

BOOK REVIEWS

DARING GREATLY: HOW THE COURAGE TO BE VULNERABLE TRANSFORMS THE WAY WE LIVE, LOVE, PARENT, AND LEAD

*By Brené Brown
New York, NY: Gotham Books (2012)
Hardcover, 256 pages*

Reviewed by SARA WITHERS

Have you ever thought of vulnerability as weakness? Many leaders do whatever it takes to avoid being caught in a position of vulnerability for fear of how they may be perceived. Dr. Brené Brown, in her book *Daring Greatly*, seeks to help readers come to a new understanding of vulnerability, to see that vulnerability is actually “courage beyond measure” and is “daring greatly.” This book is a culmination of twelve years of Brown’s research leading to the conviction that “the courage to be vulnerable will change the way we live, love, parent and lead.”

The testimony of thousands of men and women make up a large portion of Brown’s research. Her interviews reveal that her respondents all share the desire to be free

of fear and what she calls “the never-enough problem”—“never good enough,” “never perfect enough,” “never thin enough.” Throughout the book, Brown expounds on the aspects of our culture that create “the never-enough problem”: shame, comparison, and disengagement.

Brown does a phenomenal job of assessing the current state of our culture as a society in which we heap shame not only upon one another but also on ourselves. By sharing stories, Brown makes a very convincing case for the need to better understand the difference between shame and guilt, and the need to know how to work through those emotions.

Although Brown seems to clearly recognize the effects of shame on our society, I am not convinced that she has clarity on how to go about dealing with the problems of shame. She approaches the problem from a humanistic perspective, giving advice and solutions that are devoid of any deliverer other than self. Her three-step process for dealing with shame exemplifies this. In the chapter “Understanding and Combating Shame,” she describes the process as sharing your shameful experience with someone you trust, talking to yourself with love, and accepting that the shameful experience happened. Brown’s premise throughout this process is that once you can recognize shame’s attack, you can go through these steps and move on unscathed. However, this approach is incongruent with the Christian perspective that we cannot be our own healers, nor can we remove our own shame.

Brown focuses a great deal on the understanding that shame is bad and must be overcome. Although she differentiates between guilt and shame (“Guilt = I did something bad”; “Shame = I am bad”), she misses something by attempting to eliminate

shame from our lives. It is true that unwarranted shame is a harmful emotion. This is revealed in situations where one unjustly experiences shame caused by an abusive relationship, whether physical or emotional. As a result, many have lived lives filled with events that have led them to think shamefully of themselves, even though the guilt lies with others.

In Brown's attempt to reach her goal of helping the reader discover how vulnerability can be a courageous act, she does not acknowledge the Christian view of innate sinfulness. Consequently, she neglects the Christian solution to shame—to accept Christ and the sacrifice He made on the cross. While this doesn't make us any less shameful, it allows Christ's shamelessness to be judged in substitution for our own shame. In turn, we are free to be vulnerable for Him.

I agree with Brown that vulnerability is truly courageous. Leaders especially need to embrace vulnerability. But with Brown's main focus on shame as the reason we resist vulnerability, she tends to neglect many of the other factors that cause leaders to disregard the "daring greatly" value of vulnerability. These factors, which many leaders struggle with, can include greed, arrogance, pride, hate and fear. The Christian view, which Brown does not address, demonstrates that Christ provides the way to deal with legitimate and illegitimate shame. He is also the way in which leaders may address these other factors affecting vulnerability.

In addition to presenting a self-focused solution for our problems, Brown weakens her book by using a great deal of foul language. This reliance on curses to intensify her points makes for a very awkward and uncomfortable read.

Though devoid of the Christian perspective, there are many truths

detailed throughout the book, including great suggestions for how to have a positive and healthy way of life. I would recommend this book to those seeking a better understanding of how the secular mind deals with shame and takes steps toward a courageous lifestyle. But I would not recommend this book for those seeking a holistic and Christ-centered journey to vulnerability.

SARA WITHERS is a pastor in the Oregon Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and is currently a student in the Master of Divinity program at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

THE HUMANITARIAN LEADER IN EACH OF US: 7 CHOICES THAT SHAPE A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE LIFE

*By Frank LaFasto & Carl Larson
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (2012)
Paperback, 191 pages*

Reviewed by SHIRLEY FREED

The thesis of this book is that humanitarian leaders develop a commitment to help others in need by following a path through seven choice points. These opportunities to choose are presented in a linear fashion beginning with "leveraging life's experiences" and ending with "persevering" and "leading the way."

