

BOOK REVIEWS

GREAT BY CHOICE: UNCERTAINTY, CHAOS, AND LUCK—WHY SOME THRIVE DESPITE THEM ALL

*By Jim Collins & Morton T. Hansen
New York, NY: HarperCollins (2011)
Kindle Edition, 183 pages*

Reviewed by STEVEN D. REECE

This sequel to *Good to Great* takes on the question, “What are the distinguishing characteristics of those companies which do extremely well and those which do not perform well under the same set of [extremely difficult and chaotic] circumstances?” To answer this question, the authors studied companies which outperformed their competition over time (generally 15+ years). Collins and Hansen call them “10X” companies (p. 2) for returning at least ten times more shareholder value than their industry.

On the surface the book appears to be looking at companies, but the reader soon notices that the spotlight is on the leaders who lead these companies. In the process, the authors do away with some leadership myths. Contradicting the notion that “suc-

cessful leaders in a turbulent world are bold, risk-seeking visionaries,” they present findings that the best leaders “did not have a visionary ability to predict the future. They observed what worked, figured out why it worked and built upon proven foundations” (p. 9). These leaders are not supersized charismatic heroes; instead, they seem to find their calling in steadfast discipline focused on getting the right results.

To highlight the difference between the two kinds of leaders, Collins and Hansen use the 1911 race to the South Pole by Roald Amundsen and Robert Falcon Scott as a metaphor for leadership. They began their journeys to the South Pole within a few days of each other; however, each man planned differently. While Amundsen made wise decisions that eventually “led his team to victory and safety,” Scott did not, leading “his team to defeat and death” (p. 14). For example, Amundsen systematically built in “enormous buffers for unseen events” by ensuring that supply depots were marked with black flags in “precise increments for miles,” easily seen against the white landscape, which gave him a clear target in the event he got off course during a storm, while Scott did not (p. 16).

What can we learn from this story? Leaders lead differently in similar circumstances. The question is, are they prudent, envisioning potential outcomes and preparing accordingly, or are they foolish, ignoring critical preparation for difficult circumstances? Christian leaders would be wise to follow Amundsen’s example, which mirrors the principle of preparation found in Jesus’ parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matt. 7:24–27).

Successful leadership does not depend on luck or circumstances but on leaders cultivating behaviors as they face the same trying circum-

stances that derail so many of their competitors. Collins and Hansen boil it down to “a triad of core behaviors: fanatic discipline, empirical creativity, and productive paranoia” (p. 19). Readers will no doubt feel challenged as they reflect on some their own habits that tend to deviate from these core behaviors. Being more empirical means “relying upon direct observation, conducting practical experiments and/or engaging directly with evidence rather than relying upon opinion, whim, conventional wisdom, authority or untested ideas” (pp. 25–26). Most readers will also resonate with the authors’ call to turn the possibility of danger or failure into “preparation and productive action” (p. 29). They will also find great stories of how companies like Southwest Airlines, Intel, Microsoft and Progressive Insurance outperformed their competition based on leadership choices and practices through the prism of fanatic discipline, empirical creativity and productive paranoia.

For Christian leaders one of the most useful and practical principles presented may be the concept of “bullets, then cannonballs” (p. 78), or using incremental steps (firing bullets) to measure effectiveness toward success or outcomes before launching into full-blown efforts (firing cannonballs). Most readers can probably think of an example of how that might work in their own context. A church might first test a new study resource in a class or small group before launching a church-wide campaign. On the other hand, the book warns Christian leaders not to look for magic bullets.

I think that Collins has presented a compelling argument for the leadership principles that he discovered through historical comparative analysis. A case in point is the history of

two companies sharing the same business model—Pacific Southwest Airlines (PSA) and Southwest Airlines. PSA disappeared long ago as a regional carrier, while Southwest Airlines—due to leadership choices and decisions to maintain its commitment to certain practices—was able to become a national carrier in the midst of catastrophic events such as airline deregulation and 9/11.

Overall, I think *Great by Choice* provides good food for thought for Christian leaders who desire to lead with excellence in turbulent times. First, these leaders would affirm that companies and organizations do not need to sacrifice their core values in order to adapt to market conditions. Curiously, 10X companies “changed less in their reaction to their changing world than the comparison cases” (p. 10). Second, they will appreciate the notion that the destiny of great companies lies “largely within the hands of its people” and depends on “what they create, what they do and how well they do it” (p. 181). Finally, even though circumstances vary dramatically, accomplishments derive from the passion and standards that “are ultimately internal, rising from somewhere deep inside” (p. 182). These conclusions seem to hark back to the exhortation of the apostle Paul: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men” (Col. 3:23, NIV, 1984).

