An old friend (who is a serious student of Sufi mysticism) recommended that I read The Diamond Cutter, knowing of my interest in faith at work. I have dozens of unread (as yet!) books on Christian views of work by my desk and reading chair. This is a growth industry apparently. But I was happy to find The Diamond Cutter and read it for at least a couple reasons. First, while the Christian faith is deeply and uniquely anchored to Jesus Christ and the Bible as the Word of God, there is every reason be humble and open to learning from nature and from other people, other philosophies, other religions. All people (not just Christians) are made in God's image and likeness. All people have God's law "written on their hearts and consciences" according to St. Paul. There is little to fear. Second, British Christian economist E. F. Schumacher wrote a little essay on “Buddhist Economics” in his Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered (1973; freely and easily available on the internet; check it out!). Even as an outsider to Buddhism, Schumacher was able to show how faith-based values could be integrated into economic thinking with marvelous effect.

So with anticipation I read The Diamond Cutter, which, according to the cover notes, has been translated into more than 15 languages and has been "used to build billions of dollars of new business around the world." Primary author Michael Roach graduated from Princeton in the mid-70s and was awarded a grant allowing him to travel to Asia for study with Tibetan Lamas. In 1983 he took the vows of a Buddhist monk and in 1995 became the first American to earn the title of Geshe, “master of Buddhist learning.” Christie McNally is one of the first Western woman lamas. She graduated from NYU and studied in several Tibetan monasteries. She is a professor of religion and philosophy at Diamond Mountain University which she helped to found. On the business side, Roach worked for years in the diamond business. "Hidden in The Diamond Cutter is the ancient wisdom that we used to make Andin International a company with sales over $100 million per year" (pp. 9-10). Roach's Buddhist teachers actually encouraged him not to withdraw from the world or wear distinctive dress but to enter the business world and apply Buddhist insights in his work.

The Diamond Cutter is a contemporary application of an ancient book of Buddhist wisdom of the same name going back to the Buddha 2500 years ago. Roach’s approach to the teaching follows an 18th century commentary called Sunlight on the Path to Freedom. Three basic principles structure the message of the three parts of the book. The first principle is that the business should make money and be successful. Making money is a good thing, enabling good things to be done. But it must be made in the right way and with the right attitude. The second principle is that we should enjoy the money --- keeping our minds and bodies in good health so we can enjoy it. The third principle is that we should be able to look back on our business and be able to find meaning in our career and work, that it had a good impact on the world. The high degree of stress on money and wealth is a bit jarring although that may be what opens doors for the authors.
to speak and consult among the wealthy and the wannabes. Once you get past that initial impression that “greed is good” the three principles can be unpacked.

At the heart of part one on “making the money” is a view of how our attitudes affect the way we experience life and the behavior of others. It is a wise insight and a truth fully compatible with Christianity that our attitude has a huge impact on things. A setback or negative performance review is for one person something to suffer against in bitterness and anger; for someone else the exact same circumstance is a challenge that is welcomed as a joyful, positive prod to greatness. Those responses affect us, and they affect others. But The Diamond Cutter goes a big step further in denying any objective reality to that external person or act. What happens is all, entirely a matter of your “imprint” projected on to the other and the sitation. This is, Roach and McNally write, the Buddhist understanding of “non-being,” “emptiness,” and the “hidden potential of all things.” That outside other is empty until you fill it. This is “the power of positive thinking” on steroids.

This point is so central to The Diamond Cutter that a longer quotation is warranted:

A book, a building purchase, or a pain-in-the-butt-who-sits-next-to-you at work --- none of them, nothing, comes from its own side. None of them is a bad thing to happen, or a good thing to happen, from its own side --- because if it were, then everyone would experience it that way.

But people don’t. So these things are blank, or neutral, or what the Buddhists call “empty.” And yet we do experience some things as good things and we do experience some things as bad things. If it’s not coming from the things themselves, then where is it coming from? If we could solve this puzzle, then perhaps we could make things happen the way we want them to. (author emphasis)

It’s pretty obvious with just a few minutes of reflection that the way we see things is coming from ourselves.

It’s all about the imprints our attitudes and actions impose on the situation. The authors then walk through 46 business problems and give advice on how to imprint on them the way you wish them to turn out. Some of it has a “golden rulish” feel --- treat people the way you would like to be treated, blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy --- but most of it is purely mental. You can make things happen with your mind. It is too simple and does not do justice of the complexity of life. It is a bit like the hyper-Calvinists who attribute every microscopic movement to God’s foreordained decision alone --- or like a hyper-Marxist who attributes absolutely everything to the dynamics of capitalist class structure alone. So we can love the insight about the importance and power of our attitude and our interpretation of situations --- without accepting that as the unique or necessary cause of all things. For one thing, to go that simplistic route is to blame the victim, a cruel and unacceptable worldview.

On “enjoying the money” I especially valued Roach and McNally’s advice about starting each day with some quiet meditation, creating a “Circle” within which to observe one day each week as a non-work day of rest, and getting away each year for a week or two. On “finding meaning looking back” their message centers on finding ways to identify with others around you and seek their fulfillment and satisfaction. Live and work for others’; enlightenment and satisfaction, not just your own.
In short *The Diamond Cutter* provides some good insight and wisdom from which I want to learn -- but it is undermined by an oversimplified and flawed view of cause-and-effect.