

# FOREWORD

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This is a timely book. The great cry today is for leadership formation, for the creation of a foolproof process that will ensure leadership success and shield growing organizations from leadership failure. The only problem is that this cry continues to go largely unheeded. Dr. Sarah Sumner, however, has a passion to see character-centered leadership flourish within every organization, and her book offers a fresh, insightful perspective on this topic. Several years ago I had the privilege of hiring Dr. Sumner when I was at Azusa Pacific University. Since then, Sarah has gone on to distinguish herself as an able scholar, a profound teacher, and an impressive minister. Her insatiable appetite for learning is reflected throughout these pages, as is her desire for excellence.

In *Leadership above the Line*, Sarah introduces us to the People Model and offers a parable that shows how leadership develops.

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In the midst of this model, we see real personalities spring to life, wrestling not so much with principles, but with the competing priorities of real leadership in real time with real consequences.

So many leadership books go one of two directions: either offering a didactic message that appeals to the hyperrational mind or offering a narrative approach that tugs on our emotions. The appeal of Sarah's book is that it reaches out to both mind-sets. She opens the book by offering a descriptive model to which she gives flesh and bones a few pages later. In the opening section, Sarah defines not only the principles, but also the realities that exist in every organization.

It is in this opening that we are invited to recognize that people think and act differently. No immediate value decision is made, only a simple acknowledgment that this is the way the world works

and that every person not only has multiple sides to his or her personality, but also a dominant and preferred approach. These innate tendencies guide our decisions and our participation in every organization we join. The beauty of this point is its amplification of a key theme circulating in much contemporary leadership literature: A person's instincts are central to his or her decision making.

In developing the People Model, Sarah used the three dominant archetypes of truth, goodness, and beauty, reflecting the influence of the ancient Greeks, and these archetypes guide the remainder of the book. We all have an innate sense of truth, goodness, and beauty; we just have it in different amounts and express it in different ways.

The personalities in the parable that amplify the model and form the heart of the book could be taken from any organization. Each of the five featured individuals displays character qualities we have seen in others and at times have even seen in ourselves. To help us understand these tendencies, Sarah concludes the book with several tools that unveil our tendencies personally and organizationally. These tools are meant to be suggestive, not conclusive, and their biggest role is to prod us to think about the attitudes and behaviors that dominate our interaction with colleagues and, in turn, reflect our deepest commitments.

One of the biggest challenges in any organization is to gain self-awareness as individual employees and as a company. This is often a threatening process because it reveals not only our strengths, but also the areas where we remain insufficient. But Sarah's book is helpful at just this point as it prompts us to gain self-awareness while providing tools to help us undergo the change and transformation that will make us more effective.

In Jim Collins's book *Good to Great*, he explains that what separates those outstanding executives who lead their companies to

greatness from those top-notch executives whose companies never reach (or remain at) the top is this: The former strive to serve the larger mission of their organization, while the others work hard to serve their own ego needs. In many respects, Sarah is challenging us to lay aside our dominant egos for the greater good of the organization, inviting all parties to the table to gain a deeper understanding of our companies and work together to build a redemptive community that manifests the love of Christ. Although this book is written primarily as a crossover book for leaders in all organizations, it cannot be overlooked that a key to all successful leadership is to guide from a foundation anchored to Jesus Christ. This is a priority introduced at the end, but a theme that undergirds the entire project.

As you begin to read and enjoy this book, keep one final thought in mind. We are not born fully formed. We must develop. This book is meant to stimulate such development. Not one of us is ever beyond growing or needing to acquire new skills, abilities, and understandings. This reality is driven home by the very open-ended nature of the story. Although the story has a conclusion, it is not the end of the story, but only a new beginning for the individuals who make up this mythical company. This myth is reality. Every new level of self-awareness and corporate awareness begins a whole new cycle of growth and development. To this end we should be grateful for the work of Dr. Sumner, who amplifies this reality and in turn provides possibilities for our own improvement in such an attractive and appealing way. May your own life and leadership be enriched.

*Gayle D. Beebe, PhD*

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