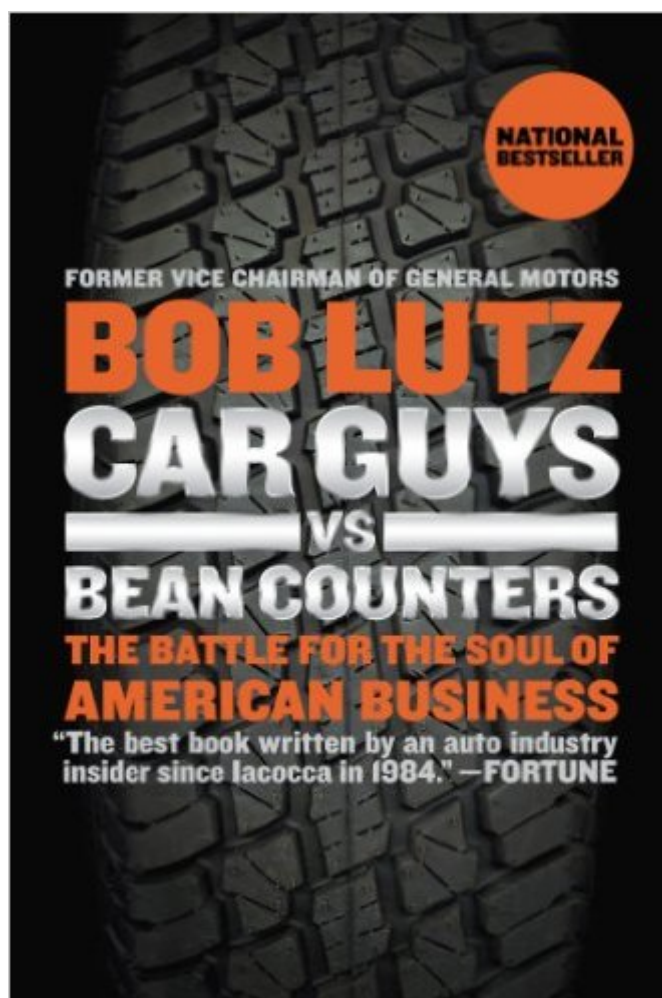


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Car Guys Vs. Bean Counters: The Battle For The Soul Of American Business



Synopsis

“One of the most acute books about management and how companies work in practice that I have read in a long time. If anyone wants to know exactly how the U.S. auto industry got into trouble, here is your guide.” —John Gapper, FINANCIAL TIMES

When Bob Lutz got into the auto business in the early 1960s, CEOs knew that if you captured the public’s imagination with innovative car design and top-quality craftsmanship, the money would follow. The “car guys” held sway, and GM dominated with bold, creative leadership and iconic brands like Cadillac, Buick, Pontiac, Oldsmobile, GMC, and Chevrolet. But then GM’s leadership began to put its faith in numbers and spreadsheets. Determined to eliminate the “waste” and “personality worship” of the bygone creative leaders, management got too smart for its own good. With the bean counters firmly in charge, carmakers, and much of American industry, lost their single-minded focus on product excellence and their competitive advantage. Decline soon followed. In 2001, General Motors hired Lutz out of retirement with a mandate to save the company by making great cars again. As vice chairman, he launched a war against the penny-pinching number crunchers who ran the company by the bottom line and reinstated a focus on creativity, design, and cars and trucks that would satisfy GM’s customers. Lutz’s commonsense lessons, combined with a generous helping of fascinating anecdotes, will inspire readers in any industry.

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Customer Reviews

‘Maximum’ Bob Lutz is the last of the legendary ‘car guys’ in the US automotive business. Car guys are those who work in the auto business because they like cars as opposed to the ‘bean counters’

who work in the car business but treat the product as just another widget. Car guys are those who work at GM or Ford or Chrysler during the day and then at night, work on their cars as a hobby. On weekends, they would race them. During their free time, they would talk cars with other car guys. That's what built GM and Detroit in general. What has almost destroyed it has been the rise of the bean counter to positions of dominance in the domestic car industry. Bean counters focus on financial manipulation over product excellence. Maximum Bob, in this book, documents what went wrong and how to address it - not only in the auto industry but in American industry in general which has all too often been led down the same path to doom as the car industry. The book is partly a biography covering a very short portion of Lutz's life - his second stint at GM - which recently ended after about a decade. This time around, he tried, with some notable success, to repair the damage he foresaw coming and which caused him to resign from GM many years before. It's more than a biography, however. It is also a diagnosis of what went wrong with the US car industry and US industry in general. Being Maximum Bob, he generally doesn't hold back his often controversial opinions being a person who'd rather speak out and found to be wrong than keep quiet. The book delivers some surprises as well as details of behind the scenes activities, which, from time to time hit the mainstream news. The short book contains no filler.

Lutz' book is about what happened to America's competitiveness, and why, per an outspoken personality with a 47-year stellar career in the business. The title gives Lutz' perspective away. His focus is the automobile industry, but the logic extends to much of our formerly dominant manufacturing sector. Generally his comments make good sense, though not always. Example - his major point would be more accurate if expressed as 'excessive focus on short-term profits. On the other hand, Lutz is not likely to apologize anytime soon for imperfect decision-making - he's more into improving things - right now, and being right more often than wrong. Lutz is not afraid to name names. His first target is America's handling of the original oil crises - with increased CAFE requirements, instead of raising the gas tax. The unintended result, per Lutz, is that Japanese manufacturers did not have to do anything to meet the new requirements, while American firms incurred high expenditures. Japan also benefited from U.S. desire to keep it within its sphere of foreign policy influence - thus, we did little or nothing about the 'yen' exchange-rate being set too low. (Sound familiar to today and problems with China?) Continuing, Lutz complains that negotiated 'voluntary trade restraints (early to mid-1980s) did NOT result in American manufacturers simply raising prices rather than using the breather to improve costs and quality. However, Lutz' defense of American automakers (they were shifting to the new demand for pickups) lacks credibility because

our manufacturers pushed that strategy as a means of avoiding both Japanese competition and stringent CAFE restraints. Similarly, Lutz criticizes those linking global warming to the auto industry, but does a poor job making his case.

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