introduction to Literature next year.

*Eleanor Nickel*

*Fresno Pacific University*