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THE MORAL IMPERATIVE REALIZED

By Michael Fullan
 Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin (2011)
 Paperback, 96 pages

Reviewed by BARBARA J. SPENCER

The *Moral Imperative Realized* urges readers to hold morality at the center of any change process. Although the context of Fullan's discussion is public education, this book has important implications for many in the non-profit sector and helping professions. Nurses, pastors, and other hospital and church leaders are among those who will be enriched by this discussion.

The "moral imperative" in the title is a balanced strategy and long range vision with implementation and daily commitment. Regardless of the field or the level of leadership involved, social responsibility is at the heart of successful reform. To achieve sustainable change, an organization's stakeholders must identify with the success of the organization and develop a mutual identity, understanding their individual roles and committing to a higher (moral) purpose.

Successful reform leaders must have several characteristics: informed optimism, persistence, the willingness to confront behavior that is incongruent with moral purpose, and the ability to help others uncover their own moral purposes. Informed optimism and confident efficacy are fused qualities that combine to create resolute moral purpose and a high level of persistence. Effective leaders move forward even when things seem to be stagnant, or worse, falling apart.

No matter how skilled, leaders cannot move forward in isolation. Effective relationship building is a

crucial leadership competency. As Fullan points out, "if you want to challenge someone to do better, you'd better build a relationship first" (p. 6). Gone are the days when leaders were desk-bound problem solvers. Today's leaders are in the hallways, the classrooms, the library and the cafeteria, in the middle of the daily ebb and flow of organizational life. Furthermore, they have a moral obligation to collaborate with and learn from other organizations.

The educational case studies featured in the book all highlight the same phenomenon: even the smallest successes fuel the change process. Once organizations begin achieving, more and more people climb aboard, even some of the most cynical. Moral purpose is created where it did not previously exist. One of the reasons collective success is so energizing is that it is not only inspiring, but educative as well. Once employees discover or regain their moral purpose, they become change agents, thus creating a ripple effect. The catalyst for this level of change is always a leader, formal or informal, who has embraced the moral imperative.

For whole system leaders, "the moral pie gets bigger" (p. 58). This level of leadership requires a broadened perspective that transcends the tools of personal influence and competency. Leaders at this level must use the tools of policy and strategy creation if they want to cultivate an environment that will reap successful and sustainable change. In order to do this, though, they must also find a way to stay grounded in the reality of the organization.

Some readers may feel that the topic of morality and the change process is too broad to be located in a single context like educational reform. However, by using a single context, Fullan underscores the point

that change and morality are mutually dependent in all situations. Regardless of context, change without morality is unsustainable, and morality that does not result in change is hollow. In Fullan's words, "it is time to marry purpose and action. . . . The only thing that counts at the end of the day is moral purpose realized" (p. 76). Leaders and helpers in all fields would be wise to remember this message.

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EMPOWERING LAITY, ENGAGING LEADERS: TAPPING THE ROOT FOR MINISTRY

*By Susan E. Gillies and
M. Ingrid Dvirnak
Valley Forge, PA, Judson Press (2012)
Paperback, 140 pages*

Reviewed by DAVID PENNO

Empowering Laity, Engaging Leaders is the third volume of the *Living Church* series edited by J. Dwight Stinnett. The goal of the series is to address eight key dynamics that are devastating the Christian church today, so that congregational leaders are empowered to address these negative forces. Gillies and Dvirnak are responding to the "declining leadership base" (p. viii) with which many churches are struggling.

The authors identify the root cause of the decline in non-clergy leaders in the Christian church today as disillusionment, which leads to disengagement. They identify three causes of this disillusionment: the misalignment of purpose and structure, individual resistance, and the misuse of

leaders. To function effectively as the Body of Christ, all three must be addressed. Church leaders will not endure the tension when the organizational demands on them do not fit with the mission of the church. Serving as a leader in the church must be about serving people, not maintaining an organization. The resistance of unchurched or "dechurched" people makes serving the church less appealing to many leaders. And those who are overworked or not working in their area of giftedness soon burn out and quit.

Gillies and Dvirnak use Jesus as a model for genuine leaders in the church today. Humility, assurance of God's calling, good communication skills, and focusing on the potential of those we serve are all aspects of effective leadership in the church. The focus on potential includes helping members discover their spiritual gifts and mobilizing them while investing in the areas where they are strong. This opens the way for God to work mightily through his people. Spiritual maturity is also a key mark of good leaders. "Spiritually unhealthy leaders endanger the congregation" (p. 91), while those who are mature are a great blessing.

One of the interesting suggestions about caring for leaders is the idea of rotating leaders. Rather than leaving people in the same position for year after year, the authors suggest that every three years or so members could change the leadership position in which they serve. This allows them to be challenged to grow into new areas of service, and it opens up opportunities for others to serve in the place they have vacated. They also suggest that the church should help leaders do periodic self-assessment so that they continue to grow in their proficiency as leaders.

