

2014

Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence [review] / Goleman, Daniel

Jorge Perez

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl>

Recommended Citation

Perez, Jorge (2014) "Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence [review] / Goleman, Daniel," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 8: No. 2, 103-105.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol8/iss2/11>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Applied Christian Leadership by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

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.

JORGE PEREZ is an entrepreneur and owner of a bilingual Hispanic newspaper in Southwest Ontario. He serves as President of the Canadian Latin American Association and is a Ph.D. student in the Andrews University Leadership Program.

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.

Goleman argues that self-awareness and empathy are a variation of attention. In *Focus*, Goleman shows how attention training enhances the four dimensions of emotional intelligence.

The first is inner focus—being aware of what is going on inside us. He suggests meditation and mindfulness to retrain our attention. Inner focus is about our self-awareness, the first element of emotional intelligence theory with the basic intent of understanding ourselves. If we understand and appreciate our emotions then we can identify their focus and impact on others, the situation, and ourselves.

Goleman talks of the importance of cognitive control, also called delayed gratification. He emphasizes this as a vital element since cognitive control will determine the level of leadership effectiveness. Goleman suggests that cognitive control is a great predictor of success, for adults as well as children. This type of control has to deal with the second element of Goleman's emotional intelligence theory—self-management.

The second kind of focus is other focus—knowing what is going on with people around us. This kind of focus allows us to smooth the connections we have with people in our lives. The third, outer focus, is our system awareness. A system can be an organization, our family, or broader external systems. This kind of focus lets us navigate the larger world. Social awareness, the third element of the emotional intelligence theory, is the ability to understand the emotions and appreciate the viewpoints of those around us.

In a final analysis, *Focus* is for coaching us how to train our attention through mindfulness, meditation and other techniques used for flexing the muscle of attention. Goleman suggests these exercises as a means of rewiring our brain.

This book is important for the progress and growth of the Christian leader as it presents and sustains the hidden driver of excellence: attention. The three kinds of focus every Christian leader needs are inner focus for self-awareness and self-management; other focus for empathy, clear communication and interpersonal effectiveness; and outer focus for reading the systems in the world in order to become aware of our surroundings and the systems that affects us.

This book has value for the Christian leader. The discipline of training the brain and focusing complete attention to the current moment is crucial, says Goleman. "Attention tends to focus on what has meaning—what matters" (p. 210). This involves putting in practice the three kinds of focus and knowing in what situation to use them.

Goleman, once again, gives us a glimpse of what makes us a leader. It is not primarily intelligence, but rather self-discipline, empathy, and attention, "far stronger forces in success." Our success as Christian leaders, called to serve others, is enhanced by paying attention and maintaining focus on the mission to which we are called.

The value of this book was somewhat diminished in that while the author's emphasis was attention, Goleman seems to lose focus in the later chapters. The author establishes the need and importance of attention in leadership and effectiveness quite well. However, outer focus, the third kind of attention, is vague and confusing. I was not able to relate attention, the hidden ingredient of excellence, with the larger picture presented in the last chapters.

Nevertheless, I would recommend *Focus* by Daniel Goleman as an esteemed reference in improving our

attention capability in relation to our emotional intelligence. The common theme is that the more focused we are, the more effective we become. By understanding this aspect of cognitive science, leaders may become more effective and successful in life and work. This book can assist you in managing your emotions, being aware of others' emotions, and developing your empathy to the end of increasing cooperation and collaboration.

JORGE PEREZ is an entrepreneur and owner of a bilingual Hispanic newspaper in Southwest Ontario. He serves as President of the Canadian Latin American Association and is a Ph.D. student in the Andrews University Leadership Program.

RECONCILE: CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION FOR ORDINARY CHRISTIANS

By John Paul Lederach
Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press (2014)
Paperback, 191 pages

Reviewed by STANLEY E.
PATTERSON

This revised and updated edition, *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians*, was first published by Herald Press in 1999 under the title *The Journey Toward Reconciliation*. Lederach writes of conflict and reconciliation out of 30 years of experience as a peace negotiator in many of the major hotspots of war and strife in the span of our planet. He clearly acknowledges the Anabaptist pacifist influence of his Mennonite religious heritage on his work and philosophy as a conflict mediator. He serves as "professor of international peacebuilding and director of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame . . . and is the founding

director of the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia" (p. 191).

Lederach cites the work of James Laue (1979) and Ronald Krayhill (1980) as primary influence sources for his work. The book contains an extensive resource section that includes tools, books, biographies, and films that may contribute to readers' understanding and application of concepts presented, but there is no formal bibliography outside of this resource section.

The book effectively weaves the author's experience and testimony, academic understanding, and actual narratives of conflict intervention and efforts at reconciliation into a finished fabric of literature that held my attention throughout. The introduction of his purpose for writing the book brought forth the expectation of discovering the spiritual foundations of peacemaking. The practical goal was presented as an effort to "see how the challenges of (his) work" connected with the "faith dimensions that motivate and sustain (him)" (p. 15). His statement of task links to his purpose by again bringing the spiritual into conversation with the practical: "We face the challenge of aligning ourselves with the central vision of God's reconciling presence and work throughout human history" (p. 16).

Lederach builds his spiritual foundation for peacemaking on the footing provided by John 3:16 wherein God sacrificed his Son as a means of reconciling fallen humanity to Himself. He takes this as a primary principle of peacemaking. God models peacemaking in His willingness to give Himself in seeking reconciliation with His enemies. In this model we see God doing more than simply talking about reconciliation; He actually takes concrete steps to make it happen. This model