The authors identified the development process by interviewing 31 individuals who had in some way taken charge of helping people in need. The humanitarian leaders varied in age, gender, ethnicity, religious background and socio-economic status. The negative forces they had taken action to ameliorate included exploitation of children, limited access to water, unavailable health

care, inequalities in education, homelessness, children at risk, and natural disasters.

Driven by a sense of fairness (or lack thereof), each of the 31 interviewees came to believe they could make a difference—that they had something to offer. And when the opportunity came, they had the positive mindset and self-awareness needed to take action. They all started small and then persevered until they were recognized as leaders.

All of the 31 leaders are introduced at the beginning of the book. Their stories unfold throughout the book as the authors describe each of the seven steps or choice points. Exemplars are chosen from the 31 narratives to develop the chapter devoted to one step. For example, the chapter on fairness features seven of the leaders. Inderjit Khurana, a teacher, recognized that the children “outside” of the school gate deserved an education as much as those “inside,” which led her to take school to the “railway children” in the form of “bags of magic” that carried basics like pencils, crayons and soap. Ryan was only six years old when he became aware that many people in the world have to walk 10,000 steps to get clean water, while he only had to walk 10 steps to the water fountain. Dr. Winchester, a surgeon, took action to provide surgical supplies and knowledge to Russian doctors who didn’t have access to the same instruments he had. Sanphasit was among the first to notice the incredible unfairness of children who are abducted and sold into prostitution. Finally, though they recognized that “life is not fair,” Kirpatrick, Samuelson and Kielburger each took action to help children in need of health care and education. These seven (of 31) narratives make the chapter/choice point about fair-

ness clear. The other six choice points are treated in a similar fashion.

There is one question I would ask the authors: did all 31 individuals completely pass through each of the seven choice points in a linear fashion? It isn’t obvious from reading the book. It seems as though most of the individuals exemplify one or more of the steps, but not necessarily all of them, and possibly not in a linear fashion.

The authors target undergraduates as the audience for the book. They hope this age group will develop as humanitarian leaders from reading the narratives and thinking about the questions raised at the end of each chapter. However, it seems to me that anyone, at any age, would benefit from reading the book. The 31 interviewees gave evidence of a deep response to those in need at all different ages and we could anticipate the same for everyone. Reading the book and taking note of the seven choice points gives readers an opportunity to evaluate their past decisions and become more intentional about reaching out to those in need and making a difference.

The book closes with a chapter giving practical information on how to get started with a humanitarian outreach initiative. I recommend the book to anyone wishing to be inspired or to inspire others to become more active in helping others. As the book affirms, all of the 31 humanitarian leaders reported being “happy” with the choices they had made; they all challenge readers to rethink their usual rationalizations for not making a bigger difference in a world of much need.

SHIRLEY FREED, Ph.D., is Professor of Leadership and Qualitative Research in the graduate Leadership Program at Andrews University. She is also Managing Editor for the *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*.

THE TOYOTA WAY TO LEAN LEADERSHIP: ACHIEVING AND SUSTAINING EXCELLENCE THROUGH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

*By Jeffery K. Liker & Gary L. Convis
New York, NY: McGraw-Hill (2012)
Hardcover, 280 pages*

Reviewed by WENDY KEOUGH

Leaders do not become leaders by accident. They develop into great leaders through intentional training, learning, and doing, especially when they are able to look for a fresh perspective as they seek solutions for a new problem. The automotive industry may seem an unlikely source for methods on Christian leadership; yet, having worked in this industry for some time myself, I feel that it is a worthwhile area of study. Relentless change, intense competition, and customer expectations shaped by constant innovation have forced car companies to seek new approaches not only to production, but also to developing the people and leaders who do the producing. Churches have started to notice that, while they are not selling cars, they ignore their changing environment at their own peril.

At first sight, Liker and Convis seem to write only for business leaders. They suggest that by incorporating “the Toyota Way,” organizations can be strengthened, become more profitable, or even come back to life after a crisis. Toyota’s “lean manufacturing” process is well documented, but what are less apparent are the innovative leadership processes behind the success of Toyota. “Toyota is unique for its combination of deep investment in people and its focus on long-term continuous

improvement.” This is something Christian organizations need to learn as well.

