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Review of *5 Leadership Essentials for Women:
Developing Your Ability to Make Things Happen*
compiler Lisa Clark

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Book Review

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Because much of the scholarship on leadership has been constructed using male norms (Nidiffer, 2001), there is added attraction when the essentials of successful leadership are targeted for women. *5 Leadership Essentials for Women: Developing Your Ability to Make Things Happen* addresses five leadership skills that, according to the “compiler” [sic] Linda Clark, are designed with women’s needs in mind. The leadership essentials explored are communication, relationship essentials, time management, group building, and conflict management.

One of the main purposes of writing *5 Leadership Essentials for Women* is to help women realize their “God-given potential” of becoming an effective leader (Clark, 2004, p. 9). Based on personal observations and more than 30 years of experience as a women’s leader, she advocates that leadership is not reserved for a chosen few nor automatically assumed with position. Kouzes and Posner (2003) described these as two common myths of leadership. They view leadership as an “observable set of skills and abilities” that “can be strengthened, honed, and enhanced” irrespective of title or position (p. 97). From their perspective, we are all born with various sets of skills and abilities and it is up to us as to what we do with what we have. The development of these skills requires practice and feedback, along with good role models and coaching.

The concept of a “natural born leader” is another myth that is perpetuated, especially in higher education (Chliwniak, 1997). This concept is often described from a masculine perspective, largely attributed to a relative lack of women leaders as role models (Regan & Brooks, 1995). Clark’s notion of realizing God-given potential suggests that we are all natural born with leadership abilities, but ones that may need to be developed. Based on his experience working with organizations and executives, Blank (2001) indicates that there are a set of specific skills that define what people commonly label as a natural born leader. Natural born leaders gain this recognition because they “*effortlessly, spontaneously,*

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consistently, and *frequently* demonstrate skills that cause others to willingly follow (Blank, 2001, p. 8). These skills come from learning, practice, and mastery.

Although Clark selects five skills as essential for leadership, the number, scope and classification of leadership skills are varied in the literature. Kouzes and Posner (2003), for example, identify five practices of exemplary leadership: Model the Way; Inspire a Shared Vision; Challenge the Process; Enable Others to Act; and Encourage the Heart. Blank (2001) describes 108 leadership skills grouped into three categories: Foundation Skills; Leadership Direction Skills; and Leadership Influence Skills. Chliwniak (1997) describes an emerging leadership model in higher education that requires strong human relations skills, a humanistic approach, collegiality, and consensus building. These images of leadership are more attributed to women than men and suggest that women are prime candidates for positions of leadership (Blackmore 2002; Chliwniak 1997; Regan & Brooks, 1995).

The mastery of skills is just one dimension of leadership but one that has been described as the “hard sciences of leadership . . . where leadership and management merge. The principles and traits are what followers expect of their leaders. The skills provide . . . the tools to win a leadership position. [And] it is the implementation of leadership skills” that sustain a leader (Frigon & Jackson, 1996, pp. 7-8).

Overview

The five leadership essentials of communication, relationship building, time management, group building, and conflict management explored in *5 Leadership Essentials for Women* are in keeping with current leadership scholarship. The same leadership skills apply to any leadership style, according to Clark. She indicates that her consideration of what were essentials of leadership was based on personal observation and experiences as a women’s leader. Sections for each of the essentials are written by women who are also identified as skilled and experienced leaders. For Clark

and the other contributors, much of the experience is based on work in Christian women's ministries and missions. Each section includes discussion questions and reflective learning exercises that are intended to help the reader better understand each of the areas.

Communication Essentials

Harral begins the section on Communication Essentials using an example based on a Biblical story. The story is used to exemplify three models of communication: one-way communication; two-way communication; and transactional communication. Communication is described as:

- a process influenced by elements of our past and present;
- “a totality” depending on our internal systems (attitudes, emotions, understandings, physical and psychological health.) that interface with our external systems (situation, time, place, urgency, ritual);
- being perceptual and creative where no two people perceive the same event in exactly the same way; and
- an uncertainty since we can never exactly predict what will happen in the communication situation. (p. 21)

Transactional communication is identified as an ethical viewpoint, resting on the recognition that human beings have a freedom of choice. The view highlights the necessity of continuous communication to share meanings and to reach mutually acceptable choices. Leaders must be careful not to assume responsibility for the choices of everyone. The challenge for leaders is to accept the other person and the range of choices, and in so doing to also accept their own range of choice.

