

Strengthening Spirit – Releasing Potential:

Spiritual Direction for Leadership and Organizational Development

by Bernadette Miles

Review by Kristen Hobby

Dr. Bernadette Miles weaves together the threads of her life, work, faith and research to offer new insights and wisdom into the application of spiritual direction and spirituality into the lives of leaders and organizations. This book speaks into the current challenges we face as a species with words of hope and inspiration for a new way of being in community with one another and our world. Gone are the days of seeing workers as machines as Miles ushers in a new way of considering leadership as a journey of increasing self-awareness and consciousness, for leaders to develop their capacity to know themselves more intimately, and to trust their sense of purpose. Miles believes that the world is being invited into a new paradigm, a need for a re-awakened consciousness of the interconnectedness of all creation, an appreciation of the central purpose of evolution and a vision of the whole of creation as the core of religious truth and she uses the ministry of spiritual direction and the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatian of Loyola as keystones. For Miles 'spiritual involves a conscious attempt to engage in practices that allow the exploration, reflection and integration of one's deepest values, sense of meaning and purpose into daily life' (p. 31').

One of the most helpful aspects of the book is the inclusion of a number of key frameworks that provide a way of viewing leaders and organizations in new ways. One of these is the Transforming Experience Framework, developed by the Grubb institute and supports an integrated approach to leaders as they see themselves as being a person, being part of a particular system, in a particular context and connected to Source. The application of spiritual direction helps leaders to fully explore each aspect in a way that not only raises consciousness by also strengthens leader's ability to see the interconnectedness of life.

A second helpful framework offered by Miles is the Seven Levels of Consciousness (SLOC) which builds upon Maslow's hierarchy of needs and incorporates a spiritual dimension to each level. Miles takes this model and re-images it by placing Source with its dimension of interconnectedness at the centre as well as overlaying the four weeks of the spiritual exercises. This new model provides the basis for Miles' research and interviews she conducted.

Miles believes that when 'organizational development is anchored in the group's relationship with God and a desire to be of service to the world, spiritual direction creates a holding environment where organizational consciousness can be explored and developed' (p. 92).

Spiritual direction is a safe place to supports leaders in reflecting on the past, exploring the present and seeing themselves through the eyes of God or Jesus which allows them to develop their own interior freedom and let go of limitations that may be holding them back.

It isn't just individual leaders that benefit from reflection and discernment, there is much to be gained by organizations to 'think and find the degree of unity across systems' (p. 141). 'Groups carry a collective history and when this is left unexamined it can undermine the group's capacity to move forward.' (p. 145). Miles invites organizations to reflect upon past experiences, even when they are difficult or even traumatic as there is much potential for healing and for future growth and transformation.

In this clearly written book Miles has provided a practical and accessible guide to exploring the role that spiritual direction, the Ignatian spiritual exercises and a broader view of spirituality can have in the lives of leaders, teams and organizations as a support to raise consciousness through a culture of collaboration rather than a command and control.

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Foreword by Wilkie Au

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