Chapters 2-5 of the book guide readers through four key areas of the Toyota Way: Self-development, coaching and developing others, supporting daily *kaizen* (a Japanese business philosophy of continuous improvement), and creating vision and aligning goals. Each of these components is illustrated by recounting actual experiences that show the success of using Toyota leadership at several manufacturing plants in the United States. Chapter 6 even gives a specific example of how using Toyota training revived a dying company. The final chapter gives the reader the tools to use to begin thinking like a Toyota-trained leader.

One of the key concepts in this book is the *gemba*. When companies face a problem, they are encouraged to return to the idea of the *gemba*—where the work is. According to Toyota methods, when there is a problem, you go to the *gemba*. You go to where the work is being done. Who are the experts on the job if it is not the people doing the job? In many cases when Toyota has failed, it has been because they did not go to the *gemba*, but instead let managers make decisions, ignoring the *gemba*. Tied to this concept is the issue of respect for those actually doing the work. Organizational leaders know how easy it is to overlook the expertise of classroom teachers, church deacons, local congregations, or the faithful secretaries who keep the office going when everybody else is gone. *Gemba* reminds us that those who do the work are often the ones with the best idea for fixing a problem.

Another great component of the Toyota Way is *genchi genbutsu*, or “go and see.” If the best people to recognize a problem are those doing

the job, then leaders must be trained to empower their employees, from the workers on the assembly line up through top executives, to identify problems and come up with corrective actions. Should Christian leaders not do the same with their employees?

The Toyota methods of leadership seek to create an environment of responsibility for continuous improvement and accountability. Similarly, Christian leaders are called to strive for Christ-like excellence, not to be satisfied with the status quo. Continuous improvement—whether measured in increasing church membership, student enrollment, funds raised, or employee morale—is a relevant issue even in Christian organizations. Is it too much for Christian leaders to expect the best from those they lead? Accountability, when used properly, is an amazing tool that the leader can use to encourage followers down a path to continuous improvement.

The authors wrap up the book by giving readers clear steps to create a Toyota environment within their company or within themselves. Leaders will find helpful suggestions such as seeking a good *sensei* (a “mentor”), working on what they can control (not only what they wish they could control), and implementing the following concept: “Try. Then reflect. Then try some more.” This mindset of incremental experimentation reveals an attitude of striving to become the best leader one can be. Interestingly, the authors recommend even to leave a company if going somewhere else creates a better fit and a chance to be a better leader. Christian leaders can relate to the concept of fitting gifts and experience to challenges. While God often leads a leader in answer to prayer into specific work contexts, He prepares leaders through their inner

growth journey for ever-more-challenging assignments.

At first, readers may not feel at home when reading about *kaizen*, *genchi genbutsu*, and *gemba*. These are themes that I learned when I entered the work force, and that have formed the leadership style I have today as a Christian leader. I feel blessed that God gave me first-hand experience in this way of thinking early in my career; this has allowed me to translate leadership development principles into an approach that builds ordinary people into extraordinary leaders. That is something I also see in the story of the Master Leader: He transformed 12 commoners into the leaders of an incredible community that still lives on today.

WENDY KEOUGH is a graduate student in the Leadership program at Andrews University, and has been a successful leader in the world of automotive manufacturing.

THE 5 LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP: PROVEN STEPS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR POTENTIAL

By John C. Maxwell
New York, NY: Center Street,
Hachette Book Group (2011)
Paperback, 289 pages

Reviewed by CHRISTIANE E. THEISS

Is leadership a process or a position? Looking at the book’s title, *The 5 Levels of Leadership*, you might think that Maxwell sees leadership as a position. But it does not take him long to underscore that he does see leadership as a process, not as a position (p. 4). So how does he resolve the apparent contradiction? Since leadership situations are never static, but dynamic and changing, leaders also have to

be willing to stay on the growing edge. This insight led Maxwell to conceive of the five levels of leadership that are different stages of a leader's development. Now an internationally recognized leadership expert who has sold more than 19 million books, Maxwell says it took him about five years to expand his concept of the five levels of leadership already found in *Developing the Leader Within You* (1993) into a publication on its own.

So, what are the levels of leadership? Instead of defining the term and elaborating on the meaning of leadership, Maxwell discusses five different types of leadership he calls levels:

1. Position—people follow you because they have to.
2. Permission—people follow you because they want to.
3. Production—people follow you because of what you have done for the organization.
4. People Development—people follow you because of what you have done for them personally.
5. Pinnacle—People follow you because of who you are and what you represent.