Another Bible story is used to exemplify principles of the situational leadership model advanced by Blanchard and Hersey. This model provides guidance regarding the communication style to be used in a given situation. Effective leadership and communication depends on the situation, the needs of the people involved, and the job of the leader asking them to do it. This section explores four approaches: telling, coaching, encouraging, and delegating.

Harral notes that “Listening may be the most important part of communication” (p. 37). It is through listening that we validate each other and create opportunities to know another. Most people have spent a great deal of time learning to read and write but few have had any formal training in listening. According to Blank (2001), “Knowing is not doing. Everybody knows it is important to listen. Few demonstrate good listening skills” (p. 15). To be recognized as a natural born leader, a person must “know what to do *and* do it *and* ultimately perform in an effortless, spontaneous manner

(Blank 2001, p. 15). This requires frequent and consistent application of good listening skills.

Common obstacles to effective listening are discussed in the chapter. Antidotes for each obstacle are offered as strategies to minimize or eliminate these obstacles. Additionally, there are strategies suggested to improve listening skills.

The importance of messages sent by unspoken communication is also addressed. This is aptly subtitled, "I See What You're Saying!" Beyond the usual attention to body language and behavior, this section also includes "space," "time," and "artifactual" communication. Space communication considers the distance we place between ourselves and others. This is often tied to a person's culture and the nature of the conversation. Time communication explores how the concept of time provides opportunity for misunderstanding. Examples of "*in just a second*" or "*awhile*" help to reinforce this point. Artifactual communication examines how the objects we use or are surrounded by influence communication. This may include how we dress, the house we live in, or the car we drive.

The last part of Communications Essentials focuses on importance of a leader speaking articulately and persuasively before a group. Harral acknowledges that this is often met with apprehension and offers suggestions to help "control the shaking" (p. 57). Tips and exercises are also offered about voice skills: pitch, pace and inflection. Practical strategies on making the message meaningful are provided, with particular emphasis on knowing the audience, the purpose of the message, and the actual delivery.

Harral indicates that purpose and organization will "make or break" the effectiveness of communication (p. 64). Five major purposes identified are: to inform; to persuade; to entertain; to inspire; and to call to action. The idea of having a clearly defined and formally stated goal would be an important element in achieving any of these intended purposes. Harral's description is very similar to what Frigon and Jackson identify as "the three Cs" of leadership: communication, cooperation, and coordination (1996, p. 107). With these strategies, leaders are able to win over their leadership team, gain followers, and overcome resistance.

Relationship Essentials

In the chapter on relationship essentials, Damon provides background discussion on how women relate and the possible reasons behind what have been identified as gender differences. Although Damon does not cite the sources, the importance of relationships and the attributes associated with women have been the topic of recent research and discussion.

“Leadership is a relationship,” according to Kouzes and Posner (2003), between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow (p. 2). This relationship “should be collaborative, guided by a shared purpose, enable respectful disagreement, have clear divisions of labor and responsibilities, and creating a learning environment in which individuals develop” (Madden, 2002, p. 117). Gender has been regarded as a category of experience that influences women to develop leadership values and engage in a model of relational leadership (Regan & Brooks, 1995). Regan and Brooks suggest that relational leadership is a model that synthesizes the finer qualities of the masculinist and feminist perspectives and forms a newer, stronger, and more balanced practice of leadership” (p. 18). Relational leadership is characterized by five attributes: collaboration, caring, courage, intuition, and vision. Chliwniak (1997) indicates that a leader with an emerging, inclusive style of leadership can provide higher education institutions with new values and ethics grounded in cooperation, community, and relationships. As a result of her research, she concludes that women appear to exhibit the emerging perceptions of leadership to a greater degree than men.

