

LeaderPerfect Newsletter

October 1, 2002

Worth the Reading

by Dr. Mike Armour

With my penchant for devouring books, people are always asking, "What have you been reading lately?" So periodically I want to use this newsletter to recommend books and articles that have been helpful for me.

Understanding the Moslem World

Given the rising tensions in the Middle East, threats from Islamic terrorists, and increasing prospects of war with Iraq, there's a fresh urgency on understanding Arab and Moslem culture.

In that regard, one topic that must never be overlooked is the Moslem struggle with secularization (separation of religion and state). Secularization has never gained firm footing in the Islamic world (only one Moslem nation -- the Turkish Republic -- has ever formally adopted it as a principle of government).

However, other Moslem governments have made limited moves toward secularization. And the question of secularization is particularly prominent among newly independent Moslem regions once part of the Soviet Union. Today there is a growing Islamic reaction against secularization, especially in the ranks of the so-called "fundamentalists."

Indeed, unrest among fundamentalists is as much a protest against secularization as it is against political accommodations with Israel or the West. If we view the Mid-East turmoil as mere rivalry between Moslems, Jews, and Christians, we are guilty of gross oversimplification. Some would argue that the chasm between Moslem and Westerner on the subject of secularization is even greater than the divide over religion.

If you're interested in a well-stated description of this problem, take a look at a new book by Bernard Lewis, professor emeritus of Near Eastern studies at Princeton. It's entitled *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* and was published earlier this year by Oxford Press. Lewis traces the Moslem world from its heyday in the Middle Ages (when it was clearly superior to the West in culture, learning, science, medicine, and military prowess) to its marginalized importance (save for oil) in today's world.

The book is chock full of insights, not just on the subject of secularization, but on dozens of other issues that separate modern Moslem culture from our prevailing worldview in the West.

Developmental Challenges in the Arab World

About the time I was enjoying *What Went Wrong*, the United Nations Development Program published an engaging study entitled Arab Human Development Report 2002. It documents how far the Arab world has indeed fallen behind the rest of the globe.

"About 65 million adult Arabs are illiterate," it notes in the Overview, "two thirds of them women." It adds that ten million children between 6 and 15 are currently out of school in Arab nations, a number likely to increase by 40% between now and 2015. "The region's maternal mortality rate is double that of Latin America and the Caribbean, and four times that of East Asia."

Leadership That Engages Emotions

Daniel Goleman (you may recognize his name as the author of the best-selling *Emotional Intelligence*) has recently co-authored a book that applies emotional intelligence to the role of leadership.

Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence is published by Harvard Business School. Goleman and co-authors Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee argue that modern "scientific studies" of management and leadership leave an impression that leadership is primarily the result of mastering a set of cognitive and analytical skills — envisioning, long-range planning, clear communication, strategic organizational alignment, etc.

To the contrary, they insist, effective leadership has always been the result of creative emotional engagement between the leader and those he or she leads. The weakness of modern leadership training, in their opinion, is that it aims at cognitive training rather than emotional development.

They look at leadership styles under six headings: visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and commanding. In the right setting, each of these styles can create resonance between leaders and those they lead. Yet, the emotional intelligence required to succeed as a visionary or coaching leader is much higher than the requirements of a pacesetter or commanding style.

The book analyzes the contexts in which each of these styles might be considered appropriate, arguing that the most positive long-term influence on organizational culture comes from the visionary and coaching approaches. It then offers guidance on how to enrich personal emotional skills in critical leadership areas.

And speaking of coaching, one hallmark of the book is its examination of the human brain in light of leadership issues. Goleman details the difference between learning leadership skills cognitively (which targets the brain's neo-cortex) and the emotional intelligence of good leadership, which functions in the brain's limbic system. Whereas the neo-cortex can master concepts quickly, the limbic system learns more slowly, through repetition and long term reinforcement.

That's why personal coaching is so valuable in developing leadership abilities. A one-day class on leadership may give cognitive awareness of new leadership skills. But extended

one-on-one coaching is far more effective at making new leadership skills "second nature."

Leadership in Times of Unpredictability

After having it on my "to read" list for months, I finally took time this summer to look at Margaret Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*. Now I'm shaking my head for having left this volume on the bookshelf so long.

Our modern definition of organizational theory and management, Wheatley holds, emerged from a Euclidean-Newtonian view of the universe. This led to a heavy dependence on dividing organizations into functional silos, drawing organization charts that put individuals in static boxes, and focusing on ways to rationalize and quantify processes.

Those developments were hardly questioned, she continues, in a Newtonian world that thought of nature as a huge machine with distinct, isolated parts where cause and effect relationships could be easily identified, calibrated, and controlled, like a cosmic game of billiards.

Contemporary science, however, operates in a much more "messy" environment (my word) where causal relations are "fuzzy" (her word). It's a strange, paradoxical world where sub-atomic realities change identity constantly, based on a given context and their interaction with other realities around them. To illustrate the profound difference of this "fuzzy" world, Wheatley offers a laymen-friendly treatment of topics such as quantum mechanics, fractals, and chaos theory.

Just as modern science outgrew Euclid and Newton, Wheatley contends, modern organizations are quickly outgrowing management theories drawn from a Newtonian view of the world. That's why so many organizations — commercial, industrial, political, social, and educational — no longer seem to work. Wheatley then shows how the worldview of "the new science" suggests alternative ways to put together organizations and human enterprises. She offers an array of new metaphors for understanding organizational dynamics and the interpersonal relationships of the workaday world.

Although she is treating highly complex topics, Wheatley writes clearly and simply. Don't let her title scare you away just because you avoided physics and advanced math in school. You'll have no problem in following her line of development. And there's much food for thought in chapter after chapter.

Incidentally, for readers who are familiar with my *Systems-Sensitive Leadership* (which I wrote with Don Browning), Wheatley's book is one of the few that has offered a System 7/System 8 view of management theory. For those who want to understand the world of System 8 more fully, this is a very helpful read.

© 2002, MCA Professional Services Group, LLC

This article may be posted to your web site so long as all copyright notices are preserved, along with an associated link to www.leaderperfect.com. You are also free to

circulate this document in hard-copy form so long as the copyright statement and this notice remain attached.