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Change Leader: Learning to do What Matters Most [review] / Fullan, Michael

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sweep things under the rug or pretend it never happened. In worship services, take time to share with the people how rich they are in God's grace rather than just telling them how they should behave. In this section of the book, the author does get very specific on how to make sure grace is shared publicly. Whether it is in the worship service or dealing with visitors as they walk in the door, making sure people experience Christ is vital.

"Portable Grace," as Eclov calls it, reveals how to minister outside the walls of the church through hospital ministry, death and grief, childbirth visits, or home and work visitation. One practical application that pastors should hear is that one does not need to be invited to go. As young pastors, we usually do not go where we are not invited, but the author recommends challenging that thinking by going proactively. I have taken this advice, and it really has been a great blessing for me and for those I'm visiting.

Probably one of the most practical chapters in the book is "March Into the Smoke." When times are scary, cloudy and daunting, a leader can easily experience disorientation and loss of focus. This section of the book is for such pastors who are weary and tired. It emphasizes the importance of being healthy on the inside so that you can take care of those on the outside. The pastor may project unresolved anger onto the congregation without even realizing it. The things he brings up are valid, but one thing he is lacking is the how-to or even the call to action for the pastor to get help with anger or depression.

One concluding critique: in the midst of his stories and encounters, the author interjects his unique doctrinal understandings in the mix of his stories and illustrations.

Consequently, some of the conversations and interactions with others would be very different if processed in different faith tradition contexts. The reader simply needs to filter and adapt accordingly.

Pastoral Graces is a good book for those who need encouragement. I found the book to be helpful when it comes to personal connections with parishioners. As pastors, we can get burned out and depressed, and feel very much alone. This book is not a fix-all, but it is a reminder that God really does love us and care about us as His messengers of grace. I cannot say this book is for every pastor, but I do recommend it for the young pastors, new pastors, and discouraged pastors who are on the verge of giving up. I believe the author accomplished what he set out to accomplish.

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CHANGE LEADER: LEARNING TO DO WHAT MATTERS MOST

*By Michael Fullan
San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/Wiley
(2011)
Hardback, 172 pages*

Reviewed by JORGE PEREZ

In *Change Leader*, Michael Fullan argues for the importance of practice as a learning tool for leaders, claiming that it plays a more central role than theory does in leading to effective change. He presents the case that research and theory should be used in the service of practice, and not the other way around (pp. xii, xiii). This last book in his trilogy on leadership

presents a seven-part solution to change leadership which “places practice front and center” and then adds six other components of “combining resolve, motivation, collaboration, confidence, impact and ‘simplicity’” (p. xiii). This book review discusses these seven areas Fullan proposes under the main theme that practice is the way to create change.

For Fullan, experience is everything. It is easy to appreciate that through the chapters Fullan keeps making a point that most good ideas come from practice, either personal or observed. Since most change initiatives fail, it makes leadership difficult because people are resistant to experiencing change; people are complicated and sometimes unmanageable (p. xiii). This is why the author invites us in the book, again and again, to look inside our practice, experiences, and ourselves. Hence, here I discuss Fullan’s conception of seven core practices or steps for today’s leaders that promise to differentiate a powerful leader from one that is merely competent.

The first step of the change process is “Deliberate Practice.” Throughout the book, Fullan drives home the evidence that practice-driven leadership is most effective because it lets practice, informed by research and theory, become the engine that brings change. Theory is not the driver as “practice is our best bet for finding solutions” (pp. 155). In short, deliberate practice drives better practice. Fullan develops and suggests that practice is a powerful tool for change and elaborates on how the brain works.

Elaborating further on the brain, he explores recent discoveries on how the brain learns in and from practice. He discusses “unpredictable inner drives,” “impressive empathy,” “mirror neurons,” and “neuroplastic-

ity” to talk about how practice changes brain processes. He argues that “the best source of learning is day-to-day practice because it is the only experience that can engage and reshape the brain” (p. 5). He suggests that the framework presented (the seven keys) is not an action plan, but rather an instrument to promote deliberate practice. In other words, in exploring and adapting these seven elements of change leadership we could become leaders whose main driver is experience.

