

BOOK REVIEW

Lead Like it Matters to God: Values-Driven Leadership in a Success-Driven World

Stearns, R. (2021). *Lead like it matters to God: Values-driven leadership in a success-driven world*. Inter Varsity Press. 264 pages.

The book *Lead Like It Matters to God* is authored by Richard Stearns, who also wrote *The Hole in Our Gospel* and was formerly the CEO of Parker Brothers, Lenox, and later of World Vision US — a Christian ministry. While *Lead Like It Matters to God* is written for business leaders, the practices presented are helpful for Christians in all sectors, including faculty and administrators in Christian higher education. This book provides a valuable and practical companion to a traditional leadership book and brings a challenging, in-depth Christian perspective to the classroom. Stearns' purpose in writing the book is to encourage Christians not to bifurcate their faith from their work. In this book, Stearns makes the case, as the title suggests, for Christian leaders to embrace the values they bring to the workplace and, by doing so, to create a healthy and flourishing workplace. Further, Stearns reminds us that God cares more about our faithfulness than our outcomes and the bottom lines of the organizations we lead.

The author opens the book with a brief description of his upbringing, education, experience, and faith journey. He then describes 17 values for Christ-centered leadership. Each of the 17 values is detailed in its own chapter of the book. Stearns begins each chapter with Scripture and a leadership principle and then uses his experience to illustrate the importance of demonstrating each value in the workplace. He also provides tangible examples and instructions for applying the lesson in a leadership setting. Contrary to most leadership books or frameworks, Stearns instructs Christian leaders to begin by embracing the values of sacrifice and surrender before moving to more traditional leadership values such as courage, excellence, integrity, and generosity. Throughout the book, Stearns encourages Christian leaders to take God to work as ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20) as we seek to fulfill the two big C's: the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) and the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:35-40).

The application of values-driven leadership, as prescribed by Stearns, aligns with other well-known leadership theories such as servant leadership, transformational leadership, and authentic leadership. Burns defines transformational leadership as a process of engaging with others to create a connection that increases motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower (Northouse, 2016). The transformational leader works to transform followers and organizations. Stearns describes three related values: encouragement, vision, and love. In the chapter on love, Stearns states that one of the critical responsibilities of a leader is to help the people under their care realize their God-given potential. Many of the values described by Stearns are similar to the characteristics of a servant leader (Northouse, 2016), such as listening and empathy. In comparison, Greenleaf describes the outcomes of the servant leadership model as followers' growth, societal impact, and organizational performance (Bradley, 1999). Still, Stearns states leaders should be less concerned with corporate performance (although they should be committed to excellence) and more concerned with helping followers see the love of Christ through their faithfulness. Values-driven leadership also relates to the theory of authentic leadership, where leaders are genuine, and the process is reciprocal, where leaders affect followers and followers affect the leader. Authentic leaders use personal stories and have high levels of self-awareness (Northouse, 2016). Stearns describes self-awareness in three domains; role awareness, personal awareness, and relational awareness. He says the best leaders work to become aware of their weaknesses and the impact of their words (Proverbs 18:21).

The book has applicability to Christian higher education in at least two specific ways. First, because the principles and practices encouraged in the book are grounded in a Christian worldview and well supported in leadership theories (transactional, situational, and servant leadership), the book can be an excellent supplemental text for instructors teaching courses like business, leadership, communication, etc. The book is easy to read and offers an opportunity to enhance faith integration by pairing it with

traditional leadership and management textbooks. Second, the values and principles described by Stearns can be applied personally to Christians in higher education. "We are to be the tangible demonstration of the love, character, and truth of Christ as we live out our faith in a very public way" (Stearns, 2021, p. 229). Demonstrating the 17 values described by Stearns allows Christ to shine through us. We are called to show and live out the values of love, encouragement, integrity, generosity, and excellence as we seek to fulfill the two great "C's."

In summary, I found the book to be inspiring and encouraging. While the book can be a quick read, I found myself in purposeful reflection throughout it due to its various applicability in all aspects of life. For example, as I was reading the book, I began to think about how helpful it would be to use in my men's small group. While Stearns' does not cite modern leadership theories or provide empirical evidence for his recommendations, he has grounded the entire book in Truth. Each principle is skillfully linked to Scripture and grounded in the gospel, allowing the biblical teaching to be the foundation of the leadership principle, thus starting with Christ. Anyone teaching a course on leadership at a Christian college or university should read *Lead Like It Matters to God* for themselves and consider how they can use it to further discussion with their students on a Christian perspective on leadership.

References

Bradley, Y. (1999). Servant leadership : a critique of Robert Greenleaf's concept of leadership. *Journal of Christian Education*, 42(2), 42–54.

Northouse, P. G. (2016). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (8th ed.). Sage. 528 pages.

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