

BOOK REVIEWS

HALFTIME

By Bob Buford

Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (2008, updated edition)

E-Publication, 298 pages

Reviewed by JOHN F. COSGROVE

In *Halftime*, Bob Buford argues for the importance of developing a life's purpose in order to live a life of significance. He presents a process for developing our personal purpose and constructing a plan for its realization. Buford describes us as being in a life-long athletic contest where we have successfully completed the first half and are now headed for the locker room. He states, "You probably rushed through college, fell in love, married, embarked on a career, climbed upward, and acquired a few things to make the journey comfortable." He further admits that we probably took some life "hits" such as divorce, loss of a job, or maybe the death of a child or spouse. We started the first half with great intentions, but "got blindsided along the way" (p. 37). We learn from our first half experiences so as to develop a strategy for a successful second half that will lead to victory, or rather, a life of significance. Buford's book is written for anyone who has an unquenchable

desire to move a successful life to a life of significance. His argument that a significant life rests with an individual's selection of a life's purpose and a strategy for its realization is practical, potentially life changing, and is supported by other scholars (such as Jim Collins, who wrote the Foreword to the 2008 edition, and Peter Drucker, who wrote the Foreword to the 1994 edition).

Buford forces us to reflect on life (reviewing the "first half"). "I knew what I believed," says Buford, "but I really did not know what to do about what I believed" (p. 15). We are asked to reflect on our earliest dreams, our most significant successes, the importance we place on faith, and what we are passionate about. The author uses these reflections to maneuver us through thoughts that include major life setbacks and how they were dealt with, the major influencers and how they impacted our life, major events and how they changed us, and moments when we felt like a champion and what we did to realize those feelings (pp. 70-75).

From these experiences and personal reflections Buford urges us to "take stock" of ourselves by asking a series of questions about our passions, beliefs, and values. This could include our relationship with God and our faith. He concludes this section by asking us to list the most important things in our life, place them in categories and, symbolically, place those categories "in a box." Buford argues that to have a successful second half we end up with one thing "in the box." It is your life's purpose. In Buford's case the three categories were family, religious beliefs, and career. He encourages us to involve our spouses and two trusted friends in making this decision (pp. 85-96). The end result is to proclaim the one thing that will define our reason for being. This is our life's purpose.

Buford spends the remainder of the book arguing a process for transitioning our life to realizing this newly discovered purpose. He discusses techniques for staying “centered” with our purpose (pp. 118–125). He emphasizes the use of what he calls “seismic testing,” that is, seeking advice from people familiar with our upcoming journey. In Buford’s case, he asked for advice from two pastors (pp. 128–132). Buford concludes the book by talking about his life with Christ, that his second half is not about collecting things but providing things to others, that learning never stops, and that this is about moving from a life of being controlled to a life of controlling things ourselves.

The readers who will find this book most valuable will have already found success and are discovering that they want more of life. They have gone through a professional life of accumulation and are asking “why continue this?” or “what’s the purpose of my work?” Many successful people are good at what they do, and could easily continue, but are simply bored. Though the book is based on the author’s life experiences, it is more than an autobiography. It addresses head-on the midlife crisis of so many. It addresses a fundamental social challenge of a developed and affluent society: we are living longer than our great-grandparents, and many of us are not ready to retire even though we might have the means. We need a new challenge. *Halftime* provides a process to enter that second half of life.

Though this book is engaging and thought provoking, it does have several shortcomings. For instance, Buford, a successful CEO of a large cable company, uses for examples people with similar wealth and position. There are many people of lesser means and status who have a yearn-

ing to be in halftime and develop a life of significance, but how this happens will not reflect Buford’s examples. Another weakness in *Halftime* is the absence of women in the discussion and examples. Women in midlife, whose nest is newly empty and who want to start a career, can learn from Buford’s suggestions, but they will have to approach their halftime in a very different way.

In conclusion, this book can be extremely valuable for those who are at halftime. Christians will appreciate Buford’s strong biblical foundation and may appreciate his signal that a personal purpose, leading to a life of significance, is actually a calling from God. There is much value in Buford’s process of defining a life’s purpose and the process for putting it in place. Even if your background differs from Buford’s but you are looking for a life that can turn success into significance, and particularly Christ-centered significance, *Halftime* is a valuable study.

