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## The Decision Maker. By Dennis Bakke

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# BOOK REVIEWS

## THE DECISION MAKER

By Dennis Bakke  
Seattle, WA: Pear Press (2013)  
Hardcover, 218 pages

Reviewed by TOM STONE &  
CHARITY STONE

Dennis Bakke, co-founder of AES Corporation, which employs 27,000 employees (p. 10), presents a decentralized model of leadership in his book *The Decision Maker*. The author does not teach his leadership model to the reader through lists of strategies and concepts, but rather weaves a story that asserts his beliefs and ideas. This format gives the reader a practical business model of decentralized decision-making concepts conveyed in such a way that the reader can assimilate these concepts and transfer them to various business/leadership settings. Bakke's main thesis is that bosses, managers, and department heads should delegate decision-making to those people who are closest to the action; this can only happen if the leaders believe in their workers.

Bakke argues that the long-standing view of leadership has been that

of a dictator—the boss makes the decisions and tells the underlings what to do and how to do it. The underlings grudgingly do exactly what the boss wants (eliminating creativity but supposedly increasing productivity and quality). In the traditional model, the boss micromanages the employees (which in actuality can lead to hurried, half-hearted, busy work). This model is not always (if ever) ideal. If decisions are made at the top by people who do not completely understand the ins and outs of the working material, work environment, or other aspects that would inform and alter their decision, they are prone to make the wrong decision. However, if decisions are made by people who better understand what they are doing, what they are working with, and how their decisions will affect the overall situation, a better decision is more likely to be made. In theory and reportedly in practice, the idea is that better decisions will be made when employees have a greater stake in making decisions, and employees will have a greater pride in their performance when they get to make the decisions.

Bakke's concepts are easy to follow and easy to remember because of the narrative format. He keeps the reader interested in what he has to say through the twists and turns of the story line (although rather predictable). His book will never make the *New York Times* bestseller list for being a novel, but his ideas about leadership are solid and he demonstrates this within his fictional story. However, we want to challenge the author's approach on three points: (1) he argues his ideas through a fictional story which he can manipulate any way he wants (it would have been more beneficial to include testimonials about actual events), (2) he gives very little background and few exam-

ples to demonstrate the validity of his ideas, and (3) it is difficult to predict how Bakke's decision-making ideas would transfer to other non-manufacturing businesses. If anything, this book is a starting point for someone who is looking for a new way to lead others.

His concept of decentralized leadership through delegating decision-making seems valid for four reasons: First, the best qualified person to make any given decision is the person with the most information and greatest investment. Second, employees are likely to be just as invested in a company they work for as the bosses, because employees' livelihood is on the line (when the company flourishes, the employees' financial situation flourishes as well). Third, when employees are given authority to make decisions that affect the company, they become more invested in the company because they take part in the success or failure of the company. Finally, when bosses show trust towards their employees, employees are more likely to rise to the occasion and succeed.

Bakke calls for his readers to believe that employees are unique, with different strengths and needs, that they are creative thinking individuals, that they are capable of learning, that they are capable of making decisions and enjoy a challenge, that they are capable of improving their work environment and want to make a valuable contribution, and that even though they are fallible they can be trusted.

We recommend this book to people who are interested in learning through a format in which they have to pluck out the important factors themselves. It would not be as beneficial for others with a more analytical mind who desire step-by-step guides or bullet-pointed lists. In

either case, because this book is designed for instructing the business world on leadership, church leaders would need to prayerfully consider how to apply it to their situation. Ultimately, God gives free will to His followers, but there may be times when execution of the decision-maker concept could constitute spiritual neglect on the part of church leaders, who are called to a higher standard of behavior and shepherding.

TOM STONE and his wife, CHARITY STONE, are both graduate students in the ministry program at Andrews University while they pastor for the Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Reading and Pottstown, PA.

## LEADERSHIP AS PRACTICE: THEORY AND APPLICATION

*By Joseph A. Raelin (Ed.)  
New York, NY: Routledge (2016)  
Paperback, 310 pages*

*Reviewed by HERMAN DAVIS*

Joseph A. Raelin, editor of this book, holds the Asa S. Knowles Chair of Practice-Oriented Education at Northeastern University, where he is also the director of the Center for Work and Learning. An author of numerous books, he is interested in creating communities of practice in which members are deeply committed to democratic and inclusive practices, dedicated to each others' development and devoid of impressionistic or inauthentic behavior and intentions.

Most recently he has sought to establish a new form of leadership, called "leaderful practice," in which everyone can participate in leadership, not just sequentially but at the same time and all together—in other words, concurrently and collectively.

*Leadership as Practice* presents an