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Leadership Emerging



Keith Merron, *The Golden Flame: The Heart and Soul of Remarkable Leadership*. Healdsburg, CA: Avista Press, 2010.

Keith Merron introduced this book to Integral Leadership Review readers in the last issue with his article, “Frame Breaking Leadership.” There he recounts his conversations with “remarkable leaders.” What I find refreshing about Merron’s work is that he is addressing a central question for potential leaders, as well as for the field of leadership studies, particularly leader development. It has been long recognized, and agonized over, that organizations have invested heavily in developing individuals to be effective leaders. Often the approaches are based

on fuzzy thinking and the value sets of those delivering the training. Some, like the Stagen Leadership program and, to a degree, with their emphasis on research, organizations like the Center for Creative Leadership are seeking the link between training and performance.

Merron’s work is remarkable for its integral resonance. Cognitive development, the relationship between individual and collective performance and their underlying systems and cultures are emphasized. Nevertheless, the heart of this book is about the individual and “the golden flame.”

“A golden flame is a fire that burns within. And not just any fire, for many of us burn hot—in anger, or personal ambition, or greed, or resentment. A golden flame is different. It’s a fire of passion directed toward a cause greater than oneself, ignited by determination, caring, and a relentless commitment to live a life of generosity—to make things better. It is a fire that burns golden from integrity and stays lit from the inner solidity of the person who contains it; when the heat touches others, they are uplifted, for it ignites the flame in themselves.”

Passion, purpose, vision beyond self, these are values that have been put forth as the essence of leadership by many authors. This book, like the others, often looks to “great leaders,” the heroes among us who accomplish great and important things (the two are not always the same). Merron goes beyond that by noting a direct relationship between leader effectiveness and employee commitment, for the domain of his attention is organizations, profit and not for profit. And I love this quotation: “The tendency to blame leaders is often directly related to a hole that we haven’t filled in ourselves.” Thus he saves himself from being just another writer in praise of the heroic, discounting the roles of others in the successes of those we call heroes.

Yet, in the early reading, I find myself struggling. We are, once again, offered a list of attributes of heroic leaders: vision, commitment to learning, wanting to be the best, a commitment to service, empowering others and so on. There is nothing remarkable in this list. It calls for focus and authenticity. And it takes us dangerously close to the precipice so well explored by Chris Argyris in his *Flawed Advice and the Management Trap*. Have a vision! we might proclaim. Be authentic! we proclaim again. There is a cartoon in a past issue of integral leadership review that characterizes this approach. For example, Merron states that great leaders have great wisdom. The challenge for all those would be leaders is to figure out how to have great wisdom. And this is Argyris' point. He takes leading leadership theorists to task because they offer such encouragements to fulfill their dreams of leadership. But they do not address the interior dimensions of how to develop the capacities and capabilities to "be wise."

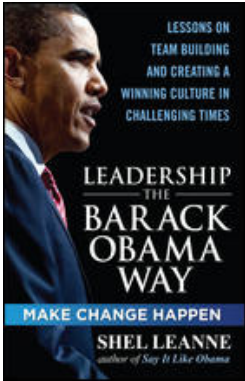
As I read this I was reminded to the humor of Jean Shepherd, particularly when he recounts his budding childhood experiences in South Side, Chicago. He wanted to a Little Annie secret decoder ring so he could be "in." Later, in reflecting on credit cards, Shepherd accounted for our desire for credit cards and membership cards as symbols of our belonging. It is as though having the symbols and the slogans make us belong or bring us respect or recognition or whatever it is we are seeking for ourselves.

One way that Merron steps away from the crowd in his writing is a recognition of the importance of that inner life and an evolutionary worldview. He draws on the work of Bill Torbert and Susann Cook-Greuter and the stage model of development, He recounts the focus of awareness and meaning making at each stage. For example, the achiever:

"Seeks effectiveness and results through application of strategies, plans, and actions. Works towards given goals—feels like an initiator, but more likely to take on given goals that self-create. Sets high standards for self and others and feels guilt if failing to meet own standards. Seeks feedback."

Material like this is highly useful for enhancing self-awareness, e.g., discovering how these descriptions fit or not, when and when not. Furthermore, one can follow his logic that it takes a shift, a developmental shift of most in leader roles to encourage or accomplish cultural shifts in organizations. These cultural shifts are critical to re-enforce the evolution of the firm in the face of new challenges. Merron recognizes that shifting "up" is very difficult. Merron notes that "humans can and sometimes do change, often through a series of exchanges with their environment." The use of coaching, leader training and feedback such shifts can be encouraged. Nevertheless, Merron insists that such shifts have occurred among the leaders he has interviewed. For the most part, they were propelled by a deep desire to make a positive difference.