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A SAILOR LOOKS AT LEADERSHIP

By Randy Deering
Oldsmar, FL: Digital Publishing
of Florida (2012)
E-Publication

Reviewed by GARTH WOODRUFF

Randy Deering applies leadership principles from his sailing experience to business and other areas of everyday life in this enjoyable, easy-to-

read book on leadership. Though sailing seems to take a minor role in *A Sailor Looks at Leadership*, the author takes the helm in this fairly comprehensive overview of leadership methods and styles, expertly steering the reader through a fast-paced regatta of one-liners. Deering fills the pages with positive, simple, concise theories supported by quotes and data. For instance, he starts Chapter 3 with “someone has wisely quipped, ‘If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll probably wind up some place else’” (p. 31). In another place he quotes Burt Nanus: “There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, achievable vision for the future, widely shared” (p. 31). Finally, after depositing some thoughtful insights, Deering follows with an inscription chiseled in the walls of a Sussex church: “A vision without a task is just a dream, a task without a vision is drudgery, but a vision and a task is the hope of the world” (p. 32). Deering defiantly simplifies, yet supports, a life journey of leadership.

In the section on teamwork, Deering quotes Henry Ford and then follows up with his own thoughtful commentary: “Henry Ford said, ‘Don’t find fault, find a remedy.’ Problems either stop us or stretch us. We can see obstacles or we can see objectives. You can see solutions in every challenge or a problem in every situation” (p. 40). Within almost every theory or point, the author interjects some good homespun thought, obviously based on years of experience and an educated mind. All aspects of leadership seem to be covered: team building, top down leadership, values, and trust building, to name a few. He even shares what he feels a leader needs person-

ally, things like “keeping in shape physically and mentally” (p. 94), stress management, and seeking sanctuary.

Deering picks up many of the same lessons Christ would have learned through the simple life of one who lived by the sea, then repackages them into modern words. Deering, a theologian with Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees, has a tendency to treat the connection of leadership and Christianity as assumed until the last section of the last chapter. “Reputation is who people say you are, character is who you really are. The famous preacher D. L. Moody said, ‘Character is what you are in the dark when nobody is looking’” (p. 110). After a short dialog regarding character, not charisma, Deering wraps up with what he calls his “Ten Commandments for Leadership” (p. 111).

A Sailor Looks at Leadership can be viewed from two different paradigms. One would be that the book is for someone new to the concept of leadership, that it gives a general overview in a non-threatening tone to introduce a reader to a very complex set of topics. The second point of view is that Deering’s book is a nice review of deeply studied theories in laymen’s terms, coupled with copious illustrations and quotes that add to the foundation and understanding of these theories. In such a complex field as leadership, seldom do you find a book that not only attempts to simplify concepts but succeeds.

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STEVE JOBS

By Walter Isaacson
New York, NY: Simon and Schuster
(2011)
Hardcover, 656 pages

Reviewed by SHAWN COLLINS

The title of this 656-page biography is simple and yet conjures up a wide array of images depending on the person reading it: *Steve Jobs*. As a household name, Steve Jobs the person, the legend, means different things to different people. He is well known as the successful leader of Apple, Inc. But his style of leadership is the area of contention between those who ardently follow his success and those who, while not denying his success, point out his failures.

The book is based on revealing interviews Walter Isaacson conducted over a two-year period with Steve Jobs and those who knew and worked with him. In a sense, Isaacson used the “Rashomon effect” to bring together the recollections of different observers to produce different but equally plausible accounts of Jobs. Isaacson describes Jobs as a complex man who disdained material objects, yet made objects people desired through the company he started and was dedicated to, Apple, Inc. In fact, if one word could describe him, it would be “innovative.” Matching innovation with leadership is a key to success, but sometimes Jobs seemed to disdain the business aspect. It was something he had to do in order to do what he truly loved—innovate.