The book also encourages church

leaders to lead balanced lives by living their faith at home, at church, and in the world. Leaders should be active witnesses in the workplace and marketplace so that the church does not become too inward focused. Ministry to those outside the church gives energy to ministry within the church. The leader must also live the values of Christianity in every area of life, being an authentic example of what a servant of Jesus is really like: “Effective leadership demands personal wholeness” (p. 79). Ministry should grow out of who we are in Christ. The authors offer seven steps in the journey toward wholeness (pp. 81-91), and suggest that leaders engage with an accountability partner to keep them on course.

Empowering Laity, Engaging Leaders also affirms the need to train the children of the church to lead, so a new crop of leaders is always being cultivated. “When adults who teach youth recognize that the youth have something to teach them as well, wonderful growth can occur at all levels” (p. 69). Another valuable suggestion involves members who have retired from the workforce and may not want to continue in full-time ministry positions: they can still serve effectively via “short-term, project-oriented opportunities” that do not demand ongoing involvement and commitment (p. 76). The book espouses a true team approach to leadership in which no one is the overall expert, but all learn from each other as they develop as the Body of Christ.

Another key element for engaging leaders is to move the church toward a missional approach to ministry and mission. This will motivate and excite leaders as they see themselves and the congregation accomplishing the work that the Lord has assigned the church. This will also help in retaining leaders in active service. The

church must constantly cast this vision, and periodically revisit its mission and vision statements to keep it all fresh and vibrant.

Empowering Laity, Engaging Leaders is a good read for those who are beginning the work of identifying and deploying members as leaders in the church. The book outlines some important concepts and practical steps on recruiting, training, serving, and retaining these leaders. Though the authors seem to wander a little sometimes in describing these aspects of empowering and engaging leaders, they are very effective in using the stories from current churches to illustrate their ideas. I would recommend this book to churches that are serious about tapping the human resources that God has placed in their congregations to serve and expand His kingdom.

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RESOLVING EVERYDAY CONFLICT

*Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books (2011)
Paperback, 128 pages*

*Reviewed by FENADES OBINCHU
and STANLEY E. PATTERSON*

This book is written as a guide to peacemaking in everyday life—turning a troubled relationship into a peaceful one. Ken Sande, founder and president of Peacemaker Ministries, collaborates with conflict management specialist Kevin Johnson. Sande is a lawyer who chose to become a full-time conciliator as a means of moving beyond legal resolution of conflict via litigation to a biblical model of resolu-

tion leading to reconciliation.

Resolving Everyday Conflict is a compact version of Sande's primary book, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*. Major tenets of this compact volume are derived from the original one. For example, the "peacemaker's checklist" (from *The Peacemaker*) forms part of the questions for discussion and reflection.

The book suggests that the core of conflict is "I"—wanting things to be done my way, my wishes, my desires, and my needs. This core is drawn from James 4:1-2, which poses the question, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires and battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight?" Resolving conflict is an act of discovering peace with one another, but it is also a means of honoring God by resolving the conflict selflessly, considering others first because at the core of most of our conflict is our desire to have things done our way.

In the authors' view, conflict does not originate with humans; rather, it has its origin in heaven with Satan seeking to exalt himself above God. This was the "I" factor which led to conflict on earth. Therefore, our basis for seeking peace lies in modeling God, who first sought peace and reconciliation with us through Christ and asks us to seek peace with others and Him.

The book is organized thematically around the subject of honoring God in our conflicts by revealing the reconciling love and power of Jesus Christ and putting aside "I." Sande and Johnson's approach is based on God's Word and under this theme they present the "Four G's" of resolving conflict:

1. Glorify God: How can I focus on God in this situation?
2. Get the log out of your eye: How can I own my part of this conflict?
3. Gently restore: How can I help others to own their contribution to this conflict?
4. Go and be reconciled: How can I give forgiveness and help reach a reasonable solution?

Though many tend to shun conflicts, the authors maintain that conflicts aren't necessarily bad. Rather, it is our sinful nature and desires that can make conflicts destructive. In their view, when Christians learn to be peacemakers, they can turn the conflict into an opportunity to strengthen relationships, preserve valuable resources, and make their lives a testimony to the love and power of Christ.

The authors rightly hold that Jesus' admonition to His followers to enjoy unity with one another is a sign that they are His disciples. Although Christians should strive to resolve conflicts and be peacemakers, it can be argued that unity is not the opposite of conflict. The best argument for this proposal would have been Philippians 2:18: "Pursue peace with all people for without which no one will see God." Though conflict is always present, people can have conflicts and still work together as a unit. The pursuit of peace provides a reason to handle conflict in a biblically appropriate manner.