The reflective exercises in this section of the book are designed for self-introspection. The intent of this self-knowledge is to provide a sense of how others see us and to help us recognize the areas that we would like to change. Damon provides a thought provoking section that includes identifying the four pieces of baggage we each carry: the steamer trunk; the duffle bag; the backpack; and the flight bag. As the image might conjure up, the steamer trunk is described as that baggage that is rarely opened and has been relegated to the attic. Within this trunk are the rules that we grew up with and our early childhood memories—much of which is remembered selectively. How we remember often influences our relationship expectations. The duffle bag contains the “dirty laundry of a lifetime” (p. 100). The ability to forgive and be forgiven shapes relationships. The backpack is filled with our anger, animosity, and resentment. This bag is described as the one often filled until the point of explosion. The importance of handling these feelings in a healthy manner is emphasized. The fourth bag is the flight bag. This bag is the one full of hopes, dreams and expectations. Damon suggests that we are unable to go on with our lives and build healthy relationships if we have not examined our four pieces of baggage.

Practical strategies are provided for developing successful relationships. Recognizing, however, that not all relationships develop in healthy and mutually satisfying directions, Damon provides four coping skills: how to solve a problem; how to deal with difficult people; learning how to speak up; and learning to let go. As with the other sections, there is significant religious

association. This section wraps up by describing what is identified as “the ultimate relationship”—the one a person has with God (p. 113).

Time Management Essentials

Lloyd reminds us in the section on time management that we each have 24 hours a day and that when we master our time, we master our life. It is a matter of being more efficient with the time we have. This includes “discerning priorities, having the right perspective, claiming responsibility for our time, accepting interruptions as opportunities, learning when to delegate and when to say no, and feeling good about the choices we have made” (p. 118). She craftily poses the question, “*Is time the problem, or am I the problem?*” and then proceeds to provide familiar but thought-provoking strategies to “find time, take time [and] make time” (p. 139; p. 141). The prevailing premise is that it is all about choices.

This section, even more than the others, infuses religious imagery to the topic with Jesus as the “master manager” and the importance of seeking a clear sense of purpose with God as a guide. Some readers may not be comfortable with these images. However, having a clear sense of purpose is cited as a basis for good time management. This clear sense of purpose often begins with establishing goals and direction. Blank (2001) categorizes the necessary skill set for this under the heading of “leadership direction skills” (p. 12). Exceptional leaders “map the territory” and chart the course of action (p. 13). It is also necessary for leaders to influence people to willingly follow. In doing so, exceptional leaders create a desire. “They inspire rather than require” (p. 13). Whether finding the time, taking the time, or making the time, having a clear sense of purpose is essential to effective time management.

Group Building Essentials

In this section Hamlin states that skilled leaders recognize they cannot rely on one leadership approach, preferring the word “approach” to what she sees as the more limiting term of “style” (p. 197). The leadership approaches described are autocratic, authoritative, democratic and laissez-faire.

Women leaders, in general, are more participatory and democratic, with less exclusive focus on task (Nidiffer, 2001). Democratic styles are correlated with higher productivity than other styles. Participatory leadership is associated with greater faculty satisfaction and is seen as most compatible with academic culture. Fisher (1999), in her book *The First Sex*, notes: “

Women’s style of management is based on sharing power, on inclusion, consultation, consensus, and collaboration . . . work[ing] interactively and swap[ping] information . . . Encourage[ing] their employees by listening to,

supporting, and encouraging them. Women give more praise . . . compliment, thank, and apologize more regularly . . . ask for more advice in order to include others in the decision making process . . . tend to give suggestions instead of giving orders . . . characteristically believe everyone can succeed in business . . . a win-win attitude.” (1999, p. 31)

The socialization of women is attributed to them being connective leaders; a highly affective approach that combines elements of both transactional and transformational leadership (Nidiffer, 2001).

Leaders empower groups by introducing an information-rich, decentralized environment and inclusive decision-making (Madden, 2002). Community should be built without silencing debate or disagreement, recognizing that diversity may be more productive in producing sound consensus decisions (Madden, 2002). Much of what Hamlin describes supports these premises. She also establishes that group building is dependent on each member recognizing a purpose, need or goal for the collective efforts. She notes that there are various stages of development. Group dynamics and maturity will determine if and in what way groups will move to consensus. Active participation and cooperation of all members are key elements.

