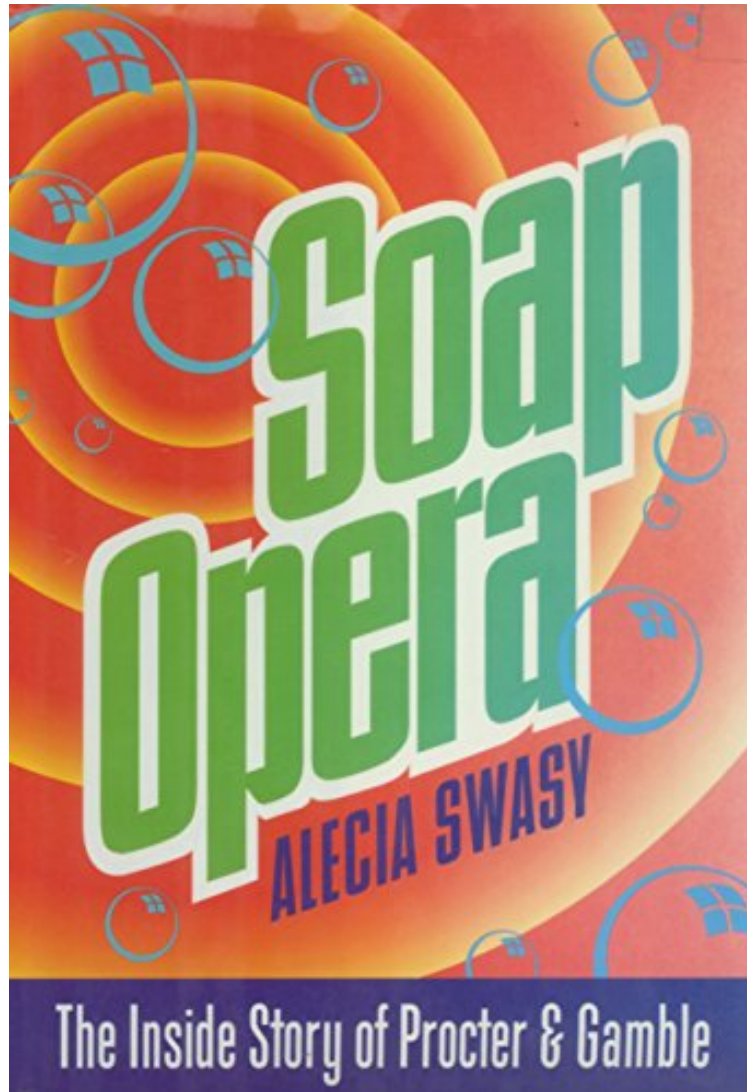


Soap Opera: The Inside Story of Procter Gamble

Alecia Swasy

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Alecia Swasy : Soap Opera: The Inside Story of Procter Gamble before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Soap Opera: The Inside Story of Procter Gamble:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I Love Soaps!By KathleenLooking forward to reading this we'll-reviewed book!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Zebra243excellent11 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Why people hate big businessBy Bill Slocum"Soap Opera" recounts what one hopes to be, though perhaps optimistically, a particularly bad period in the history of one of America's largest corporations, Procter Gamble in the '80s and early '90s, when led by succeeding CEOs John Smale and Ed Artzt, the company ran afoul of environmental laws, consumer safety, common sense, and basic human decency in truly arrogant fashion. To read the story comprehensively laid out by Alecia Swasy is to gape in astonishment at the true measure of