And Merron's leaders are on heroic journeys. These journeys involve being open to experimentation, seeking wisdom from others, and recognition of the role of projection in choices of behavior. This is the shadow side. Fundamentally, developing one's self and capacities for leadership is a journey of self-mastery. In the end, Merron notes, it is a hero's journey. Now we need accounts of all who sought self-mastery, undertook this journey, but never filled a leader role. What happened to those who did not master Merron's secret ingredient: belief in self and the willingness to step into the leader role. So, despite Merron's integral and developmental orientation, this book is about the individual and their growth. It is a wonderful read with many examples. But from this reviewer's point of view, it is essentially another—albeit valuable—in the long line of books that comprehend leadership as an individual journey. But don't let met stop you. Find the richness in this book.



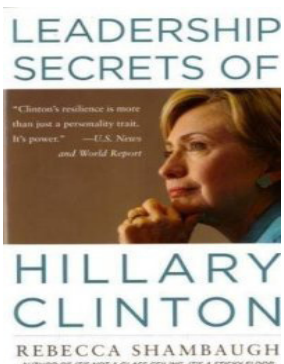
Shel Leanne. *Leadership the Barack Obama Way*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010.

I have to admit to being a supporter of Barack Obama. He excites me and often leads me to hope when there is so much “bad news” to think about. And I also must admit that he has disappointed me. His gradualist, consensus approach in the early years of his administration have been met with staunch resistance and a consistent series of messages seeking to undermine his and his administration’s effectiveness to deliver on his campaign promises. And at the same time he has joined with the military forces that have so distorted the position of this country internationally in a continuation of military occupation of two Middle Eastern countries that, in my humble opinion, we should leave to their own devices, despite the likelihood that this will send the arena into more turmoil. I just don’t think military action is the answer and I do think international diplomacy in a fresh and new way can make a difference. In any case, choosing violence to counter violence just generates more violence. We fail in the process to take a position that is moral and supportive of generative processes in the world. In this sense, I am more persuaded by Sam Harris (http://blog.ted.com/2010/03/22/science_can_ans/) than I am a president I voted to elect. Well, enough of my political opinion. I just mention these things so that the reader of this review is a bit informed about my biases, if that is what they truly are.

Just as I have had some disappointments in Obama’s decisions and actions (certainly not most of them), I am greatly disappointed in this book on his leadership. For the most part, the focus is on Obama up to his being elected president. I am interested in his leadership as president. Secondly, the focus of the discussion is about attributes and traits and their attendant behaviors. For example, the first chapter is about Obama’s way of winning trust and confidence. This involves managing early impressions through image and body language. It includes getting the right props around you, including wearing the right clothes and color of necktie. But enough of this. Let’s go on to another example of this treatise on leadership.

There are familiar presentations about communicating a vision, forming a team, leveraging a good reputation. But one stood out for potential insight to a broader sense of leadership and of strategy: making friends in unusual places. When I saw this I immediately thought of Obama’s reaching out to those who disagree with him. As president, it seems like this has yielded small gains, although I must admit there may be many aspects of this I am not familiar with. The book is disappointing in its treatment of this subject because it focuses primarily on Obama’s efforts before he became president. No insights to be found here. Instead we read about the *Harvard Law Review*, his activities as Illinois state senator and as a member of the U.S. Senate. All good stories, if only this author did not rely so heavily of this phase of his career, even to the point of repeating stories. Where is the reflection on his presidency? Pretty much absent.

I leave the rest to you.



Rebecca Shambaugh, *Leadership Secrets of Hillary Clinton*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010.

To review this book in the way that I would normally do would just lead to my repeating, once again, the reductionist view of leadership that focuses on attributes and traits. Further, it would require me to criticize the author for a heroic view of leadership that fails to account for so many other factors. Finally, I would be required

to raise the specter of Chris Argyris' admonitions about giving advice that is not actionable. If you have read these reviews before, you have already seen these themes show up over and over. You may wonder why I do reviews of such books. Well, because each contains a germ of truth, an element useful to our thinking about, developing and practicing leadership.

So, I share with you some of the themes found here.

First, the author cites the challenges and difficulties face by Secretary of State Clinton from her notification by NASA when she was a young girl that they did not use women as astronauts after she inquired as to how she could become one to more recent challenges that are generally well known around the world.