Steve Jobs was dying, and he knew it. Jobs asked Walter Isaacson on several occasions to write his biography—he wanted people to know the real Steve Jobs and understand what his legacy was. The book moves

along by starting with Jobs’ early life and the things that shaped his early childhood. As Jobs’ career progresses, so do the pages. Interspersed are chapters about Jobs as a human.

Intersecting creativity and technology, and getting others to understand that vision, required a special individual. It took someone inspiring. Steve Jobs took inspiration to a new level. He inspired people to accomplish things and meet deadlines nobody thought were possible. He somehow seemed to know what was possible. He then pushed people to make possible what, in their minds own minds, was impossible. His employees referred to this as his “reality distortion field.”

How does one learn from Isaacson’s description of Steve Jobs? Jobs was hugely successful in his life, but had some bumps in the road. He was ousted from the very company he founded. But here is one of the take-home lessons from Isaacson’s book: learn from your mistakes. When Jobs returned from exile to Apple he had learned from his mistakes. Then there is the value of inspiration. Jobs knew how to inspire his employees through his “reality distortion field.” But he had difficulties dealing with those who did not see things his way. There was a dichotomy in Jobs’ leadership style: he was a brilliant innovator, bringing people and products together, but sometimes in unconventional and sometimes controversial ways.

Can Christian leaders learn from Jobs’ example? Jobs lived with the reality of his dying, which drove him to reflect on his life and seek to clarify his legacy. Christian leaders will probably be pained to learn of Jobs’ tortured search for enlightenment. Yet his experience points to a key leadership question: “What is our legacy? How do I want to be remem-

bered as a leader? Is the vision I inspire worth giving my best to? Isaacson in the end presents a one-of-a-kind man, a transformational and charismatic leader who inspired while struggling with his own shadows.

Jobs had “a premonition that he would not live a long life” and “felt a sense of urgency about all he wanted to get done” (p. 262). Steve Jobs’ last words were reportedly “oh wow, oh wow, oh wow.” We’ll never know to what he was referring. Walter Isaacson gives us a rich glimpse of this complex personality, his intriguing thought processes, and the controversial leadership style of one of the most influential leaders of our time. While Christian leaders may have difficulties dealing with some of Jobs’ biases against organized religion, they will find this book helpful in reading some of the currents that have shaped our generation.

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MEETING THE ETHICAL CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP: CASTING LIGHT OR SHADOW

By Craig E. Johnson
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (2012),
4th edition
Paperback, 536 pages

Reviewed by DUANE M. COVRIG

Now in its fourth edition, *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership* has become one of the best-selling ethical leadership texts used in colleges and universities today. It blends together an overview of ethics, ethical decision-making, moral leadership processes, and group and organizational dynamics into one

reader-friendly source. It has case studies, illustrations from films and popular culture, and succinct reviews of the best in scholarship and research on ethics in organizations. I consider it the single best resource for anyone wanting to improve their understanding and practice of ethics. It is especially focused on professional life in organizations and leadership, but also has insight for some personal ethics.

I have used previous editions of this text since 1999 in teaching appropriate professional ethics and moral leadership to teachers and educational leaders; more recently I have seen it useful for my students in business and health care.

The author, Craig Johnson, is a professor and administrator at George Fox University, a Christian university in Oregon that has Quaker roots. The Quaker influence is evident in his use of Parker Palmer and the focus on peace and global justice. Beyond that, however, the use of Christian theology and ideas is limited and more peripheral. Instead, he dives into and uses scholarship and research from business, philosophy and the social sciences. This fact makes the book useful for Christian leaders who may have read biblical and theological ethics but have not explored other areas of ethics.

While Johnson draws a lot from his first chosen area of research, communication, he is also very effective at reviewing research on morality in group processes and organizational dynamics and in bringing these implications to an understanding of moral leadership.

Each chapter has some activities and useful reflection and application sections. Practicing administrators will appreciate Johnson’s brevity and ability to move past philosophical hair-splitting in applying ethical principles to real contemporary issues.

