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What Matters Now: How to Win in a World of Relentless Change, Ferocious Competition, and Unstoppable Innovation [review] / Hamel, Gary

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ly develops the thesis suggested in its title: spiritual leadership in the Christian context must seek God’s agenda for both the leader and those being led. Spiritual Leadership is a book that deserves a prominent listing in any bibliography that would intend to guide the Christian leader. Those who wish to contribute to the process of leadership in a manner that honors the Master and the community that is identified by His name will benefit from reading this book.

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WHAT MATTERS NOW: HOW TO WIN IN A WORLD OF RELENTLESS CHANGE, FEROCIOUS COMPETITION, AND UNSTOPPABLE INNOVATION

By Gary Hamel
Hardcover, 304 pages
Reviewed by MATTHEW SHALLENBERGER

A critical concern for Christian leaders today is maintaining relevance in the world around us. This is a challenging task, especially considering the breakneck pace of change in the 21st century. Too often our “new” ideas are outdated before we even get them off of the ground. And in many cases, truly innovative strategies are short-circuited by the bureaucracy in our organizations. Gary Hamel’s new book, What Matters Now, provides a clarion call to transform the very nature of management and organization so that leaders can move from surviving to thriving in our ever-changing world. Though Hamel’s book is written primarily from a business management perspective, his application of the supporting concepts includes several examples from a church perspective. Christian leaders, managers, and organizations can benefit from this book as well.

Hamel divides his book into five modular sections corresponding to his five principles that matter now more than ever. The first principle is values. Drawing from the 2008 financial crisis, which continues to plague the global economy, Hamel demonstrates how a breakdown of ethics and morals led to a broken system and diminished trust. He cites a Gallup poll that reported only 15% of people willing to describe the ethical values of executives as “high” or “very high” (p. 5). Greed, pride, dishonesty, and other ethical lapses infect even the highest levels of business and financial leadership. Sadly, Christian leaders are not immune. How many prominent evangelical leaders have been brought down by scandal and corruption? Christian leaders would be wise to heed Hamel’s call for a renewal of values. Reproach is brought not only on the leader but also on the religious organization and on God when the leader’s integrity fails.

The second principle is innovation. Hamel argues that in order for organizations to remain competitive, they need to create a culture of distributed authority and innovation that extends top to bottom throughout the organization.

The third principle is adaptability. The rate of change is so rapid that there is no perfect strategy for keeping pace. Organizations cannot bank on their time-tested models to sustain them. What worked in the past may not work in the future. Honest assess-
ment of our strategy’s effectiveness is crucial. If it’s not working, change it—adapt or die. “But we’ve always done it this way” traditionalism is exactly the kind of shortsightedness Hamel argues against. Christian leaders face the unchanging challenge of proclaiming the “everlasting gospel” in a rapidly changing world which requires necessary adaptation.

The fourth principle is passion. Hamel cites the 2007-2008 Global Workforce Survey, which found that only 21% of employees were “truly engaged in their work, in the sense that they would ‘go the extra mile’ for their employer.” Perhaps even more shocking, 38% were “mostly or entirely disengaged, while the rest were in the tepid middle” (p. 138). He encourages the reader to start by putting people first. Those who serve our organizations are more than a cog in a machine, especially one that can easily be replaced while the organizational machine keeps on churning.

Instead, Hamel argues that we need to put individuals before the organization. Organizations are made up of people, and people have passion and creativity and innovative ideas. Why not tap into that potential? He tells the story of St. Andrews, a struggling church in the U.K. that radically reorganized around the concept of people first. By placing parishioners in “mission-shaped communities,” St. Andrews was able to reinvigorate the church as well as deeply impact the surrounding community.

The fifth principle is ideology. Hamel envisions a total reinvention of management by reversing the hierarchical pyramid. He maintains that we need to push power and decision-making outward and downward to multiply the number of people who are involved in setting the organization’s direction and priorities. This requires empowering people with knowledge and information and giving them the freedom to make decisions in a context of peer accountability.

These principles are strengthened by Hamel’s inclusion of several examples of companies that have not only adapted their structure and leadership but have done away with the pyramid (no bosses!) and have experienced tremendous success as a result.

Perhaps the main factor that ties everything together in Hamel’s book is this idea of dispersing power throughout an organization rather than concentrating it in the hands of a few privileged leaders. What can the Christian leader learn from this model? Why not start by asking what can be done to empower those we lead to become more engaged in shaping the values of our organizations and churches? What talents and skills can they bring to the table that would help us become more innovative, passionate, and adaptable? In order to tap into this potential, leaders must confront the fear of releasing control and be willing to give others the power and freedom often reserved for self.

This raises important questions. How do we actualize this ideal of empowerment? One of Hamel’s suggestions is to use an internal wiki to ask questions and get feedback from the people in the organization (p. 169). But how many organizations utilize a wiki or some alternative system for people to give feedback and contribute input related to what’s working and what isn’t working in the organization?

The Christian leader must ask how unity of belief is maintained while dispersing power and the expectation of innovation to the people. Is there a risk of splintering the organization from the pressures of various groups pulling it in new or possibly opposite directions? How might this context of
freedom impact the issue of faith and orthodoxy? These are important questions that must be answered as Hamel’s concepts are considered. Finally, Christian leaders must wrestle with the question, what is our bottom line? In Hamel’s view, organizational priorities should shift from “institution → individual → profit” to “individual → organization → impact” (pp. 149-150). What is the impact? What is the Christian leader’s ultimate goal? And how might we restructure our organizational model to best accomplish that goal?

Though What Matters Now does not answer all of the questions Christian leaders might have, the fact that it prompts these questions makes it well worth reading. Hamel’s ideas should resonate with Christian leaders, especially those who embrace the truth of the priesthood of all believers and the responsibility of every disciple of Christ to be engaged in service to fulfill the Great Commission. Though some may think Hamel’s ideas too radical to be of practical value, the Christian leader should remember that our ultimate Leader, Jesus Christ, was a revolutionary in His own time. Christian leaders continue to draw inspiration from His remarkable vision. Perhaps Hamel’s book can help Christian leaders restore some of the vitality and innovation that the church has lost. For this reason, I highly recommend this book to all Christian leaders who are ready to change the paradigm of leadership and who desire to empower the people they serve.

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TRANSFORMISSIONAL COACHING: EMPOWERING LEADERS IN A CHANGING MINISTRY WORLD

By Steve Ogne & Tim Roehl
Hardcover, 286 pages
Reviewed by GREG SCHALLER

In TransforMissional Coaching, Ogne and Roehl share practical insights into holistic coaching. They establish a biblical basis for coaching that is anchored in examples such as Jethro coaching Moses, Barnabas coming alongside Paul, Paul’s call to equip the body for acts of service, and many Proverbs that summon hearers to act wisely.

Why coaching? According to the authors, coaching offers breakthroughs in a Christ follower’s transformation and growth. The old paradigm for initiating change is telling others they need to change and/or providing information that will lead to change. In contrast, the coaching paradigm for transformational change provides a relationship in which the Christ follower recounts his reality and experiences discovery of needed change followed by strategic action steps and accountability. Examples of needed transformation include getting unstuck in transitions, clarifying God’s calling, addressing personal character issues, and becoming more self-aware.

This book underscores the significance of listening and asking key questions for effective coaching. Ogne and Roehl advocate probing by asking questions and actively listening to the one being coached. This is counterintuitive and challenges the natural instinct to dictate solutions, an act which interrupts the possibility for self-discovery that leads to transfor-