Unfortunately, the book provides relatively little help in regard to resolving everyday conflicts outside of the Christian context, since the authority that determines appropriate conflict resolution behavior assumes a high regard for the word of God. The audience addressed in this book is mainly Christian, or at least those who value the Word of God. Since

conflicts occur among both Christians and non-Christians, it would be helpful to see how the principles highlighted in this book might be crafted to address conflict outside the Christian setting or between Christians and non-Christians.

We recommend this book as an introduction to the art of Christian conflict resolution and relational reconciliation. Though *Resolving Everyday Conflict* is a compact and easy-to-read book, it provides a concise and convincing argument that the cause of most conflicts centers in self—my wants, my needs, my rights—without any regard for how we are honoring God by revealing the reconciling love and power of Jesus Christ. The authors maintain that the foundation of principles of conflict resolution and true peacemaking are to be found in the gospel of Jesus Christ, which brings His love, mercy, forgiveness, strength, and wisdom to the conflicts of daily life.

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EAT THAT FROG: 21 GREAT WAYS TO STOP PROCRASTINATING AND GET MORE DONE IN LESS TIME

By Brian Tracy
San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler
(2007, 2nd edition)
Paperback, 128 pages

Reviewed by MICHAEL ADOMAKO
and STANLEY E. PATTERSON

We live in a competitive world wherein adding value to oneself can provide an edge over competitors. In *Eat That Frog*, Brian Tracy reveals the means of accomplishing that end by focusing on improving our management of time. “The main reason to develop time management skills is that one can complete everything that is important in one’s work and free up more and more time to do things that give one the greatest happiness and satisfaction” (p. 52).

We strongly agree with Tracy when he posits that “the effective people, due to limited time, select among the lot and launch directly into their major tasks and then discipline themselves to work steadily and single-mindedly until those tasks are complete.” Such people resist the temptation to start with the easier task (pp. 2-3). This can be made possible by setting priorities right.

The book introduces the Six-P Formula—“Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance”—and holds that proper planning leads to an increase in productivity and performance. This formula, according to Tracy, is seen in the 10/90 Rule. This rule asserts that the first 10% of time that a person spends planning and organizing her work before she begins will save as much as 90% of the time in getting the job done once she gets started (p.18). That said, we do not believe the author is suggesting the Six-P Formula to be a panacea for productivity increment.

According to Tracy, most people procrastinate on the top 10-20% of the “vital few” items that are the most valuable and important while concentrating on the “trivial many” 80% which contribute very little to significant results. The irony is that the amount of time required to complete an important job is often the same amount of time required to do an

unimportant job (pp. 21-23). Successful people are those who are willing to delay gratification and make sacrifices in the short term so that they can enjoy far greater rewards in the long term. Unsuccessful people do the opposite (p. 27). It is our job to find the limiting factor that acts as an impediment to our progress and focus our energies on alleviating it as quickly as possible. Tracy might have added balance to these two statements and avoided being prescriptive had he added that one can delay gratification and make sacrifices and still not succeed due to other hindering factors.

Tracy suggests that one's mental attitude can impact performance and effectiveness. He addresses issues relating to the development of a positive mental attitude by quoting Martin Seligman's book, *Learned Optimism*. Optimists have four special behaviors: (1) they look for the good in every situation, (2) they always seek valuable lessons in every setback or difficulty, (3) they always look for the solution to every problem, and (4) they think and talk continually about their goals. (p. 87)

"For you to be able to concentrate on those few things that make the most difference in your business or personal life, you must discipline yourself to treat technology as a servant, not as a master" (p. 101). If we want to perform at our best, says Tracy, we need to detach on a regular basis from technology and communication devices to avoid falling into the technological trap (p. 90). This trap enmeshes us in the distraction of information exchange that sabotages our intent to accomplish necessary work. Treating technology as a servant and not as a master is a must. There is no option (p. 94). This should not, however, be taken as Tracy's condemnation of technology and communication devices.

Another technique Tracy suggests for us to get ourselves going is called the "Swiss cheese" method of working. The person using this method gets into gear by resolving to punch a hole in the task. He takes intermittent breaks as he performs the tasks in order to energize himself and be enthusiastic (p. 99).

Throughout the book Tracy uses and reuses the term discipline. Success requires discipline—self-discipline, self-mastery, and self-control. These are the building blocks of character and high performance (p.111). It requires discipline, more for some than others, to focus on the significant rather than the trivial. "Eat the frog" is a memorable metaphor for embracing the significant tasks at hand as a means to greater productivity in our work.

We strongly recommend this book to anyone who wants to manage her time well and also add value to herself in this competitive world.

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