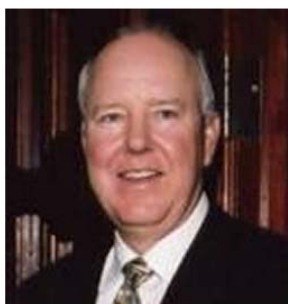


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# Gleanings

by Gerald R. Chester, Ph.D.

## Who Has Wisdom for the Workplace?



The books that seem to be influencing organizational leaders today are titles such as *Good to Great* by Jim Collins and *Jack—Straight from the Gut* by Jack Welch. These books are popular among both leaders and followers, including many church leaders. In fact, I have heard sermons based on these books despite the fact that neither author overtly builds his arguments from Scripture. This begs the question, why is the Christian community so intently listening to these sources for wisdom?

Clearly the message this sends is that the Christian community doesn't have knowledge (i.e., the understanding of reality from God's perspective) or wisdom (i.e., the skill to live life) that is relevant for leading and managing organizations. Or at least that the knowledge and wisdom Christians do have is tacitly inferior to that offered by others.

It seems that many of us assume that wisdom for leadership and management exists independently of a biblical worldview. The presupposition is that this wisdom is discovered heuristically by observing leaders and organizations whom we deem to be worthy of emulation. Such a pragmatic process always seeks to systemize wisdom into salient principles that will facilitate organizational success, but never seeks to understand the origin of these principles.

The assumption of the researchers appears to be that these principles exist independent of the Creator of the universe. Such a presupposition is acceptable to those who do not believe that the universe has a Creator. But for those who believe in a Creator, the assumption of knowledge and wisdom independently of the Creator is illogical. If there is a Creator, everything that exists finds its origin in the Creator. Hence, how could any principle that facilitates long-term success exist independently of the Creator?

Principles of leadership and management widely accepted by researchers, including servant leadership, the Golden Rule, and sowing and reaping (i.e., cause and effect), are indeed found in the Bible. These principles were created by the God who created the universe and all the rules of the universe. This reality suggests that the principles that facilitate leadership and management are rooted in the Bible, the Creator's revelation to His creation.

If the Bible is the source of the principles of leadership and management, why aren't Bible scholars the ones articulating these great principles? Why are empirical researchers such as Jim Collins and practitioners such as Jack Welch leading the way? Perhaps the answer can be found in the theology of work widely embraced by Christianity today.

If Christians view work in the physical realm as little more than a necessary evil or simply a vehicle to make money, then we will not study the Bible expecting to discover principles of leadership and management that apply to physical work. But if Christians view physical work as a divine calling, and hence activity that is valuable to God, then the Bible becomes a treasure chest of wisdom.

Could it be that researchers who are not studying the Bible but only studying God's revelation in creation are discovering God's principles? These people are studying God's physical universe, which theologians call general revelation. The adroit study of general revelation leads people, such as Collins and Welch, to discover God's principles of leadership and management. Though general revelation provides insight into God's principles, the Bible provides even more insight.

Christians who study the Bible, however, often do not see God's truth for leadership and management because they are not studying the Bible for that purpose. Then out of necessity to survive in the physical world, Christians are driven to secular books for wisdom to lead and manage organizations. But this doesn't have to be and shouldn't be. The lack of biblical scholarship applied to leadership and management is a testimony to the failure of Christians to understand and value work as God does.

For Christians, the knowledge and wisdom to lead and manage organizations can be found in the study of both general revelation and special revelation (the Bible). Such a study should lead Christians to an even more profound understanding of how to lead and manage than any research limited to general revelation.

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