College of Business Book Review by Debra Burke

Title: "Gandhi, CEO: 14 Principles to Guide & Inspire Modern Leaders"

Author: Alan Axelrod

Publisher: Sterling

Length: 224 pages

Price: $22.95 (hardcover)

Reading time: 4 hours

Reading rating: 9 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 3.5 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

In his latest project, “Gandhi, CEO: 14 Principles to Guide & Inspire Modern Leaders,” Alan Axelrod extracts from the life of Mohandas Gandhi abiding principles of effective management that may be applied in a corporate setting, and used as a catalyst for organizational progress. Axelrod previously focused on leadership principles that could be distilled from the lives of General George Patton, Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Queen Elizabeth I.

After a brief introduction about the life of Gandhi, the author outlines fourteen principles as chapters, and within each enunciates several lessons from his leadership style. For example, in the examining principles relating to the decision-making process, he urges organizational leaders to embrace transparency, observing that the transparency of Gandhi’s revolution was the secret of its success. In celebrating Gandhi’s genius of noncooperation, he suggests that leaders must earn cooperation, and that in giving everyone a stake in the outcome, principled dissent should be valued as a lesson and not as a threat, because “if everyone is thinking alike, no one is really thinking.”

Gandhi’s campaign for home rule, and ultimately independence, was a methodical march, and in observing this accomplishment, the author suggests that organizational change requires a managed revolution, and that shaking things up for the sake of shaking things up is not itself a desirable end. The author observes that Gandhi acknowledged the reality of its foreign rulers, and that corporate leaders likewise must accept their reality as a part of the process of changing that reality.

Like Gandhi, corporate leaders should embrace their employees as the greatest asset of the enterprise and set a quiet example against which colleagues may measure their attitude and behavior. To this end, enduring leadership must be open be an open book, since a “closed book has little meaning and less value.” In operating as an open book, corporate leaders must demonstrate consistency in principles, valuing both the means and the ends of all actions taken. The author cites examples of Gandhi’s rejection of tyranny and the acceptance of responsibility, as being a behavior worth imitating.

Many of the lessons from Gandhi’s sacrificial style characterize this century’s description of the servant-leader, and the author examines that approach through the lens of this transformational historical figure. The object of Gandhi’s life work was truth, and the author suggests that this value will also spawn the proper ethical framework for a viable corporate culture. While at first blush Gandhi may seem like an unlikely role model for corporate leaders, his life provides valuable insights into effective leadership. Throughout the book, the author documents Gandhi’s opinions and beliefs with specific references to his writings, and seamlessly weaves specific examples from his amazing life together with relevant lessons that may be drawn and applied to any manger’s working environment.

Debra Burke is a professor of Business Law in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. Her research interests include labor and employment law, in addition to legal and regulatory issues affecting business. For previously reviewed books, visit us at our website at www.wcu.edu/cob/.