

# BOOK REVIEWS

## HOW LEARNING WORKS: SEVEN RESEARCH BASED PRINCIPLES FOR SMART TEACHING

*By Susan A. Ambrose, Michael W. Bridges, Marsha C. Lovett, Michele DiPietro, & Marie K. Norman*  
San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass  
Hardcover, pages  
Reviewed by RAQUEL RODRIGUEZ

How Learning Works, in the words of the authors, “grew out of over twenty-nine years of experience consulting with faculty colleagues about teaching and learning” (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 2). It is a major contribution to the field and practice of education because it provides a synthesis of experience and reflection on the successes and problems in the process of education noted in discussions with thousands of educators worldwide, and in a great variety of disciplines, institutions, and cultures. The authors have focused on seven basic learning principles which students employ and which teachers can utilize to improve the learning experience for their students. The book’s main purpose is to provide “a bridge between research and practice,

between teaching and learning” for instructors at all levels of teaching (p. 2). Its aim, then, is to help teachers get a better understanding of the learning process so that they can communicate their lessons more effectively. While a book about learning may seem irrelevant to leaders who are not educators, one must remember that leaders are in many respects teachers of those they lead.

Learning, say the authors, is defined as “a process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning” (p. 3). They have taken the perspective that learning involves both developmental processes that are occurring in the student’s life, and the holistic context which includes not only skills and knowledge, but also social and emotional experiences that influence their values and their self-perception.

The book consists of two parts. While the main body of the text presents the theoretical basis of both learning and instructional science by discussing the seven principles of learning in detail, the eight appendices provide concrete examples of how the teacher puts the learning principles into practice, and shows how the concept of maps, rubrics, exam wrappers, checklists, and other devices can be used in the classroom.

The authors have distilled the seven learning principles from research in a variety of disciplines, dedicating one chapter to each principle. These principles are outlined in the book’s introduction:

1. Students’ prior knowledge can help or hinder learning.
2. How students organize knowledge influences how they learn and apply what they know.
3. Students’ motivation determines, directs, and sustains what they do to learn.

4. To develop mastery, students must acquire component skills, practice integrating them, and know when to apply what they have learned.
5. Goal-directed practice coupled with targeted feedback enhances the quality of students' learning.
6. Students' current level of development interacts with the social, emotional, and intellectual climate of the course to impact learning.
7. To become self-directed learners, students must learn to monitor and adjust their approaches to learning. (pp. 4-6)

The seven principles are presented in an intuitively sequential pattern that allows the reader to connect each principle to the one that precedes and follows it. This pattern contributes to and facilitates the metacognitive work that allows an instructor to self-assess and adjust teaching behavior to fit an effective and proven process of teaching and learning. In addition, the psychological context of learning is addressed in four of the seven principles which recognize the student as a person with variable attitudes and experiences that impact the effectiveness of teaching and learning. This creates a holistic model wherein teaching and learning become a relational transaction that recognizes variables in both instructor and learner with interactions that affect each.

The authors identify their intended audience as "faculty members, graduate students, faculty developers, instructional designers and librarians." They add that "it also includes K-12 educators" (p. 12). But this classroom-centered focus ignores the fact that teaching and learning is a part of nearly all of the various facets of life, particularly in the work environment. Therefore, it should be recognized that effective teaching and learning strategies are elemental realities in

God's People as extending the impact of effective church leadership beyond the membership of the church. "The vitality of the church," he says, "holds enormous potential for the well-being of the many societies in which we live" (p. xi). This book is structured around the foundational dimensions of pastoral leadership—spirituality of the leader, service to parishioners, the role of Scripture and theology, and finally ministry of the Word.

Beeley reports that the development of pastors capable of sustaining effective church leadership is given priority by the early church. "Those who shepherd God's flock on behalf of Christ" (p. 6) are presented as stewards with leadership responsibility for the care of God's people. The bishop (supervisor of pastors) is also described as being a pastor who cares for his people rather than as an "administrative official" (p. 7). Ideally the bishops assume "servant-like authority and authoritative service" whereby they "exercise their authority not by throwing their weight around, but by helping to build others up" (p. 12).

