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Book Review: The Shaping of an Effective Leader

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Book Review: The Shaping of an Effective Leader

Abstract

The Shaping of an Effective Leader has been fundamentally encouraging to me in the area of leadership because I have been fortunate enough to be a recipient of the leadership of the author. Serving on my dissertation committee, Gayle Beebe encouraged me to development a Christian theology of suffering. He recommended reading the works of Diogenes Allen, Lawrence Bowker, Herbert Lockyear, Henri Nouwen, as well as others. In our meetings to discuss these works, it did not take long for me to discover that I was in the presence of one of the most Christlike individuals I had ever encountered. The knowledge, skills, and dispositions of leadership modeled to me by the author are reflected in the principles of this work.

Book Review: The Shaping of an Effective Leader

Beebe, G. (2011). *The shaping of an effective leader – Eight formative principles of leadership*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. Paperback, ISBN 978-0-8308-3820-2, 208 pages.

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The Reading Effect Between Author and Reader

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Just Another “How’s that working for you?” Book on Leadership!

The popular psychologist and television host, Dr. Phil, often asks his guests, with regard to their life situations, the pragmatic question, “How’s that working for you?” So often, studies in leadership utilize this same premise; constructs of leadership are promoted as true, because they work (Knight, 2006). Beebe’s work, however, offers time-tested principles from the perspective of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral; from this worldview, the principles work, because they are true. Beebe uses key themes to answer important questions for the reader. In this case, “What kind of leader is this work seeking to develop?”

General “Sublime” Principles

Beebe’s book is built upon the simple premise that leaders matter. Further, the “fortunes of every organization...rise and fall based on the effectiveness of its leadership” (p.19). The goal of his writing therefore, is to identify and articulate principles of effective leadership. The principles presented by the author build on each other in a

synergistic manner, and are cumulative in their efficacy.

Certainly, one vocation of all those involved in the International Christian Community for Teacher Education (ICCTE), is a calling to leadership. Whether in leading students as a teacher, or in leading educational institutions as an administrator, leadership in education is vital. In light of this premise, I cite many current educational, leadership, and Christian thinkers whose works serve to validate Beebe’s. I also summarize the principles presented in Beebe’s book by using a metaphor of building a school. In this case, “How do we build the leadership of the school we all hope for?”

The school would definitely need a foundation (basement) of trust. The first of Beebe’s principles – the necessity of character, addresses just such a foundation (Palmer, 2007). The framing (walls) of the school would need to be built of respect. Beebe’s principles two – the importance of competence, and principle three – the advantage of team chemistry, promote just such a framework (Marzano, 2003; Muhammad, 2009). The covering of the school (roof) would require principle four – the interplay of culture and context, principle five – the strength of compatibility and coherence, and principle six –the guidance of convictions. These serve the need for collegiality in the school (Goleman, 1995; Liesveld & Miller, 2005; Wenger, 1998). In addition, the covering of the school (roof) would also require principle seven – the significance of maintaining our connections, and the principle eight-the opportunity to make an ultimate contribution, in order to address the need for professionalism in the school (Warren, 2002). Thus, the salient constructs (blue prints) for building the leadership of the school we all hope for are thoroughly developed in Beebe’s book.

The Depth and Complexity of an “Added Element” of the Text

Anyone who writes a book on the topic of leadership has undertaken a very difficult task. The term “shaping” in the title intimates a process or journey, and we tend to want our “odysseys” to be of the quick and painless variety; as Beebe observes, “The siren’s song of instant results is hard to ignore” (p.166). Because of this fact, it is at the application level where books of this nature collect dust. This book addresses the specific challenges a leader will encounter at each stage of the journey, and how to overcome them.

The proactive leadership plan in the pages of Beebe’s work provides the reader with an awareness of the journey’s difficult topography. The challenge to a leader’s character will be the vice of gluttony, and it must be countered with the virtue of temperance. Competence will be tested by the vice of envy, and it is the virtue of happiness that will oppose it. The task of team chemistry will be disputed by the vice of greed, and it must be answered with the virtue of generosity. The challenge to culture will be the vice of anger, and it must be defied with the virtue of mildness. Compatibility will be encountered by the vice of pride, and it must be refuted with the virtue of humility. The struggle to acquire convictions will be challenged by the vice of lust, and it must be contradicted with the virtue of fidelity. Connections will be broken by the vice of indifference, and it must be countered with the virtue of perseverance. Finally, the challenge to commitment will be the vice of melancholy and it must be opposed with the virtue of perspective.

When I use Beebe’s work in secular leadership courses, contemporary graduate students find discussions of vice antiquated, and invoke for them images of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer, 1985); yet, had the Christian goal of Chaucer’s work been achieved (Roland, 200), perhaps his magnum opus would have included stories of sojourners on the road to Canterbury Cathedral who struggle to demonstrate virtues similar to those Beebe has identified. Reflecting on this fact causes me to recognize anew that one of the great apologetics for the Christian faith is simply to consider Jesus; in Him we find all of these virtues and none of these vices.

George Barna (1997), in conducting research on our culture observes, “Most of all, we have a crisis of Christian leadership” (p. 29). Gayle Beebe’s closing remarks fill me with hope. He writes, “It doesn’t really matter where you find yourself today. If you have a longing to make a difference through your leadership, begin where you are and get underway” (p. 167). *The Shaping of an Effective Leader* is a map to guide the journey.

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