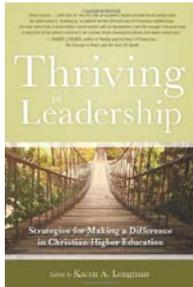


## Professional Book Review

Longman, K. A. (Ed.) (2012). *Thriving in Leadership: Strategies for Making a Difference in Christian Higher Education*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press. 336 pp., ISBN-13: 978-0891122296 (pbk), \$24.99.

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Editor Karen Longman has brought together a strong group of experienced and successful university leaders to create this powerful volume. The title introduces the book's focus on leadership as a situation in which one who is called can thrive and make a difference. Written almost entirely by women in Christian higher education senior leadership (only the Foreword and Epilogue are written by male authors), it is of special significance to the readers of this journal who value equity and diversity.

In her introduction, Longman stresses the importance of effective leadership. She notes, "Christian higher education must have exceptional leadership if the complex challenges facing today's colleges and universities are to be effectively addressed" (p. 27). However, leadership is not easy. Further, leadership development is not keeping pace with the anticipated need (p. 27).<sup>1</sup>

The volume is divided into three parts. The first focuses on the leader's interior life. Laurie A. Schreiner's essay emphasizes the importance of perspective for the leader, noting that how one views a situation is critical to thriving in leadership. "Thriving leaders . . . interpret crises in a way that enables them to remain hopeful, engaged, and striving toward meaningful goals" (p. 41). The essay includes several strategies to help the leader embody a positive perspective. The "Leading from the Center: Body and Place" essay made me think carefully about how God has put each of us into a place as well as into a physical body, and the implications this has for leadership. The strengths approach to leadership described in the essay by Deborah J. White calls the leader to understand and lead based on her own giftedness, as well as based on the talents, not weaknesses, of others around her. "Successful leaders...build a team that can function well together and bring out the best in each other" (p. 88).

Section Two considers the social intelligence of thriving leaders. The ability to understand and "read" the emotional and social landscape is a critical skill for leaders. In her essay, Shirley V. Hoogstra emphasizes the importance of trust and illustrates it well with personal examples from her own life and ministry. The essay on faculty culture by Carolyn E. Dirksen was especially helpful to me because it verbalized the values of the culture in which I, as a faculty member, live and helped me make sense of faculty/administration and faculty/staff misunderstandings in a new way. Shirley H. Showalter's essay, "Building a

Powerful Leadership Team,” describes how she built her team and developed a covenant by which the leadership team lived and worked. Other essays in this section discuss story as a tool for communication, "orchestrating a life of influence" (written by a musician, of course), and mentoring.

The third, and final, section describes how leaders can shape a thriving organizational culture. Marie S. Morris discusses metaphors and leadership: "Both our leadership and our influence on the institutions where we serve are framed by our institution's culture, by our operating metaphors" (p. 220). Institutions often express a commitment to diversity, but author Rebecca R. Hernandez describes how non-White students can feel like guests, with the White majority being the host. Instead, she suggests the idea of a "world house" as a "strong model for diversity in higher education" (p. 229). In her chapter, Carla D. Sanderson gives practical and specific ways that leaders can work towards building a "distinctive, Christ-honoring campus culture" (p. 243). Carol A. Taylor's transparent and inspiring essay of how she, by God's grace, led a turnaround at her institution reminds the leader of the importance of commitment to the journey: "The first decision a leader has to make is whether or not to personally commit to the journey" and face reality while maintaining hope (p. 265). The final essay, "Leadership in the Fifth Dimension," describes the continuum on which leaders live, balancing between time (the mundane, daily details) and the timeless (mission, vision, and the big picture). Lee F. Snyder even reflects upon how a leader might know when it is time to leave.

The volume is well-written and carefully edited. Essayists make relevant reference to other chapters, evidencing a broad vision for the book that was articulated and carried out. Though essays can be read individually and not necessarily in the order presented, there is a clear logic in the volume's organization and presentation.

Each essay provides ample food for thought, making this the kind of volume to which a leader will return repeatedly for further reflection and in light of new circumstances and challenges. I am confident that, as my life changes personally and institutionally, I will return to *Thriving in Leadership* to tap into the wisdom of these wise women again and again.

### Endnote

1. The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) developed their Leadership Development Institutes as one response to this concern. Noting the need for diversity, including gender diversity, in senior leadership, the CCCU developed the Women's Leadership Development Institutes (WLDI), and all of the volume's writers have served as resource leaders for the CCCU Institutes (p. 25).