The second step is about “Being Resolute.” In this section he reviews the critical role of “impressive empathy” (the ability to understand and share the feelings of another) and how change leaders combine impressive empathy with moral purpose. Fullan invites us to remember two things: stay the course against all odds and be empathetic when it comes to antagonism. In the process of adopting change, if this is to occur, disagreements must be resolved with resolution and empathy. After all, values of resolute leaders have a moral attribute, Fullan says.

It is known that firm action is crucial in change leadership, and at the same time, in Chapter 2 and throughout the rest of the steps, the author emphasizes the vital, if not indispensable, role of impressive empathy—empathy for those who disagree with us. Impressive empathy is important because effective leadership must involve and motivate people affected by change. “Motivating people, after all, is what change is about” (p. 48).

The third step deals with what “Motivates the Masses.” In our business environment, every leader is expected to bring about change and the big change problem is how to engage people. Two important assertions by Fullan are that “Change is

only a mirage unless people actually experience the reality of improvement” and that “Helping people accomplish something that they have never accomplished before causes motivation to increase deeply” (p. 52). In other words, “realized effectiveness” is what motivates people. The recent emphasis on change leadership suggests that change is an engine for moving masses that also are looking for change. This is why change leaders cannot achieve success without the commitment and collaboration of the group.

In the fourth step, “Collaborate to Compete,” Fullan suggests that it is vital for the change to occur to open up the group to new ideas and competition. This is what the author calls “collaborative competition,” the yin-yang of successful change. Fullan invites us to build collaborative cultures, and as effective change leaders we must welcome both collaboration and competition. He states that “the effective change leader appreciates both collaboration and competition . . . for ongoing success you need to collaborate and compete” (p. 97).

I resonate with Fullan when he declares that change leaders shape a philosophy of commitment and sound competition. Furthermore, he states, “If people become intrinsically motivated, competition to do their best comes naturally” (p. 98). In short, a purposeful collaborative culture within the organization is the key for change. After all, learning the change process and how to influence it is the job of the effective change leader.

The fifth step, “Learning Confidently,” talks about the determination to learn as a vital component to any leader of change. In this step, it is important to note that only by learning how to learn can we become effective change leaders.

Fullan invites us, in this step, to do four things in combination: to use our brain, to cultivate a growth mindset in others and ourselves, to be indispensable in the right way, and to maintain a high level of confidence. An old adage says that “a text out of context is only a pretext; context is everything.” This is what change leaders do; they change contexts, according to Fullan. In fact, he affirms that “change leadership is about how to move individuals, organizations, and systems into new contexts” (p. 122). By learning, we intentionally know what is going on and what impact the change leader is having.

Knowledgeable leaders of change are able to admit and learn from mistakes. Fullan states that “only the learners eventually become effective change leaders” (p. 118). He further admits that change leadership is about changing context and that “change leaders need to be explicitly aware that this is the business they are in” (p. 123).

Regarding “Impact,” the sixth step, the author invites us to go out of our way to get to know ourselves, to be alert and mindful of our influence and power as change leaders. Once again, we are reminded to use our brain and to let practice drive better practice. As change leaders, we must be aware and competent of our impact. This step is a good reminder that leaders need to focus on the task at hand, and avoid distractions, by becoming good at deciding what *not* to do. Fullan makes special emphasis on the importance of knowing ourselves better in order to admit our mistakes; align goals, action, and feedback; establish a climate of opened and critical feedback; focus on a few priorities; know ourselves better; follow a checklist; and celebrate success after it happens.

All this is important because once the leader identifies his or her shortcomings, only a careful and intentional checks and balances system will lead to a successful change. The solutions proposed by the author are rather simple: work on your habits of the mind and matching mechanisms. Fullan confesses that what it takes is “day-to-day leaders and managers focusing on a small number of key things, doing them well, and being transparent about their practice and progress. . . . It is simplicity itself” (p. 150).

The last chapter, “Sustain Simplicity,” provides an overview of the above key steps solution. Fullan reminds us to keep it simple and “tackle complex problems without feeling overwhelmed” (p. 152). This chapter depicts Fullan’s Change Leaders Framework with the assumption that if we understand the seven keys of this framework we will become better leaders. In this final chapter, *Change Leader* reinforces what it has been sharing throughout the book, that practice, especially a reflective experience, produces better practice.