Strategies are suggested for building groups effectively. The “5 B’s of Group Leading” provide a focus for leaders: Be an Encourager; Be Decisive; Be a Sharer; Be Visionary; and Be a Skilled Leader (pp. 192-193). “Rx for a Healthy Group” describes nine additional tips:

- Rx—Proper motivation
- Rx—Wise use of members’ gifts
- Rx—Respect for the individual
- Rx—Accountability
- Rx—Balance of leader/member involvement
- Rx—Communication
- Rx—Attitude of teamwork
- Rx—Shared goals
- Rx—Constructive handling of conflict.

These strategies and the others discussed will ring familiar to anyone who is or has tried to lead group activities. They are also ones that often need development and constant attention.

Conflict Management Essentials

Schooley begins this section by describing the conflict between Michelangelo and Pope Julius II over the painting of the Sistine Chapel. She cites the story as an illustration of how conflict can enrich and enliven rather than destroy relationships. She views conflict as more often a sign of interdependence and really a need to work together in some way.

Conflict is seen as a benefit since it can prevent stagnation, stimulating interest and curiosity. As such, it can serve as a channel through which problems can be aired and solutions identified. Whether conflict is bad or good depends in part on how skillfully it is managed, according to Schooley. In well-managed conflict situations, the potential difficulties are highlighted, new solutions are encouraged and efforts are made to ensure the continued commitment and interest of others. Schooley associates colors with three common sources of conflict: green for “ideas” that are presented and tested but not always well received; gold for “status” referring to the group hierarchy and possible hidden agendas; and red for “need for power” as the perceived influence one person has over another (pp. 227-229). Various types of conflict are also explored along with recognizing ways people deal with conflict.

Although there are reflective exercises in this section, helpful strategies are not as prevalent as in the other sections. Readers seeking practical skills in the area of conflict management and managing difficult people may want to turn to other resources. Hiebert and Klatt’s (2001), *The Encyclopedia of Leadership*, offer five levels for dealing with conflict, depending on the level of resolution that is most appropriate. When confronted with difficult people, they provide profiles of five common types of difficult people: the aggressors, the know-it-alls, the negativists, the sticklers, and the indecisives. For each profile, techniques are suggested on how to deal most effectively with each type. Manning (1995) has a slightly different list of difficult people types but the themes are similar.

Karre (2005) takes a slightly different approach when focusing on dealing with difficult people. She suggests that the language of “dealing with difficult people” communicates a self-fulfilling prophecy. A different perspective is to think of conflict situations as “productive coaching conversations” (p. 1). Coaching provides support, guidance, and advice so that team members are able to achieve their personal and professional best. Karre (2005) provides both tips and tools in this endeavor.

Many of the tips for dealing with conflict and difficult people focus on fostering relationships and good communication. An additional tool offered by Karre (2005) is GROW: Grow, Reality, Options, and Wrap-up. This

acronym represents a four-step agenda for after taking the time to talk and clarify issues and feelings. The steps help to move the coaching conversations forward. During this process, Karre (2005) suggests moving the conversation to paper—writing down the goal; writing down the reality; sharing of options; making notes. This shifts the focus from the individual to the paper and increases the quality of “actionable choices” (Karre, 2005, p. 4).

Conclusion

5 Leadership Essentials for Women: Developing Your Ability to Make Things Happen does identify five common skills necessary for successful leadership. Each section includes questions and reflective learning exercises to help readers better understand themselves in relation to each of the five key leadership areas. Effective leadership and communication involve skills that must be learned and practiced. Knowing oneself is an important aspect of leadership and one of the leadership “competencies” (Chliwniak, 1997, p. 66). The tips, strategies, and reflective exercises offered in *5 Leadership Essentials for Women: Developing Your Ability to Make Things Happen* are ideal for a person with new and developing leadership responsibilities. Those with more leadership experience may find the tips, strategies, and reflective exercises valuable as a quick self-assessment check.

Despite the title, the book does not provide substantial support for how or why these leadership essentials are “for women.” The references cited tend to be from out of print resources. It is also not immediately evident when reviewing the cover or the book highlights that the context for leadership is with religious organizations. Sprinkled throughout the respective sections are specific references to examples found in the Bible and the life of Jesus. The belief expressed is that as “Christian women we know that a dependence upon God is the first step to becoming a leader (p. 11).” This context may limit the potential interest and usefulness for some readers.

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