

# Henry, A. (2022). *Seen, Heard, and Paid: The New Work Rules for the Marginalized*. Rodale

**Review by** Nathaniel Heggins Bryant

Years of experience working as a Black man in largely white (and, to be sure, white-collar) spaces inform longtime tech and productivity journalist and editor Alan Henry's first book. As the book's subtitle suggests, *Seen, Heard, and Paid* should be read as a series of specific and practical recommendations for marginalized workers who find themselves in similar situations. Henry directly addresses many facets of how white-collar work still operates on outdated racial, gendered, and class-based hierarchies that center and promote white men at the expense of their co-workers who are from underrepresented identity groups. His advice confronts many largely unspoken expectations about success on the job and he formalizes and codifies the kind of advice that has often circulated in worker whisper-networks about how to get ahead at work without becoming 'the office mom,' someone who does necessary but unglorified work to keep the office going, or without earning an unfair reputation for supposedly being selfish, or loud, or not a team player when a worker stands up for themselves. (Intersectional analyses of workplace dynamics have long documented how these reputations are nearly always gendered, classed, and racialized—often all three working in tandem at the same time.) Threading the needle of protecting one's self and achieving personal success and satisfaction without becoming further marginalized already presents a rather fraught set of challenges on its own for women, queer workers, and people of color. In addition, most marginalized workers have higher work expectations with lower ceilings of promotion, and also experience higher rates of burnout, as well as daily microaggressions, as his book adroitly demonstrates.

Henry directly addresses his book to the professionals in any given field who might be the only person of color, or woman, or queer person in the room. He does so in part because he has long detected a series of gaps when it comes to career and productivity advice. He makes his intent clear from the introduction, both about how his book should be read and what it attempts to do: 'To be productive, we need to be seen, heard, and paid fairly for our work. Affording these rights to everyone requires a new look at how work is done and a new set of real-world rules for people who are sidelined and lack privilege' (p. 4). What he does best is to collect and arrange advice, perspectives, and recommendations from other productivity writers (particularly women and writers of color) and interweaves them with his own experience, generating a book that serves as a comprehensive field guide to tackle these concerns.

*Seen, Heard, and Paid* offers a comprehensive list of things to consider and tasks to complete for readers so that they can protect themselves, maintain or even increase productivity on meaningful projects, highlight their accomplishments, and even extricate themselves from a job should it prove too toxic for workers. He has arranged his chapters as a set of numbered rules, with a parenthetical subtitle, each of which focuses on a different element: Rule 5, for instance, is 'Office Housework Will Never Get You Ahead (Getting the Glamour Work),' Rule 9 is 'Give Your In-Box Its Time, but No More (Being Mindful),' and the final chapter, Rule 15, is titled 'Your Job Is Not Your Friend (Knowing When to Go).' Many of the core activities in these chapters have multiple uses,

too. The most notable recommendation—to keep a work journal or personal log and paper trail of both achievements and concerns—comes up repeatedly over the course of the book. It allows a marginalized worker to point to the numerous projects and obligations a person has in real time if a manager or coworkers are skeptical of their contributions. This is handy if and when that worker needs to be able to refuse a new request. (Indeed, Henry devotes one chapter, Rule 6, ‘Figure Out Your Unique Contribution,’ to setting workplace boundaries, particularly in how to accept or decline work requests so that the already marginalized worker does not fall into the trap of taking on so-called office housework, important but often low-reward grunt work, the requests for which are often already racialized or gendered at the outset.) At the same time, if a worker feels aggrieved enough to lodge formal complaints or ask for a raise, this work journal serves as a paper trail and data to back these up or, if the workplace culture should prove too hostile and toxic, the journal can serve as a springboard to allow that worker to leave on her own terms and hopefully start a successful search for a new job.

To be entirely clear, this book is not necessarily about or even for traditional blue-collar or labor-intensive jobs, though Henry occasionally gestures beyond white-collar or intellectual labor. Nevertheless, I think his book does offer up quite a bit to those interested in Working-Class Studies, for self-identifying working-class academics (particularly those from marginalized communities) or formerly working-class people finding themselves in unfamiliar professional settings. The use of direct address personalizes his hard-won advice at the same time that it also validates what people inclined to read his book have probably already experienced: these behaviors are not new, they are not acceptable, and you are not alone in experiencing them. His book manages to, for the most part, make useful recommendations for succeeding at a workplace and protecting one’s self while not succumbing to ‘productivity porn,’ Vivek Halder’s term for the constant fetishizing of productivity tips, tricks, hacks, and tools, the productivity (and usually expensive) cottage industry that winds up serving as a distraction for actually doing meaningful work. What I find to be his most compelling chapter on this topic is Rule 8, ‘Don’t Fall for Productivity Porn (Prioritizing Your Work),’ in which he simultaneously acknowledges how his own career participates in this dynamic while also critiquing its limitations, particularly the notion that those most likely to engage in productivity porn are those who are already privileged enough to not need it.

However, the most powerful takeaway for any reader of Henry’s book is a fundamental one: it is not the individual worker’s responsibility to take on and fundamentally change a workplace that is racist, misogynistic, homo- or transphobic, ableist, and the like. This is a point bookending *Seen, Heard, and Paid*, and he makes it very explicit: ‘*It’s not your job to fix a workplace’s systemic discrimination issues*. Especially if you’re in a toxic environment and are a victim of those issues, it’s not your job’ (p. 244). In many ways it might be productive to read Henry’s book as advice for young professionals that is analogous to what other texts have done to demystify the university for first-generation college students. For too long marginalized workers have entered into new spaces and done poorly because they lack basic information about how to succeed, learning too late about invisible norms and the interpersonal dynamics that privilege white, straight men above everyone else. This is a refreshingly direct and honest assessment, one that is hardly unique but nevertheless needs to be articulated more forcefully and repeated loudly until the workplace dynamics do change for the better.

**Reviewer Bio**

**Nathaniel Heggins Bryant** is Assistant Professor of English at California State University, Chico. He is the author of several articles dealing with the intersection of labor studies, prison studies, and prison writing on individuals like the Soledad Brother George Jackson and Caryl Chessman. He has served as the Working-Class Studies Association secretary and is currently the vice president for his campus chapter of the California Faculty Association, the labor union representing faculty, counselors, librarians, and coaches in the CSU system.