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Relational Leading: Practices for Dialogically Based Collaboration. By Lone Hersted & Kenneth J. Gergen.

Stanley E. Patterson PhD
Andrews University, patterss@andrews.edu

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lead by showing value and respect for them and accentuating the strengths of their team to help offset their own weaknesses, thus emphasizing the positive rather than the negative. Emphasizing weaknesses makes people feel poorly and drains energy and productivity. The authors suggest that leaders stay grounded and avoid embracing cliques and elitist behavior, which tend to alienate followers and ultimately reduce productivity. Finally they encourage the leader to conduct difficult conversations with dignity rather than power-based confrontations aimed at punishment or compliance.

The last two chapters address essential management elements that contribute to uplift. “Measuring With Meaning” requires that one needs to measure that which is valued in order to be successful. If the leader shares the mission targets and projects transparency, it is possible to intelligently interpret the evidence collected and make metrics meaningful. It also infers that the measurements should be reflective of what is commonly determined by both leader and followers as valued. In other words, if leaders let others know how they will be evaluated, they will typically be more effective in achieving a positive evaluation.

This element is followed in the final chapter with the recommendation to pursue “Sustainable Success”—that is, keep the mission consistent with available resources. Readers are advised not to make promises or build expectations that they cannot deliver upon. To the extent that an organization can grow from within, it should build those resources to meet that mission. Growth should be sustainable and performed at a reasonable rate. Finally, the *raison d’être* of any organization is its mission statement.

Everything that is done should be related to this mission.

My take-away from this book is that leaders who keep these concepts in mind are more likely to be effective in helping to achieve organizational goals. By applying the uplift elements presented in this outstanding book, a culture may be developed that provides the necessary lift at all levels of the organization, resulting in success.

STEPHEN B. MOLL is Vice Provost of Florida International University in North Miami, Florida.

RELATIONAL LEADING: PRACTICES FOR DIALOGICALLY BASED COLLABORATION

*By Lone Hersted & Kenneth J. Gergen
Chagrin Falls, OH: Taos Institute
Publications (2013)
Kindle edition, 197 pages*

*Reviewed by STANLEY E.
PATTERSON*

The Taos Institute and the authors have made a valuable contribution to the leadership community by providing not only a theoretical base for relational leadership but also a description of a practical application of the concept. The model is explored primarily in the corporate management context where “new and highly complex problems require linking many different kinds of knowledge; cooperation across cultural borders is increasingly necessary; work teams are needed to supply continuous innovation. Successful collaboration originates in dialogic process” (loc 128). It is in this context that the authors suggest that effective leadership is today a matter of conversation rather than command. “Successful dialogue is crucial” (loc 128).

As leadership practice and ideology experience increased distance from Great Man Theory and “command and control” models, the need for a sensible and effective platform upon which to build leadership practice becomes essential. If coercive models are surrendered, the question that begs a response is “What’s left?” What do we enter when we leave or step out of the command and control box? Hersted and Gergen describe the new context: “Organizational culture is largely the product of dialogue—the way we speak to each other and what we say” (loc 743). Simply stated, the relational context is essentially the new reality if we jettison command and control (“In its bare bones it is monologic: ‘We tell you what to do,’” [loc 1347]) and exchange this reality for a reality of “we decide what to do through dialogue.”

The relational organization consequently benefits from a natural rise in a sense of collective ownership that sparks motivation and creativity—too often lost in the managed context. Ownership reflects an attitude born out of a new sense of identity wherein employees are the organization rather than simply being “tools” within it. “Collaborative involvement enhances commitment” (loc 1354). “From a relational standpoint, organizational change can be seen as a continuous process of dialogue” (loc 1567) flowing out of this new committed identity that produces creativity and cooperation, thus serving the process of organizational change. Functional creativity—the predicate for essential innovation—testifies that “dialogic process is the fundamental key to stimulating and developing new ideas. If you can harness the powers inherent in dialogue, creativity will be unlimited, and innovation will be realized” (loc 2133).

Another benefit to the organization as a result of increased dialogue is found in the arena of intra-organizational conflict. When conflict is solved by administrative fiat, it is not truly solved—only stifled. Though many organizations smartly address conflict with intentional dialogue, the low level conflict is often smothered by well-intentioned managers who bow to expediency as a means of getting on with work. In this same environment, emotions are seldom addressed, thus diminishing attitudes that support collaboration and cooperation. But Hersten and Gergen suggest a different way:

[The] relational leader may actually invite conflict. We mean this in the sense of encouraging the broadest range of opinions practicable. Rather than viewing differences in terms of antagonisms, the leader should encourage curiosity. “Let us explore all the ways one might see this.” (loc 1636)

At the same time, this can provide a healthy expression for emotions necessary for effective collaborative behavior:

Whether emotions contribute to an organization on the one hand, or undermine its efficacy on the other, importantly depends on the dramas of dialogue. A relationally skilled leader can invite and transform the dramas played out in the theater of the organization. (loc 1941)

The value of this volume might have been enhanced to the end that a broader audience could have been embraced if it had been expanded beyond the managed corporate context. Freely associated leadership contexts such as churches and voluntary organizations often apply management principles to the freely associated participants where the authority to control has never been established by a contractual agree-

ment. In these cases a relational model is the only legitimate model. Though dwarfed by the numbers of managed organizations, the freely associated context is an essential social element that could benefit from the concepts put forth in this book. Nonetheless, the book is subject to contextual translation by the leader in the non-managed context who is looking for a relational model consistent with the free associated organization.

I give this book my highest recommendation for all who have a vision and commitment to leading people in a manner that honors their dignity, freedom, intelligence, creativity, and the need to hear and be heard. “If the contemporary organization is to thrive, it is essential that information, ideas, opinions, and values move freely across the borders that otherwise separates the organization from its context” (loc 347).

STANLEY PATTERSON, Ph.D., is the Executive Director of the Christian Leadership Center and is a professor in the Christian Ministry Department at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

DEVELOPING RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP: RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPING REFLEXIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

*By Carsten Hornstrup, Jesper Loehr-Petersen, Joergen G. Madsen, Thomas Johansen, & Allan Vinther Jensen
Chagrin Falls, Ohio: Taos Institute Publications (2012)
Kindle edition, 225 pages*

Reviewed by STANLEY E. PATTERSON

The Taos Institute is an organization dedicated to the development of

social constructionist theory and practices. The topic of relational leadership is one of the foci of the *Taos Tempo Series: Collaborative Practices for Changing Times*, and this book by Hornstrup et al. is one of six in this series. The book is presented in two general sections: theory that informs the practice of relational leadership and application of relational leadership in practice. Since most leaders do not emerge as leaders in the relational model, the constructionist implications would suggest that it is possible to become a relational leader. Though this rationale is not clearly articulated in the Preface, it is nonetheless implied in the use of the word “developing” in the title, as well as the content which addresses personal change. The “book represents a journey through systemic and constructionist theories and practice that constantly generates new ideas and inspiration” (loc 99).

The book opens with a listing of “tools” that serve the process of personal change. One of them, *autopoiesis*, “means self-creation (*auto* = self and *poiesis* = create), referring to the fact that the human realization process always takes place in a circularly closed nervous system” (loc 164). We determine meaning based upon what we know or have experienced, and thus we grow in a limited fashion as long as we focus on growing within our closed system. To optimize our growth and development, we interact to a greater or lesser degree with the external environment, and “through interaction with the external world, the autopoietic system is constantly being influenced and developed” (loc 172). We can maximize the impact of such exposure by intentionally engaging in dialogue that challenges our closed system understanding by constructing new meanings via conversations with