human depravity in search of the holy buck. Does Swasy have it in for PG? Yeah, but so would you if you were a journalist and your subject was breaking the law to trample on your rights while you tried to do your job. Things got so out of hand as PG launched telephone record investigations and had ex-employees brought to Cincinnati police stations to explain why they were talking to a reporter, that the ensuing coverage sparked a national outcry. Pundits and cartoonists weighed in about the KGB tactics of people who make laundry detergent and toothpaste. When finally brought to heel by indignant shareholders, CEO Artzt shrugged and called it a mistake. "The only thing he regretted," Swasy writes, "was getting caught." Swasy was clearly embittered by her experience, and when her narrative flies into polemical flourishes, as in the Epilogue ("[Critics] refuse to buy the Ivory-pure image so carefully cultivated by PG's years of marketing. We should all do the same"), the book is poorer for it. She does a great job describing, through the voices of mostly anonymous insiders, the noxious work environment of PG for its employees (and you don't have to be a "Proctoid" to relate to the Dilbert-in-the-Death-Star picture she paints), then editorializes on how PG advertising nurtures enduring cultural "myths" about a woman's place being in the home. Frankly, this latter angle comes up lame. PG advertising reflected the culture for years, it sold product, and it has been adjusted to fit contemporary mores, as Swasy notes (just not enough for her liking.) I don't know whether it's so awful the role of the female was once rather more rigidly defined than it is now, but dumping much of the blame on PG's doorstep seems excessive. Marketing to lesbian soccer Moms in the 1940s would probably have not helped PG achieve its present level of success. Where Swasy's book is strongest is the account of Rely, the tampon whose ingredients could cause toxic shock, and were directly responsible for the deaths of several women in 1979-80. Despite the accumulation of evidence, PG went forward with its marketing. As recounted in a chapter of the book "Guerrilla Marketing") that should be required reading in corporate ethics classes, CEO Smale even planned to roll out a deodorant version of Rely while his underlings worked to silence researchers (mostly successfully) with generous grant money. The chapter is particularly good when it recounts how one trial lawyer and a bereaved husband he represented forced PG to pay ridiculously low damages and put needed heat on the effort to establish PG's culpability. Never mind, though. Swasy reveals later on that PG's lab boys were concurrently doping out how to add the same toxic chemical to diapers. There are other good chapters on PG's arrogant practices overseas, its inept handling of domestic retailers (not just the small fry but WalMart, too!), and its stranglehold on a Florida community living around a river PG polluted. Sometimes, as with the Florida case, Swasy seems too eager to embrace anything the critics dish out, and her noting the death of the PG snack food Pringles [as of the book's publication in 1994] appears in retrospect to have been premature. But overall, "Soap Opera" is a solid addition to business journalism. Books like this one only make you look a little deeper than your coupon stash in thinking about what products you buy. And that's a good thing.

As the maker of Ivory soap, Tide detergent, and Crest toothpaste, Procter Gamble is a household name. It is America's thirteenth largest company, lauded by business schools as a model for success. But behind PG's wholesome image is a control-obsessed company so paranoid that Wall Street analysts, employees, and the chairman himself refer to it as "the Kremlin." The company demands conformity and unquestioning loyalty from its employees, who work in a strict and oppressive environment. PG's wealth and power ensures it gets what it wants, from tax breaks to the eager services of Washington lobbyists. In this explosive expose, Wall Street Journal reporter Alecia Swasy—who covered PG for three years—tells the full chilling story of life within the PG behemoth. Drawn from interviews with over 300 former and current PG employees (including CEO Ed Artzt), visits to PG operations in five countries, and thousands of court and company documents, Soap Opera reveals the dirty tricks and draconian mind-set of the company with the "99.44/100% pure" facade. Included here is the real story behind PG's Rely brand tampons and their link to women's deaths from toxic shock syndrome—and how PG tried to suppress that evidence. Swasy takes us to Taylor County, Florida, where residents drink bottled water because PG's influence allowed the company to flood the local river with dioxin-laden toxic waste from its paper mill. Among these and dozens of other examples of the company's cutthroat nature is Swasy's own story of PG's unethical seizure of Cincinnati phone records in an effort to track down her sources. Wonderfully readable and impeccably researched, Soap Opera is a sobering look at the price of success in America.

From Publishers Weekly Wall Street Journal reporter Swasy reveals unsavory practices at Procter Gamble. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus s Wall Street Journal reporter Swasy was, she tell us, spied upon, followed, and bugged while writing this admirable—if ultimately somewhat disappointing—history of the dark side of Ivory-soap and Tide manufacturer Procter Gamble. According to hundreds of interviews Swasy conducted with current and former PG managers, contractors, and company watchdogs, PG—a founder of the national brand name and a pillar of Cincinnati civic life since 1837—turns out to be a paranoid corporate strongman obsessed with controlling the lives of its employees and preserving the sacrosanct reputation of its brands. In chapters devoted, respectively, to the single-minded career of CEO Ed Artzt, to racism and sexism at headquarters, to totalitarian demands for worker loyalty, to hushed-up environmental debacles in PG plants around the nation, and, finally, to the ruthless marketing

here and abroad of brands--including Crest, Pampers, Tide, and, most notoriously, Rely tampons (which were responsible for a number of deaths in the toxic-shock syndrome scandal of the 1970's), Swasy thoroughly dismantles PG's wholesome image. The documentation of various kinds of corporate malfeasance--including the well-publicized but still shocking episode in which PG persuaded friendly local county law-enforcement officials secretly to search the private phone records of hundreds of PG employees, looking for calls to Swasy's Pittsburgh phone after an unfavorable story by her appeared in The Wall Street Journal--is heroic. But the cumulative tale isn't shapely enough to stand on its own as a cautionary story, and Swasy is too close to it to ask what it tells us about corporate America today. For all Swasy's careful work, the book finally has a little ring of an author's rant. Must reading, however, for company watchers, PG shareholders, curious consumers, and citizens of Cincinnati. (Sixteen pages of bw photographs) --
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