Ever since the US became infatuated with efficiency, business authors have explored the content and form of management. Today authors approach the issue by providing guidelines for creating successful companies, though many appear to be expanded PowerPoint presentations with disconnected content. Badowski’s approach is somewhat unique in that she can provide insight from the perspective of the executive assistant to the executive, in her case to the notable Jack Welch. For Badowski, this working relationship is a venue in which, through partnership, one person can support the decision making of another – a role in which everyone finds themselves, and hence the supposed value of the book.

To present information on building effective working partnerships, Badowski adopts the structure of each chapter relating a tool, and liberally provides stories on how that tool was applied during her time at GE working for Welch. The book includes such chapters as Trust, Confidence, Impatience, Preparedness, and Simplicity. She makes it clear though, that ‘how-tos’ are not the focus of the book.

A central tenet is that you and your boss need each other, and a strong relationship is required to accomplish challenging tasks. Badowski includes some useful managerial insights into how one part of that relationship is to remove the obstacles and the minutiae so that leadership can lead instead of wasting time on things that can be done by others. The centrality of her role as one who creates time and facilitates decision making is paramount to her book. As is the concept of anticipating the needs of those above you.

Badowski emphasizes the importance of gathering and highlighting relevant information for decisions (based on an intimate understanding of what is important to Welch), and collecting and ordering issues for presentation to Welch so that he can move through them quickly. There are numerous insights about getting the most out of the long workdays spent leading a large and complex organization. In addition, there are insights into the important elements of the partnership relationship. In fact, there are three qualities that Welch, in his foreword, notes are important in partnership: loyalty, discretion and forgiveness. These infuse the book, though Badowski does not directly address them.

The insight of a strong partnership is not gained through Badowski’s analysis, which is mild, though thankfully not of the painfully homespun variety common in business books. The tools featured are themselves self evident, though the chattily spun stories are collected together to produce clear, even repeatable, illustrations of each. It helps of course that she knows what readers seek: to learn more about Welch. Anecdotes about trailing Welch to turn off faucets he might leave on (given that this active, forward thinking man had better things to think about), or the image of an assistant sorting through trash to keep track of decisions made via the circular file are revealing. There is enough gossip of this sort to keep stimulated.

Managing Up is an acceptable introduction to the world of working with others in close partnership. Those who wish to be more than just an employee, but a partner with those around them, could gain from this book. It provides some useful insight and reminds us of some important lessons, and above all, provides some interesting stories of how things worked with Jack Welch at GE. It is not a tedious read – it could not be given the plethora of well-chosen and -told stories – though Badowski misses an opportunity to provide more of the ‘how-tos’ of effective office management of which she is clearly a master.