What is very useful is Johnson's ability to set up a chapter and its main components in a logical way that makes reading philosophy easier than most books of this nature. He then can summarize the main aspects of the chapter in very practical ways with clear application. He often offers several ways to approach a topic and for that reason provides a more liberating and generative quality to his ethical critique that is not always evident in other books, some of which can become dogmatic about their approach to ethics.

Those planning on reading Johnson should leave time to view some of the films Johnson recommends or refers to in his moral illustrations. They really drive home some of his points.

To get a fuller appreciation of the value of this book, please see the interview with Johnson in this issue of *JACL*. Note also that a short section of Johnson's chapter on "The Leader's Character" is used in Traxler and Covrig's critique of the moral leadership of Andrew Jackson, also in this *JACL*. We highly recommend this book to Christian leaders.

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CREDIBILITY: HOW LEADERS GAIN AND LOSE IT, WHY PEOPLE DEMAND IT

By J. M. Kouzes & B. Z. Posner
San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass (2011)
Hardcover, 250 pages

Reviewed by DIANE PERSIN
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To unpack the essence of credibility

is the main purpose of J. M. Kouzes and B. Z. Posner's book, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*. Published as an updated and revised version of their 1993 book, also titled *Credibility*, Kouzes and Posner expand on this most seminal attribute of successful leaders in what they call a "completely revised and slimmed-down version of the original" (p. xvii). They explain that, despite its shortened length, this updated edition places an additional emphasis on 21st-century technology and also has a companion workbook with exercises for strengthening credibility. However, they begin with the disappointing realization that, particularly within the last five years of economic turmoil, credibility has rapidly declined in various sectors of society: "Organized religion, Wall Street, Congress, business executives, the presidency, public schools, newspapers, banks, insurance companies, car salespeople, HMOs, and more have taken hits" (p. xii). This lack of trust in institutions and businesses has translated into a skepticism and distrust of individuals.

After exploring this credibility crisis, the authors pose a series of questions—what positive actions can leaders take to strengthen credibility over time? What can you do? What can anyone do? Kouzes and Posner begin to answer these questions by presenting one of their core ideas in the book—that leadership is the relationship between those who lead and those who choose to follow. The key to building a successful relationship is to create credible leaders who both trust their followers and are trusted by them. How to become a credible leader becomes the focus of much of the book.

In much the same way as their previous work, *The Leadership Challenge*, *Credibility* presents gaining

credibility among followers as a likely result of six “key disciplines”: discovering oneself, appreciating constituents, affirming shared values, developing capacity, serving a purpose, and sustaining hope. Using approachable language and a non-intimidating tone, Kouzes and Posner devote a chapter to each of these disciplines, providing a rich range of examples of successful leaders. They suggest that these six disciplines need not be regarded as attainable only to CEOs; rather, they can be achieved by anyone who understands and undertakes these important leadership lessons. Using a combination of quantitative research data gleaned from surveys and qualitative, more anecdotal evidence, they present a rich picture of how an aspiring leader may best earn the trust of his or her followers.

The recent emphasis on transformational or charismatic leadership suggests that leaders who appeal to their audience’s emotions can produce significant outcomes. However, many who discuss this form of leadership warn that such emotional responses may produce either positive or negative responses from followers. Consider Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy’s (2009) cautionary inclusion of David Koresh, Adolf Hitler and Slobodan Milosevic as leaders who could also be considered to be charismatic, as well as admirable leaders such as Jesus Christ, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mohandas Gandhi (p. 628). Kouzes and Posner do not specifically address transformational or charismatic leadership in their book. This is perhaps surprising, since it may have offered an opportunity to present credibility as an ethos-driven form of leadership, instead of the pathos-driven leadership of transformational or charismatic leadership. However, they appear to provide a balance in their final chapter. Entitled

“The Struggle to Be Human,” it suggests that each of the six key disciplines may be corrupted into a negative attribute or vice if not used thoughtfully. For example, “developing capacity” may lead to vanity in a leader who may overestimate his or her own capacities, requiring humility as an “antidote” in these circumstances. In this sense, perhaps the authors remind us that, despite their clear recommendations and approachable tone, becoming a credible leader is a nuanced and complex process after all.

