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Haley Swindler

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by Haley Swindler

Introduction

Mr. Bill George is a professor, best-selling author, and businessman. He received his MBA from Harvard University, where he has been teaching leadership since 2004 and has also served as the president and CEO of Medtronic. He has been acknowledged as one of the "Top 25 Business Leaders of the Past 25 Years" by PBS; "Executive of the Year—2001" by the Academy of Management; and "Director of the Year—2001–2002" by the National Association of Corporate Directors.

In the latest edition of his well-received leadership guide *Discover Your True North* (2015), George argues that genuine, authentic leaders are ultimately more effective and successful and asserts that leadership is "no longer…about developing charisma, emulating other leaders, looking good externally, and acting in one's self-interest" (p. 3). He supports this claim using dozens of case studies drawn from interviews of a large and diverse group of prominent business leaders around the world. The book is divided into three parts in order to facilitate the reader's ascent to a thorough understanding of authentic leadership and also includes exercises at the end of each chapter to encourage reflection and practice of individual leadership concepts. The format of the book is easy to follow and the case studies paired with each concept make the material relatable and important to the reader while breaking up the monotony of theory with the relevance of practice.

Summary

Although George is fairly straightforward in advocating certain authentic leadership processes, he fails to clearly establish his intended audience and this oversight creates some contradiction throughout the book. The introduction talks about a "new generation of leaders" who are "much more diverse than their predecessors, more global in their outlook, and more likely to be promoted from within" (George, 2015, p. 7). However, the interviews highlighted in each chapter include very few modern examples and no actual leaders of this so-called "new generation" are featured, which disconnects the book from young readers. If, however, his intended audience is more experienced leaders like the ones presented in the examples, they are inadvertently alienated by George's assertion that the upcoming generation are moving the discipline of leadership in the right direction.

A similar inconsistency presented by George involves his view of religion. George has few reservations about discussing his own experience with faith and its influence on his personal authentic leadership journey. He also profiles many leaders with similar motivations stemming from religious beliefs and practices. Apart from a few mentions of Buddhism and meditation (which he appears to think are the same thing), the narrative presented here is overwhelmingly Christian. It is hard as a millennial reading this book to disregard the noticeable rise of young leaders who do not identify with any religion, let alone who actually belong to specific organized religious institutions. The religious undertones interspersed throughout the book simply won't resonate with many young leaders, and the absence of this acknowledgment by the author is disappointing. George also dedicates

an entire chapter to the future of leadership being increasingly global in nature, which could easily be viewed as a direct contradiction to his promotion of motivations rooted in faith. This is because George fails to thoroughly discuss how widely religious beliefs vary across the world, or how this affects leaders' values and behaviors. Because George insists that "leadership principles are values translated into practice," he should offer a more expansive discussion of these values and how they are developed (George, 2015, p. 106).

Evaluation/Analysis

Arguably the biggest problem with *Discover Your True North* exists in its simplicity. The book reads more like a testimony of what has worked for certain leaders in the past and what hasn't, than a guide to leadership. Perhaps the reason it is such an easy and quick read is that the material isn't all that original, especially to an assumed audience of MBA students, who are likely inundated with the same concepts of adaptive and value-driven leadership. While he doesn't expressly adopt an existing leadership framework, George does take a firm stance against the trait model of leadership, insisting that anyone in any position can step up and lead at any point in time (George, 2015, p. 9). The case studies illustrate this assertion and provide motivation for leaders struggling with *finding their True North*, but the book falls short of establishing a theoretical template which readers can utilize in order to improve.

While *Discover Your True North* (George, 2015) does not provide a comprehensive leadership theory, George does present a number of salient points that are absent from a lot of conventional leadership literature. For instance, his emphasis on self-awareness and leadership as a life-long journey gives readers a sense of control and confidence which is needed to develop as leaders. He takes the stance that "leadership is not a singular destination but a marathon journey that progresses through many stages

until you reach your peak" (George, 2015, p. 25). Although he outlines these stages specifically for the reader, the overall message that leadership can be for everyone as an ongoing process of improvement is a powerful one. George reassures his readers that "some outstanding leaders…did not see themselves as leaders at all" (p. 20). This expansion of leadership to include leaders of all ages and levels of experience not only serves as inspiration for young leaders to improve and become more authentic, but also adds to the leadership community by bringing all walks of life together around a shared purpose.

Conclusion

In addition to viewing leadership as a process involving self-reflection and introspection, George also notes that negative events or crucibles have the potential to strengthen leaders and inspire them to make a difference. He suggests that "by understanding the meaning of key events in your life and reframing them, you can determine your leadership purpose" (George, 2015, p. 204). This idea is strengthened by the fact that almost all of the interviews featured in the book include in some way instances of failure, reflection, and growth. This realization that failure is not only okay but actually quite common is perhaps the catalyst of authentic leadership, especially for young leaders who may be lacking confidence and experience. Even if its greatest use is a motivational tool for unsure leaders, *Discovering Your True North* is truly unique in its approach and Bill George will no doubt continue to play a role in the future of authentic leadership.

References

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