

Book Review

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DeKoch, B., & Clampitt, P. G. (2022). *Leading With Care in a Tough World: Beyond Servant Leadership*. Rodin Books. 376 pp. ISBN: 978-1957588100

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“You can accomplish by kindness what you cannot accomplish by force” Publilius Syrus

The preceding quote, taken from the book itself, sums up a refreshing perspective of leadership. The *IJBC* reader might say “So what?” (to cite one of Dr. Phillip Clampitt’s favorite questions) because this book simultaneously targets leadership scholars and professionals. Simply put, *Leading with Care in a Tough World: Beyond Servant Leadership*, matters to any *IJBC* reader interested in the positive, ethical co-creation of communication and leadership, both in research and practice. This review explains our evaluation by discussing the book’s key premises, architecture, content overview, and inherent value to key stakeholders in business communication.

Key Premises of *Leading With Care in a Tough World: Beyond Servant Leadership*

Let’s begin with the key premises of this engaging and evidence-based book. It successfully addresses the meta question of how can an effective leader (a person of organizational influence who gets the right things accomplished) be kind and have integrity within a model that embeds business communication. Most of us are familiar with servant leadership (Liden et al., 2014; Spears, 1996), which puts follower development first and is often expressed and perceived through communication (Gutierrez-Wirsching, 2019; Gutierrez-Wirsching et al., 2015), but the authors contend that kindness and follower concern alone are not enough. Leaders must combine empathy and ethical behavior with other qualities that also encompass meeting organizational goals. A valuable balance for this tension forms the book’s model, much of which is sustained through business communication.

This model draws from leadership beliefs that include uncertainty, progress, values, learning, and kindness, and demonstrates how leaders can actualize these beliefs—especially through business communication. Specifically, the first part of this book presents core beliefs/values (beliefs being our mental models of the world from which deep-seated values emerge), such as promoting psychological safety, trust, respectfulness of others, humility, honesty, fairness, and patience. Case in point, the authors

underscore these beliefs/values as journeys and not destinations. Most importantly, the efficacy of these beliefs/values draws from quality research, and the authors consistently demonstrate how they are communicated well. In addition, the authors model how to avoid toxic positivity (the unrealistic suppression of negative feelings and exclusive modeling of positive emotions).

Challenges to holding and expressing these beliefs/values are openly explored as well. This extra step includes feasible strategies for managing these challenges, such as how to respond to push back (dissent included) and guidelines for communicating financial information, even when it is negative from the receiver's perspective. Going further, this book highlights the related questions about how theories and beliefs create synergy with practice within the book's model. The result is a rich and inspiring agenda for agile, virtuous leaders in our VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world (Baran & Woznyj, 2020; Sathyanarayan & Lavanya, 2018).

Architecture and Content Overview of *Leading With Care in a Tough World: Beyond Servant Leadership*

This book is divided into two main parts, beliefs and practices. The authors present five principal attributes of caring leaders' beliefs: embracing uncertainty, progress through exploring and refining, values and identity, lifelong learning, and having confidence that being kind is not soft. The second part of the book—practices of caring leaders—details the qualities of good coaching, fostering a healthy performance climate, robust communication, transforming push back, dynamic relationship building, collaboration as a prequel to negotiation, inclusion, financial performance, envisioning and forging the future, and going beyond servant leadership. All these practices incorporate ethical behaviors too.

The authors write each of these chapters with clarity while weaving theory, reflective models, practical examples, and abundant business communication relevance into their frameworks. For example, the chapter titled *Leading with Kindness is Not Being Soft*, discusses numerous ways to express kindness and poses the critical question of "Do I walk the talk?" along with meaningful suggestions for how to diagnose and bridge congruence-related gaps.

The authors also provide self-reflection questions at the end of each chapter in the second part of the book. These assessments offer springboards for scholars' research agendas and professionals' self-improvement and training/development designs. Many of these instruments align closely with vital, ongoing conversations in our field, particularly about inclusion, change, and financial communication (Aritz & Walker, 2014; Cardon et al., 2019; Palmieri et al., 2018; Ter Hoeven & Van Zoonen, 2020; Walker & Aritz, 2015). In addition, this book has a helpful appendix which includes performance discussion questions and pertinent items to consider.

Relevance and Value of Leading With Care in a Tough World: Beyond Servant Leadership to the Business Communication Community

This book is valuable to business communication scholars, professionals, and instructors. For scholars, the book offers an in-depth road map of contemporary leadership issues, many of which are integrated with communication. The authors also critically analyze and draw these issues from timely and credible evidence. For instance, the discussion about diversity and engagement could be the launching pad for compelling business communication research agendas. Relatedly, for early career business communication academics who want to specialize in leadership communication, the entire book provides a solid grounding in leadership theory.

At the same time, the authors use a conversational style and oriented toward action and measurable outcomes. This writing style makes it highly accessible to business communication professionals, especially those in consulting, training/development, and public relations. And even though the book is not pedagogical, business communication instructors (who often assume scholarly roles) could adopt it for an advanced or graduate-level class. Finally, reading the book may well inspire some lively classroom exercises and lessons for most levels of business communication learning.

Conclusion

In our humble opinions, the greatest strengths of *Leading with Care in a Tough World: Beyond Servant Leadership* are its uniqueness, its positive guidance, and its commendable message. We have the capacity to be caring, ethical, and effective leaders and much of this whitewater journey is successfully navigated through reflective communication.

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