

Journal of Applied Christian Leadership

Volume 10 | Number 2

Article 10

9-2016

Leadership as Practice: Theory and Application. By Joseph A. Raelin (Ed.)

Herman Leon Davis Sr.
Andrews University, hermand@andrews.edu

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



Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Davis, Herman Leon Sr. (2016) "Leadership as Practice: Theory and Application. By Joseph A. Raelin (Ed.)," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 10: No. 2, 93-95.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol10/iss2/10>

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.

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

emerging theory of leadership that challenges traditional thought about how leadership is defined and exercised. It is an attempt to create momentum in the direction of the emerging practice view of leadership.

Practice leadership as described in this book is very much akin to earlier traditions, such as distributed, collective, relational and shared leadership. Thus it is set apart from the traits and behaviors of individual leadership. The book posits the theory that leadership as practice allows for organism versus static, agency versus structure, and leadership development based upon shared collaboration, dialogics and contested interactions.

This book emphasizes the need for greater research that will go beyond the tradition of trait or influence theories to include agency, dialogue, and other social processes. The book brings together a collection of 18 theorists and experts who provide scholarly and empirical background, study of the nature of practice, social interactions and application, all of which address methodologies and development. The book suggests that much of what leadership is does not reside outside of leadership but is in fact embedded within it.

Historically, trait and influence leadership is individualistic and structured. It tends to reflect management style and thus is often static. This book proposes a process of leadership that emerges from the idea that anyone within the community of the project or process can contribute and influence direction and outcomes. This theory proposes a “we-ness” or subjective inclusiveness that stands opposite the individualistic and hierarchal traditions of behavior leadership theory. This proposes through practice leadership a socialized process that can be discursive

but also agency driven. Trait and behavior leadership can be considered prescriptive, because they assume certain presets. Practice theory allows for forays into the unknown. The text describes it as ontological, epistemological and philosophical. It takes into account the being, beliefs and interpretations of participants. The idea of agency is the vehicle to this end. Plainly put, people and their interactive processes go a long way toward driving practice leadership.

Therefore, practice leadership, as described in this text, relies heavily upon integrated communication, such as is reflected in shared, distributed, and relational leadership. Such interaction, dialogue, collaboration and shared learning reflect what the text refers to as holarchy, which is an ethically grounded relationship between unity and diversity. In such a context, the whole and the parts are equally valued.

Traditional leadership models or theories focus on pursuit of the most direct route possible to the desired outcomes using whatever methods are necessary to incentivize the team. Practice leadership, however, desires what the text calls “intersubjectivism.” This is a “shared, unique and contested understanding of social realities created between people in and across moments of time and space.”

Traditional leadership has often practiced an imposition style that is externally applied, compared with practice leadership, which relies upon embedded relationships. The intersubjectivism proposed in this book presupposes connected responsiveness based upon ongoing engagement. Practice leadership is processual and transitory. In this context, practice leadership is also democratic, allowing for gender

inclusion and diversity. The examination of interpersonal dynamics gives strength to community and thus leadership practice.

Because leadership as practice is emergent, it does not stand as strong among various leadership theories. Even so, the book presents practice leadership as an option worthy of careful consideration, especially since so much about social context is emergent and the need to expand local involvement in leadership is rising.

The book concludes with a call to intentional leadership as practice development. Traditional models of leadership theory are worthy of specific and deliberate challenge. Leaders, learners and developers must recognize and facilitate the necessary tensions among themselves that will allow cross-boundary collaboration and better practice outcomes.

I strongly recommend *Leadership as Practice*. If you are interested in reassessing how you have considered and used various leadership theories, this text will provoke your thinking on how to do better what you have already done well.

HERMAN DAVIS is a current Doctor of Ministry student and active church pastor in south Florida.

BOUNDARIES FOR LEADERS

By Henry Cloud
New York, NY: HarperCollins (2013)
Kindle Version, 272 pages

Reviewed by OSEI DANIELS

“You are ridiculously in charge!” This is one of the key phrases stated by Dr. Henry Cloud in his book *Boundaries for Leaders*. This book breaks down clearly how leaders are

to set up appropriate boundaries with themselves and those they lead. Being “in charge” gives you the authority to accomplish exactly what you determine is important and the direction you want to take the team or organization.

This book, *Boundaries for Leaders*, has helped me embrace the fact that I’m in charge, and that it is completely OK to lead! Speaking the truth in love, clarifying responsibilities and literally asking people what I need them to do has been a big challenge for me in my life. I have always been more of the “worker bee” and not the leader. God has given me the opportunity to mature and grow into my leadership role as youth pastor.

As a pastor, my role is to develop relationships with young people, to encourage them not only to give their lives to Jesus but to motivate them to want to serve Jesus by using their gifts and talents. From what I’ve learned in this book, they also need to make sure they learn crystal clear boundaries for themselves, what they are and are not responsible for as future leaders in their schools and communities. “No one else can set these boundaries for you” (loc 2661) is a powerful principle that will help them tremendously in their maturing into young adults and successful people, serving others out of love rather than fear.

In my marriage of nine years, I’ve been reminded of the amazing gift my wife is to me as it relates to receiving feedback. Before, in my immaturity, I bristled at my wife’s suggestions, corrections and input. But I’ve learned that I needed someone who knew me, believed in my abilities, and didn’t want to harm me in any way. I’ve learned that I needed to open up. Dr. Cloud states that “good character . . . HUNGERS for feedback” (loc 2776). Being a trustworthy leader mandates