

## **Public Call To Break Taboos**

TORSTEN RIECKE, NEW YORK  
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Bob MacDonald is a provocateur. During a time when in America a number of managers are on trial for balance sheet and securities fraud, the 62-year old publicly calls for violating the rules. His provocative action instructions are called "Cheat to Win" – in German the title could be "Defraud to Win."

"Allianz leader Michael Diekman loves the book, but doesn't dare to be seen in public with it," MacDonald says with a big grin. He enjoys the publicity for his provocative book title, but he doesn't want to be seen as a card sharp. That's why he immediately corrects the impression in the subtitle: his book is about the honest way to disregard all dishonest business rules. So the reader does not find out about shady balance sheet tricks, but does find out much about integrity and entrepreneurship.

MacDonald cites several examples for the non-conformism he proclaims, but mainly cites his own success story: the rise from an insurance salesman who polished doorknobs to the top manager at the Allianz Life North America. He worked his way up to manager at the insurance company ITT Life, but was fired when he pulled the life insurance sector from its Sleeping Beauty-like sleep by using an unconventional advertising campaign. He then created the company LifeUSA from nothing. In 1999, MacDonald sold that company to Allianz for \$540 Million.

In his book, he credits his breaking of conventions with his success. He counsels the unconventional manager to align the staff's interests with the company's goals by using participatory models. Instead of spreading fear in the company, the manager should encourage employees' creativity and risk readiness. The more power a manager passes on, the more involvement his employees will return, is MacDonald's thesis.

His advice is certainly not new. However, the book rises above the large number of management advice books because MacDonald's life story makes it appear authentic and thus convincing. In this sense the author can certainly be compared to the management icon Jack Welch. An additional positive aspect is the fact that he manages to describe the inside life at the otherwise rather dry insurance industry in a humorous fashion -- even if the industry's top managers don't want to be seen in public with the provocative title.

Quote for Mac's Web site:

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—Handelsblatt, Germany's leading business newspaper