Using a combination of practice and research theory obtained by his consulting and teaching career, Fullan presents throughout the chapters a practical and rich picture of how to become effective leaders of change. He admits that most change initiatives fail and throughout the book he shows that we cannot force people to change, that rewards do not work or have short-lived impact, and that inspiration is not enough. What is very valuable is Fullan’s assertion that his book provides protection against bad training because it provides leaders of change with the right reasons to learn from and trust themselves.

In the final analysis, the author of

Change Leader reminds us that his book is for the wise practitioner rather than the abstract theorist. In the last chapters, Fullan provides a very practical way to know what impact we are having as change leaders. Leaders of change will be able to learn to be effective by going out of the way to know us better. He acknowledges that the brain distorts things, perceptive attention is being diminished, information overloads compromise our memory, and cognitive impairment has become an epidemic along with the loss of empathy and compassion. Fullan asks, What does all this mean for us as leaders of change? The proposed answer is “use your brain; let deliberative practice drive better practice” and “be aware and cognizant of your impact” (p. 131). In short, be a learner.

This book is important for the progress and growth of the leaders of change as it presents and sustains all along the 10-year rule: be a deliberate and intentional learner and you will master any field in 10 years. By sharing and linking their own practices to the seven elements suggested by Fullan, leaders of change will move to improve their effectiveness and become better leaders. His argument that to be an effective leader of change we must go out of our way to know ourselves and use our brain is, pragmatically speaking, life changing. The author presents deep applied practice that is feasible for anyone who wants to implement it.

This book has value for the leader who is going through organizational or team change and wants to make sense of individual change management first. Of all that Fullan offers, I found step two, “Be Resolute,” the most valuable. In particular, impressive empathy, the ability to understand others who disagree with you, is presented as a critical soft skill to

becoming an effective leader of change. As a Christian and leader, I deeply agree with the emphasis and critical role the author gives to being impressively empathetic. As a Christian, I feel the responsibility to “Love my neighbor as myself” and “Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.” In this, Fullan asserts that “if you want to have any chance of changing a negative relationship you have to give other people respect before they have earned it” (p. 32). It has been my experience that there is no other way to reach out to others, particularly during the change process. Empathy for others does exactly that.

What diminished the value of this work for me was that even though the author emphasizes the leader as a learner, Fullan fails to go deeper into exploring and putting together the learning cycle of a leader. The author establishes the relationship between leadership and learning quite well. However, the changeover from “reflective doing” to theory is vague and confusing. In several of the steps and throughout the book, the learning cycle, which involves experience, reflection, and theory, is not well presented or not presented at all, leaving an immediate gap in understanding. Since reflection is so central to the learning cycle, a better effort could have been made in establishing reflection as connecting practice (concrete experience) and (abstract) theory. In addition, step seven, “Sustain Simplicity,” reads more as a conclusion rather than a valid step and a part of the change solution. This left me with a page-flipping reaction to find more about “Simplicity.”

Even with those apparent restrictions, I would recommend *Change Leader* by Michael Fullan as an esteemed reference in learning more

about ourselves as proactive leaders and in particular leaders of change.

In conclusion, this volume provides us with a lot of common sense and helps develop a new kind of leader, a leader who values experience and reflective learning. By understanding the seven-step change process, leaders will become effective and successful leaders of change in their organizations. This book is full of discernment and knowledge that comes from someone with vast experience in the change process.

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FOCUS: THE HIDDEN DRIVER OF EXCELLENCE

By Daniel Goleman
New York, NY: Harper Collins (2013)
Hardcover, 312 pages

Reviewed by JORGE PEREZ

Can a leader be fulfilled and productive at the same time? Goleman thinks “Yes” and he makes his case by placing attention, the elusive and underappreciated mental faculty, in the spotlight. In *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*, he makes a case for the science of attention as a determinant skill for leaders, arguing that such a state of awareness is linked to excellence and a key to fulfillment and success. “Leaders must pay more attention to their attention, if they want to increase it,” Goleman says.

In his previous book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman defines emotional intelligence as self-awareness and self-management—how we manage ourselves, and social skills, how we manage our relationships.