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Review of *Together We Can: Pathways to Collective
Leadership in Agriculture at Texas A&M*. By Edward
A. Hiler and Steven L. Bosserman.

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Together We Can: Pathways to Collective Leadership in Agriculture at Texas A&M. By Edward A. Hiler and Steven L. Bosserman. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011. xii + 105 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$25.00 cloth.

Leadership is about people and their interdependence in groups, organizations, and communities. More specifically, it is about understanding and working with the individual and collective psychology of people and groups. The rhetoric of leadership is much more than what leaders say; it is fundamentally what leaders *do*, and what their behavior signals regarding institutional values, goals, and commitments.

In colleges of agriculture, land-grant universities, and higher education more generally, the need for people-centered, collective leadership is dire. Leadership is not a mechanical enterprise that treats people as inputs into some organizational production function depicted in shifting organizational charts. It embraces change, not the status quo, and recognizes that change is grounded in the thinking of individuals and groups; leadership involves connecting with people's hearts and minds in a process of cocreating vision, process, action, and community. This necessitates treating people with respect and valuing their expertise, experience, and wisdom in a process of mutual learning over time. Leadership is a dynamic, evolutionary process of finding the nexus between conflict and cooperation within groups, organizations, and communities, as well as with external collaborators and interests, all in service to larger social and institutional goals.

Edward Hiler's leadership journey through a series of major administrative positions at Texas A&M is a story of collective leadership, as told by Hiler himself, and framed by organizational and leadership strategist Steve Bosserman. This brief,

highly readable, and provocative book illustrates the philosophical and operational essences of collective leadership. The shifting demographic, economic, ecological, and sociopolitical realities of Texas and the Great Plains called for optimizing the contributions of Texas A&M and other institutions of higher education in addressing critical issues. Hiler, ever the visionary, saw the power of an inclusive, egalitarian, shared leadership style that allowed diverse constituencies to take ownership of both issues and proposed solutions. The import of Hiler's work, however, ranges far beyond the Great Plains; it applies to strengthening organizational development and leadership in land-grant universities and higher education nationally.

Hiler and Bosserman artfully weave together several essential themes in organizational development and collective leadership that emphasize the critical importance of collaboration and collective engagement, rather than competition, as the vehicle for individual and institutional growth, development, and effectiveness. To this end, formal and informal conversations have an equally important role. Hiler sought to create spaces in which informal exchanges could flourish: opening his home, for example, to colleagues and students in an effort to develop sensitivity to and respect for both professional and personal goals and motivations. In both formal and informal contexts, Hiler prioritized opportunities for open dialogues in which participants could forward ideas and raise concerns as individuals rather than as institutional affiliates as a means of fostering innovation. He also developed transparent and extensive channels and networks of commu-

nication that allowed internal and external partners to share, discuss, and access available ideas and information. By forging individual relationships centered on integrity, trust, and a willingness to share power and influence, Hiler modeled a form of leadership that came to characterize the institutional culture.

Hiler's personal narrative is interspersed with Bosserman's metaframes detailing organizational development and collective leadership philosophy and principles. This structure contributes immeasurably to conveying the powerful messages stemming from Hiler's experience. In a writing style reflecting many of the qualities of his fruitful collective leadership approach, he highlights and honors the critical roles of wisdom of his institutional colleagues and fellow citizens in shaping his understanding of the processes and values of partnering at all levels. And Bosserman deftly distills critical collective leadership philosophy and principles from Hiler's work.

Together We Can provides valuable insight for current and aspiring leaders and professionals in land-grant universities, higher education in general, and the nonprofit sector more broadly.

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