The author states that the following are the key lesson categories from reviewing the Secretary's approach to leadership:

"First, Hillary provides us with examples of several *unique attributes* that are required of leaders at any level of any organization in the world today, such as being a *continuous learner*, *being resilient*, and being "*adaptively*" *authentic*.

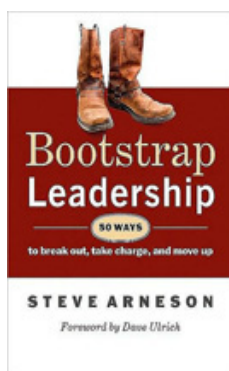
"Second, she provides us with examples of key leadership skills that are essential in today's turbulent business environment. These include *being focused*, *being 'connected' to people*, and *being a great communicator*.

"And, finally, she provides us with a great example of the *heart of a great leader*, which involves *leading with purpose* and *being of service to others*."

Each of these themes are addressed in the book and broken down into sets of admonitions regarding what is required to lead in this way. For example, in addressing the turbulence of change:

1. Recognize the human factor in change.
2. Never resist a good change—get ahead of it.
3. Focus on what you can control and be realistic in your expectations. (A lesson I need to learn.)
4. Create and share your vision for the future.
5. Communicate! Communicate! Communicate!

Well, that should give you a feel for what can be found in this small book about a big topic. Help yourself to this laundry list of "shoulds"—and let me know if you have figured out how to do all of this and show up as a leader, much less an example of leadership.



Steve Arneson. *Bootstrap Leadership: 50 Ways to Break Out, Take Charge, and Move Up*, Foreword by Dave Ulrich. San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler, 2010.

How can you turn down a book with a foreword by Dave Ulrich? He is the kind of thinker and consultant who deserves his own place on Wikipedia. Check him out. Since 1991, he has been presented with one or more awards far more years than not. He has been recognized in *BusinessWeek*, Human Resource Management, Kirk Englehardt Exemplary Business Ethics Award from Utah Valley University, and more. He co-authored *The Why*

of Work: How Great Leaders Build Abundant Organizations That Win, Leadership Brand: Developing Customer-Focused Leaders to Drive Performance And Build Lasting Value, and Organizational Capability: Competing from the Inside Out. Well let's see what he has to say. First, he indicates that there are five basic rules that leaders must follow:

1. Shape the Future
2. Make Things Happen
3. Engage Today's Talent
4. Build the Next Generation
5. Invest in Yourself

Sound familiar?

He goes on to indicate how you can best use the insights from this book:

1. Commit to learning.
2. Assess your strengths and weaknesses.
3. Start with small successes.
4. See yourself as others see you (the thing Bobby Burns regretted we could not do, but in this era of 360° feedback, we may conclude—at our own risk—that we will have clarity about how the boss, peers, subordinates, even your significant other sees you).

I'm sorry—or not. But the stream of this kind of material has been going on for many years. And we can expect to find more of it in the 50 recommendations by Arneson. Here are some samples:

1. Evaluate your working relationships (as well as those that don't work).
2. Find a mentor.
3. Identify and leverage your strengths.
4. Craft your own definition of leadership (Why not? The field is wide open with the 800+ definitions already floating out there.)
5. Read three business books a year. (No stretching here. Three books a year? Let's see, if each is 250 pages long, that is 750 pages, divided by 365. That's roughly two pages a day. My god, man, how do you expect busy would be leaders to read two pages a day?)
6. Learn about other cultures (We are experiencing globalization and it is important to know how to manipulate people no matter where you are.)
7. Visit innovative companies. (Steal their ideas, even if they won't work in your culture and context.)
8. Review your strategy twice a year. (Are you sure that is a way to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty?)
9. Take charge of your own career. (Who do you trust more with it? Certainly not your mentor or the HR Department.)
10. Set priorities for your time. (As though time management isn't a waste of time.)

Okay, I am being hard on what may be a pretty decent set of ideas for individuals to reflect on as an awareness exercise to determine how they might be more effective. Arneson is, after all, a business coach. *Leadership Excellence*, the online publication under the banner of Warren Bennis that features consultants and coaches in using sound bites to attract business. But who am I to argue with success? Arneson was identified as one of the top 50 executive coaches by *Leadership Excellence*. He works with Fortune 500 companies. He sits in the

offices of corporate power that is so heavily influencing our culture, our politics and our economy. So, perhaps we should be grateful for words of wisdom such as these.

Oh, and by the way, to support your own learning Arneson has provided, yes, a 50 question self-assessment you can use to see how you are doing with his 50 pieces of advice.