

Review

The message of this book offers a principled response that seems at first glance deceptively simple in both its clarity and consistency. This is a single message book, offered up with unusual personal vulnerability and commitment by one who has been convinced by both research and experience.

Senske organizes his approach to Christian values-based leadership around four areas: the development of a healthy organizational culture, strategic planning, mentoring, and balancing personal with professional life. Using concrete examples from both profit and non-profit environments he makes a convincing argument that the corporate financial model of serving only the bottom line is not the best model. Rather management and leadership approaches that value and empower people, and which have as a priority the long term good of the organization, will in the long run provide the best probability for success.

Senske offers Matthew 7:12 as the “Golden Rule” foundational basis for both understanding and measuring Christian values. “So, in everything, do to others, what you would have them do to you.” This Golden Rule of Leadership works, he claims, because it is comprehensive, incorporating into one accessible principle the gospel values of love, honesty, respect and justice. Christian values-based management makes good business sense. Or, more colloquially stated, leaders can help their organizations to do well by doing good.

The Golden Rule is not limited to Christians and can be found in both the Torah and the Koran. Secular leaders also adopt it as a value. This book however, speaks specifically to those men and women of Christian faith who seek to combine excellence in their work and faithfulness in their personal lives.

Less convincing for some might be his claim that under this model all decisions work for good for those who follow the Golden Rule. Are there not some circumstances that, finally, cannot be shaped into win-win situations? For example, is it always possible for a manager to sleep well at night having taken tough decisions to dismiss staff? One would like to talk more with Senske about whether there might be circumstances in which these can be nothing else than tough decisions which, although they might be necessary and even good for the organization, would not be in the best interests of the individuals, and therefore disturbing for the sleep of Christian managers.

One question that Senske does not address, but to which this book points, is how a values-based Christian approach would work within the one organization where not only the manager and

management team, but the organization itself most directly professes those Christian values: the church. To what extent could this approach be implemented in, for example, a congregational setting?

Is it possible to imagine church councils engaging in values-based strategic planning? How is building a leadership team different when working with volunteers? How does the life and health of a local parish relate to the salary and benefits package of the pastor and staff? Is there a message here for overworked pastors and over-committed laypeople? Upon finishing this book, the Christian leader and manager thinks: “Yes! Of course!” In that sense there is a certain level of common sense and stating of the obvious for people of faith called to live out their baptism within their vocational life.

Kurt Senske invites Christians to reclaim the richness of their beliefs and values for the purpose of pursuing excellence in their work. This book is both an invitation and challenge to managers and non-managers alike to risk a new and Christ-centered way of working. It dares people to trust that the same Christian values which stands one in good stead in life, will also be a firm foundation for living faithfully in the work place.

—Rebecca S. Larson, Executive Director, Division for Church in Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America