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Milwaukee Biz Blog

Empowerment is key to servant leadership

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A few years ago, when I was first promoted into a management position – without any prior training or experience in that field - I asked my father for advice.

The conversation was very brief. It went something like this:

"Hey Dad, I've never been in management. How am I going to do it? What's the secret to being a good leader?" I asked.

His answer came quickly. "The key to management is very simple, actually. You surround yourself with the best people, and you do everything you can to help them fly."

I was reminded of that conversation this week when I received an advance copy of a book in the making. The book, titled, "*Leadership: The Art of Empowering*," provides insights and inspirations for "Attitudes and Skills for Transformative Leadership."

The book was co-written by Keith Clark, a Roman Catholic priest and a member of the Capuchin-Franciscan religious order at the Monte Alverno Retreat & Spirituality Center in Appleton, and Mike Panther, a retired executive from South Carolina.

Full disclosure here: I helped Keith - as best I could – with some of the original concepts for the book. He is a friend, and I am thrilled to see that he was able to complete his tome.

The book is filled with wisdom, the kind that only someone like Keith can provide.

The essence of the book is that a servant leader empowers people to do the right things at the right time consistently. The servant leader serves the subordinates and helps them achieve, rather than being served by the subordinates.

Here are a couple of nuggets of wisdom from the book:

"Integrity is an even more valuable commodity than reputation. Integrity is wholeness, incorruptibility. It is established by being true to oneself; it is an interior reality. Integrity is lost by choosing behavior which violates one's moral and ethical codes (whether or not other people know about it)."

"A leader takes responsibility, not only for his or her happiness, but also for his or her influence on the happiness of others in the environment."

"Anyone wishing to exercise leadership in a group needs not only to avoid the care-less word, but must seek the opportunity to speak the care-full word. By doing so, one can help set a positive tone for the environment in which everyone lives and works."

By [Steve Jagler](#)

Steve Jagler is executive editor of BizTimes Milwaukee....

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"A leader recognizes, respects and moderates differences of opinion ... A leader does not pretend that everyone is in agreement when the evidence suggests otherwise."

"Punishment looks to the past. It doesn't change the past, but it focuses on what cannot be undone or redone. Empowerment looks to the future in the hope that it can be shaped by more desirable behavior."

* "A leader helps colleagues see the light before the heat is applied."

* "An assertive person can demonstrate affection and friendship, can admit fear and anxiety, express agreement and support, and generally be spontaneous."

* "Real servant leadership provides the atmosphere where everyone knows that help from the leader is available when needed, but at the same time everyone in the organization is expected to perform and deliver results."

Dad was right all along.

(Editor's note: The book featured in this column has not yet been published, but it should be. If you know of a publisher in need of a solid book on servant leadership, send them my way.)

Steve Jagler is executive editor of BizTimes Milwaukee.

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