

2014

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Recommended Citation

Overstreet, Robert L. (2014) "The Power of Invisible Leadership: How a Compelling Common Purpose Inspires Exceptional Leadership [review] / Hickman, Gill Robinson and Georgia J. Sorenson," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 8: No. 1, 112-113.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol8/iss1/12>

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THE POWER OF INVISIBLE LEADERSHIP: HOW A COMPELLING COMMON PURPOSE INSPIRES EXCEPTIONAL LEADERSHIP

*By Gill Robinson Hickman and Georgia J. Sorenson
Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE (2014)
Paperback, 104 pages*

Reviewed by ROBERT L. OVERSTREET

Much writing on the topic of leadership focuses on personal qualities of leaders or strategies for leading more effectively. In *The Power of Invisible Leadership*, Hickman and Sorenson explain how a different element should be considered—the power of a compelling common purpose. Other leadership theories, such as transformational leadership and servant leadership, share commonalities with the concept of invisible leadership, namely, that leadership is compelled by a deeply held common purpose. However, a distinct aspect of invisible leadership is a shift from the emphasis on leader-as-person to leader-as-role, with many individuals within the organization working together to accomplish a common purpose and sharing responsibility. Those in designated leadership roles and those in the role of follower all follow the invisible leader—their common purpose. They do this because they are passionately compelled to do so by their dedication to a common purpose, with which they are deeply connected. The authors use the metaphor of music to explain how invisible leadership works, explaining that while the force may be invisible, it is palpable and impactful, just as the spaces

between notes in music, the swell and fall of rests, decrescendos, and crescendos, help create musical masterpieces.

Hickman and Sorenson point to common purpose as a crucial element of invisible leadership—a type of purpose that focuses on synergy, honesty, and helping those in need. Those called by the force of invisible leadership to be leaders encourage others to use their strengths willingly in pursuit of the common purpose. This common purpose serves as the driving force for invisible leadership by nurturing strong bonds that connect contributors to each other and to the common purpose of the organization, and inspire selfless willingness to serve as leaders or followers as needed. The authors provide illustrations of invisible leadership in action, noting that this phenomenon occurs not only in great causes such as the civil rights or environmental movements, but also in nonprofit organizations, government organizations, businesses, and social movements. Colors, a Manhattan-based restaurant, provides an example of invisible leadership. Cooperatively owned and run by restaurant workers who survived the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, the common purpose of Colors' worker-owners is to honor their 73 colleagues who died on 9/11.

Documentation for this research-based book was gathered through a survey based on eight factors: self-selection/attraction, commitment or ownership, influence, bond among participants, self-agency, taking action or leadership visibly, rising above self-interest, and utilizing opportunities and resources. One of the most significant findings presented in the book regards the following discovery about organizations in which invisible leadership is present:

“The most important aspect of

each organization's purpose was that leaders and members clearly and effectively conveyed to others the characteristics that made their organization and its purpose special, unique, or significant" (p. 43).

The Power of Invisible Leadership articulates how an unseen force exists within successful organizations—between leaders and followers, and between purposes and people. Hickman and Sorenson emphasize charisma of purpose as the motivating force of invisible leadership: "A democratic organization is clear about why it exists and where it is headed and what it hopes to achieve" (p. 43). Invisible leadership creates an environment in which all members of the organization can understand and be committed to its purpose and mission.

The Power of Invisible Leadership exemplifies leadership situations in which there is a dedication to a common purpose and a motivating force for guidance. While the authors' research is an excellent starting point for a discussion of the concept of invisible leadership, more research must be done before the ideas and concepts presented can be universally understood and accepted. Those without an existing knowledge of the foundations of leadership theory will need to engage in much additional study to understand concepts briefly referenced in beginning chapters. However, the authors bring a fresh perspective on the motivations that lead people to accept leadership roles and on the factors affecting their success. The passion elicited by a common purpose—invisible leadership—can cause organizations to succeed despite overwhelming setbacks and problems. Leaders who want to understand how commitment to a common purpose can benefit their organizations would do well to consider purchasing and reading *The*

Power of Invisible Leadership. Leaders of nonprofits such as churches and schools will recognize that invisible leadership is already present in their organizations and will benefit from a thoughtful consideration of how to help their organizations benefit more by focusing on the common purpose.

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LEADERS MAKE THE FUTURE: TEN NEW LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

*By Bob Johansen
San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler
(2012, 2nd edition)
Hardcover, 248 pages*

Reviewed by KENNETH MANDERS

Leaders Make the Future speaks to this present time when the Western world is experiencing great uncertainty and perplexity accompanying the global economic downturn, high unemployment, industrial production sullied by ongoing pollution of the environment, and the consequent problems of global climate change. These challenges are accompanied by a wave of political and social unrest typified by the Arab Spring that leaves humanity with the sense that something more than a traditional approach by today's leaders will be needed to make the world a better place. The idea that leaders can take action now, and develop a skill set that will guide their organizations and communities to create a better future and make the world a better place, is indeed an idea whose time has come.

In his second edition of *Leaders*