By holding themselves to the high standards of Kouzes and Posner’s six disciplines and working to uphold their “do what we say we will do” philosophy as a kind of daily goal to be met, Christian leaders today can present themselves as truly credible role models for their followers. Moreover, Kouzes and Posner challenge all people to thoughtfully discern credible leadership and to distinguish it from the misleading and manipulative messages that can often be found in the media today (particularly, it seems, in politics). Moving beyond *ad hominem* attacks on a speaker and instead engaging in more thoughtful dialogue about the substance of his or her message is one way in which we can regain the trust of others. In John 13:15, after Jesus washes His disciples’ feet, He says to them, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (NIV). With these words, He challenges all Christian leaders to act in a way that others can emulate. Herein is the truest definition of credibility.

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CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS: TOOLS FOR TALKING WHEN THE STAKES ARE HIGH

*By Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny,
Ron McMillan, & Al Switzler
New York, NY: McGraw-Hill (2012),
2nd edition*

E-Publication, 288 pages

Reviewed by AKINWUMI OKE

The ability to engage successfully in crucial conversations is a defining attribute of effective leadership. Crucial conversations arise in the course of our day-to-day activities as a result of our differing opinions, emotions, and the high stakes attached to outcomes of our interpersonal interactions. The authors of this eye-opening book are cofounders of VitalSmarts and innovators in corporate training and organizational performance. They argue that “at the heart of almost all chronic problems in our organizations, our teams, and our relationships lie crucial conversations—ones that we’re either not holding or not holding well” (p. 9). These conversations have significant consequences for our present and future success as effective leaders. *Crucial Conversations* presents a model to enable leaders to engage in difficult conversations that result in multiple benefits to organizations, individuals and relationships.

Readers can probably make their own lists of emotionally charged and politically risky subjects that most people would rather avoid. It turns out that addressing those is one of the most important skills a leader can learn. To help in this process, the authors outline a framework of seven principles for holding crucial conver-

sations through the use of dialogue. It starts with a self awareness that defines the issue and focuses on the desired outcomes. The next steps are closely related to observation skills aimed at managing divergence of opinions and heightened emotional states that could divert the dialogue from “silence to violence.” In working through the stages of learning to look, making it safe, mastering my stories, stating my path, exploring others’ paths, and moving to action, the authors describe invaluable skills for not only managing the dialogue, but ensuring that the participants maintain a steady course of mutual exchange. The benefits can be measured in improved relationships and better results for the organization.

The fact that crucial conversations are at the core of most human relationships has significant implications for leaders and followers, because leadership—especially authentic and transformational leadership—relies on a relational approach in which leaders influence followers in dyads, groups, and organizational exchanges (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Brower, Schoorman, & Tan, 2000; Burns, 1998). Because leader-member relationships are based on trust building as well as a good understanding of each others’ needs and motivations, the ability to engage in crucial conversations is a vital skill required of leaders in all spheres of human endeavor.

The “master my stories” section is an important part of the book for leaders to read. In it they will learn that, in taking responsibility for airing a view in a manner that does not intimidate the recipient, one can be assertive without having to be confrontational and putting the other person on the defensive. By using the “STATE” skills proffered in the book, leaders learn to communicate without being overly

domineering in crucial conversations.

In the final analysis, the authors of *Crucial Conversations* have provided a very practical guide to working through key moments that define the success and failure of organizations and teams. Christian leaders will be able to relate many of these principles to the scriptural injunction to be truthful yet loving, patient yet decisive in the right kind of actions. Jesus seems to have mastered those skills as He pursued His sacrificial mission on earth. His example also shows that not all crucial conversations can be managed through a dialogical framework. But that should not be taken as a license for escalating situations; when not managed well, this often proves destructive.

This book is also important for the development and training of emerging leaders. In the past, churches have provided good training in theology but have done less to make sure Christian leaders acquire the crucial tools involved in changing the “mind and heart” when the stakes are high and opinions collide. By sharing these powerful crucial conversation tools with emerging leaders, Christian leaders could make a priceless contribution to helping the church and Christian organizations to become truly transformative.

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