The core of the book is the in-depth description of those five levels, the unwritten common-sense laws, rules, and behaviors characterizing them, and the downsides of each level keeping leaders from advancing to the next level. A most helpful feature is Maxwell's explanation of how one gets to the next level.

But that also brings out one of the ever-present tensions in the book. Statements like "you can move up a level but you will never leave the previous one behind" (p. 11) and "you are not on the same level with every person" (p. 12), show that the described levels are in fact leadership dimensions rather than steps on a leadership ladder. However, there are other statements that breathe a hierarchical view

of leadership: "The higher you go, the easier it is to lead"; "The higher you go, the more time and commitment is required to win a level"; "Moving up levels occurs slowly, but going down can happen quickly"; "The higher you go, the greater the return"; "Moving farther up always requires further growth"; "Not climbing the levels limits you and your people" (pp. 13–16). Maxwell argues that "when you change positions or organizations, you seldom stay at the same level" (p. 17), and speaks of climbing (p. 18). He seems to be aware of the dependency between leaders, followers and the situation, a common interactional framework used by classic leadership scholars like Fiedler (1967) and Hollander (1978). His assumption that the level of permission (relationships) precedes the level of production (tasks) actually contradicts Hersey & Blanchard's (1969) well-known Situational Leadership model where tasks and relationship-oriented behavior vary according to the maturity of followers.

Thus, even though the book does not acknowledge recognized leadership concepts or theories, Maxwell's practical approach to assessing a current leadership situation can be an asset for a leader's personal day-to-day journey as a leader. He provides a three-part questionnaire about the leader, her specific situation, and her direct reports and their perceptions of her. Taken together, they give a sense of the level where a leader currently stands, according to Maxwell's five leadership levels. Caution is required in regard to the variables Maxwell uses in the assessment questionnaire, because characteristics linked to the variables' behavior, values, and perception are often jumbled with each other.

Even though Maxwell does not give an explanation as to what he under-

stands as growing, his orientation towards developing others to grow and to lead is another enriching aspect of the book. He describes good leaders as investing “their time, energy, money, and thinking into growing others to leaders” (p. 181). This used to be called empowering people. Although Maxwell links the development of people to only two of his leadership levels, developing and empowering people today are the most crucial leadership skills and competencies (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004). Though some of Maxwell’s arguments for people development sound more like common sense, they still are food for thought. According to Maxwell, “people development sets you apart from most leaders” (p. 183) and “provides great personal fulfillment” (p. 192).

Because it is easy to digest and does not claim any scientific approach, *The 5 Levels of Leadership* allows for fast reading. Maxwell’s statements are framed with a lot of good stories and are peppered with anecdotes from his own life. While he tends to overpromise, Maxwell provides plenty of motivational energy as he sends readers on to find their own answers and create their own roadmap to advance along the five levels.

In an interview with CBN on January 9, 2012, Maxwell stated that Jesus Christ is his ultimate leader, and is the motivator who helps others to achieve leadership success. “I put the cookies on the lower shelf, so everybody could have some. And I think when they read [the book] they’re going to say, ‘Hey, I think I can go to the next level as a leader.’” If Jesus Christ is his leadership model, why does Maxwell not mention the servant leadership approach of Jesus? One is left to wonder if Maxwell sees hierarchical leadership as inevitable.

References

- Fiedler, F. E. (1967). *A theory of leadership effectiveness*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Hernez-Broome, G., & Hughes, R. L. (2004). Leadership development: Past, present, and future. *Human Resource Planning*, 27(1), 24–32.
- Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. H. (1969). Life cycle theory of leadership. *Training & Development Journal*, 23, 26–34.
- Hollander, E. P. (1978). *Leadership dynamics: A practical guide to effective relationships*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Martin, M. (2012). John Maxwell unveils “five levels of leadership.” CBN. Retrieved from <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/finance/2012/January/John-Maxwell-Unveils-Five-Levels-of-Leadership/>
- Maxwell, J. C. (1993). *Developing the leader within you*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

CHRISTIANE THEISS is the Chief Human Resources Officer at AZ Medien AG, a multi-media company in Aarau, Switzerland. She is also a Ph.D. student at Andrews University.