Beeley quotes the counsel of Ambrose, who said that pastors should not demonstrate their effectiveness through self but rather that they should "'show your virtue in your spiritual children'" (p. 15). This focus on generative service to people is common in the comments assembled by Beeley regarding the role of the pastor and bishop in the early church and reveals a strong likeness to the servant leadership model encouraged in church leaders today. This presents a challenge to the practice of evaluating pastors on the quantitative basis of growth productivity rather than on the basis of disciples created through training and equipping.

It is also interesting to consider Beeley's report that the early church practiced a "profoundly social" (pp. 19, 73) selection process in choosing their pastors and bishops. This was done through a relational process of observation of the person and discernment of their giftedness. Multiple reasons are given to support the idea that "the candidate's inward sense of calling is much less important compared to the discernment of the community" (p. 20). Though not dealt with in the book, this revelation piques my curiosity as to when that community component faded from common practice.

This book emphasizes the need for pastoral leadership to be buttressed by authentic biblical spirituality. Nanzianus is colorfully quoted in support of this emphasis: "Who would think of teaching a musical instrument, Gregory asks, without first learning to play? Or who would presume to captain a ship who hasn't first handled the oar, taken the helm,





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*  
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*Reviewed by MATTHEW*  
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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 ok book is writtenuowirst toa

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

## TRANSFORMISSIONAL

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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mation. But key questions and listening allow for effective clarification, self-discovery, and a self-motivated action plan to occur in a coaching relationship. The authors include a whole series of helpful questions.

Ogne and Roehl's significant contribution to coaching, however, is linking coaching to young leaders in the postmodern setting. They suggest that the young postmodern mindset is looking for relationships, proximity, and affinity. Authenticity, story, and experiences matter to a millennial living in a media-saturated society. The genius of coaching is that it is not a program; rather, it is a coming alongside another person to facilitate the release of God-given potential. This personal coaching offers a key to personal leadership

them and their witness. The third essay (pp. 69-89) proposes wholeness as spiritual growth's goal, through comprehensive pacific inclusivity (pp. 77-82).

By linking faith to intimately personal experience, this book has potential to bring a renewal of faith to Christians who are disillusioned in, or even by, the church. Christian leaders will be guided in conceptualizing the causes of deficiencies in life and religious organizations. They will also see the nature of genuine spiritual growth, which will motivate them to promote such genuine growth rather than a mere surface Christianity that doesn't fool many anymore.

The book links outward Christian behavior with in-depth factors that either foil or enable it; any effort towards Christian behavior that does not acknowledge this link only addresses surface activity that is easily counterproductive to Christianity's stated goals. Ulanov describes problems commonly stemming from religious sectarianism: "theological bullying" (pp. 52) and threats to life (p. 51). Shadow awareness and pacific integration (p. 58) are proposed as needed alternate solutions (pp. 52-53, 55), because the end result of a "conscious dialogue" with shadow content is that things are clearer, "good is more possible and evil more avoidable" (pp. 53-54), and the world is safer.

Aptly illustrating the issues of the thesis from a treasure trove of biblical material, Ulanov uses pressing terms to warn of the dangers to Christians and to the church of refusing Jung's pacifically inclusive growth. Such refusal "always leads to catastrophe" (p. 48):

[This is] dangerous [because it leads to a] religion of words that do not incarnate . . . [and] empty exhortations . . . [and to our becoming] windbags . . . [and]

theological know-it-alls, full of what should be, [but] rejecting what is . . . [all the while] trying to force others to agree [with us] . . . on pain of death. (p. 79)

In refusing the work proposed, Ulanov sees us as failing our call and becoming moralistic, projecting our flaws unto others, and having illnesses which we either carry ourselves or pass on to our children (p. 83). "There is no future for the church without including the psyche, especially the unconscious" (p. 32). If such propositions do not catch the attention of Christian leaders whose responsibility it is to deal with the hemorrhage of the postmodern church, what will?

Based on history, even biblical history, one can be doubtful that the challenging call of this book will be responded to adequately and in a timely manner by more than a minority; instead, it will likely be opposed by many. But this should not deter readers who are determined to become part of the safe, life-giving minority who are answering the call to reclaim this eminently Christian work for the church.

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