

Off the Shelf Leadership Thesis Relies on Spiritual Perspective

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(Editor's note: This month we are featuring the second installment of our book review column titled "Off the Shelf." If you have read any books that would be of interest to those in the rebuilding industry please bring them to our attention for review in an upcoming issue.)

"The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make," by Hans Finzel, published by NexGen.

At a recent *Exchange* staff meeting, there was a rare bit of dissension regarding the presentation of this book review. As the editor and I differed on our final opinions of the book, we debated using various formats from a Ebert and Roeper "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" approach, to more colorful Dan Aykroyd-flavored terminology beginning with "Polly, you ignorant..."

The editor finally relented and said I could write the review solo if I'd express how much she enjoyed the book. Polly really liked the book.

Now it's my turn.

"The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make" is a relatively brief litany of ways to be a positive leader through "down-and-dirty" relationship building with those in your charge. Author Hans Finzel does a fine job of categorizing ten areas of leadership which particularly cause trouble for those who don't stay focused on the people around them.

His subheads and bullet points not only help with comprehension and retention, but make this little book a practical reference tool.

The "Powerpoints" at the end of the chapters (Could he find a cornier heading?), also help to clarify Finzel's main ideas. However, chapter-closing digressions of statistics, charts, quotations from other authors, poetry, and Scripture, ultimately distract from the relatively strong messages of his own writings.

The ten chapter titles are clear and to the point, and the book is full of quotable one liners such as: "The good

you do can be destroyed by the precautions you fail to take," or "The greatest ideas bubble up from the workers," or my favorite, "People who hold great power in organizations usually don't sense their power—like a skunk who is immune to the aroma that has so much power over others!"

Finzel is president of the Christian ministry World Venture, which was known as CBInternational until June of this year. His leadership know-how is vast with a staff of 500 spread throughout 60 areas around the world, and more than 15,000 donors and partnering churches.

So reader beware: Finzel's theories are built on the servant-leadership models of Jesus Christ, Moses, Joshua, and other biblical figures.

Now don't misunderstand. I am a card-carrying member of the born-again Christian church and love to study the Bible. I would really have enjoyed this as a Sunday School class curriculum. It even makes me grin to think that Finzel has slipped a little Scripture onto the desks of secular managers who never would have picked up this book if they had known it was bursting with religious teachings.

But it doesn't seem quite fair that even with a quick scan of the chapter titles, it's not clear that this is a religiously-based book and inappropriate in many business settings.

Yet with that in mind, his core theories are well-stated and worth considering.

Finzel's Top Ten

The author presents the most important points first with his top ten list. Chapter One explores the "top-down" attitude, illustrated by a "military model of barking orders to weak underlings." This abusive leadership style is characterized by depriving people of knowledge in order to keep them in line, much as a brutal dictator maintains his power through ignorance.

This is where the "servant leadership" or "participatory management" format is introduced with the visual of the pyramid resting on the leader's shoulders (as opposed to the leader sitting atop the pyramid monitoring his organization from above). "There is nothing in my organization that anyone does that I should not be willing to do myself if it

promotes the good of us all," he says.

Chapter Two will hit a nerve with those task-oriented personalities. Do you consider people interruptions or opportunities? Finzel points out that although successful leaders must complete a certain amount of paperwork, they will always have time for relationships. If this is a struggle for you, he suggests changing to a "MBWA" management style—"manage by walking around."

The next two chapters unfold with pointers for recognizing and making the most of different personality types in your organization. Some need regular affirmation and encouragement, while others need a lot of rope to try out new ideas or hang themselves in the process. He says these "mavericks" may cause trouble, but their innovative spirits are what keep organizations from drying out.

"Dictatorship in Decision-making" presents a comparison of organizational charts, including the traditional bosses-at-the-top chart; the horizontal "lead-the-charge" chart which resembles a sports tournament bracket; the flat networking model where the boss is a clearinghouse between members of the group; and ending with the servant-leadership inverted pyramid he described in the first chapter.

His point here is that good leaders allow those who are doing the work to make the decisions: "The more I can push decisions into the various departments, the more ownership and enthusiasm there will be in implementing the decisions."

This segues nicely into the next chapter, "Dirty Delegation," which slaps the hands of leaders who delegate work without the requisite authority to do the work. According to Finzel, there is no deal killer like giving someone a project without the respect to let them complete it.

The ending chapters on communication, corporate culture, and graceful retirement are where non-religious readers will get frustrated. The information as it relates strictly to business gets weaker as the spiritual digressions get longer. But if Finzel doesn't lose you by the last few chapters, his point is clear: Developing integrity and depth of character give leaders the freedom to care for and serve others, allowing organizations to remain vibrant.

So if you're in charge of people at home, church, a business, or a civic or professional organization, this is certainly a decent reference book to take off the shelf from time to time. But it is certainly one book that shouldn't be judged by its cover.