

# BOOK REVIEW:

## *Christian Scripture and Human Resource Management: Building a Path to Servant Leadership through Faith*

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There are multiple books on Servant Leadership, but there are very few, if any, that intersect the leadership theory with the Christian faith and Human Resource Management as Roberts' (2015) has done. Roberts states on the first page of chapter one that the goal of the book is to assist "Christian leaders and managers to assume the mantle of servant leadership in human resource management." This book does just that by providing multiple lists, tables, and advice on how to apply the principles of servant leadership theory to the management of human resources, and I would recommend the book because of these outstanding features. However, the book also falls prey to the idea that Servant Leadership is the theory that is recommended by God and Scripture. Roberts goes as far as saying in the same introductory paragraph of the book that Servant Leadership is "the God-directed and endorsed means for achieving our Great Commandment and Commission missions. Servant Leadership is the approach to leadership promoted by scripture."

The book covers multiple topics that are applicable to individuals involved in human resource management ranging from empowerment and change management to training and development, and compensation. In chapter one Roberts lays a foundation for the book rooting servant leadership theory in scripture, even claiming that it is the foundational leadership principle of Christianity. Roberts even cautions the reader that it would be better to not learn about servant leadership principles than to learn about them without following through and implementing them, invoking Matthew

7:22-23. Yet the chapter does a nice job surveying how servant leadership is also compatible with the other major world religions of Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. Additionally, there are multiple tables and lists highlighting key servant leadership literature and attributes as well as an excellent summary of foundational principles at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 2 is an excellent chapter highlighting examples of servant leadership principles in passages of scripture. A wide range of biblical characters are highlighted ranging from Moses and Nehemiah to Jesus and the disciples, covering topics such as respect for 360-degree authority, courage, and reasoning. It would be an interesting exercise to see if a similar study could be done with other leadership theories such as transformational leadership.

There are sections of three chapters in the rest of the book that stand out as highlights, making this text a worthwhile read. The first is on the change management process. Roberts does a good job of reminding the reader about the spiritual component of the change process by providing multiple principles to increase trust. The next chapter on empowerment includes the very important, yet often overlooked, topic of followership. Roberts enumerates 25 key attributes of servant followership which will be helpful for individuals at all levels of an organization. The third standout section that Roberts includes is performance measurements for volunteers. This is an important topic for those working in many faith-based organizations, but it is rarely discussed or included as a topic in this type of book. A deeper, more thorough

analysis would have been appreciated, but it was encouraging that Roberts had the foresight to include a discussion on volunteers.

Two topics that I was hoping would be covered in greater detail were employee termination and mission stewardship. Roberts approaches the relationship between the leader and follower as a covenantal one. This philosophy is consistently espoused throughout the book reinforcing the importance of the leader-follower relationship beyond being merely transactional in nature. However, there are times when a separation must occur, which Roberts acknowledge. A more thorough analysis of the conflict between this covenant relationship and the principles of stewardship and sustainability would have been appreciated. Closely related to this topic is the interplay between the servant leader and mission stewardship. Roberts states that all of servant leadership rests upon the principle foundation of serving others first, and the literature generally supports this understanding. However, since Roberts and other Christian writers look to Jesus as the quintessential servant leader, there seems to be some conflict as Jesus' priority was to his father and his glory and will over and above that of his followers. A perfect example is found in the story of the death of John the Baptist. To be fair, Roberts acknowledges early in the book that "one cannot be a servant leader and not achieve the mission..." but there is no discussion from

there about how servant leaders should navigate situations when mission objectives and service to others first are in conflict. This is especially necessary when followers are viewed as being in covenant with their leader, yet the leader is also a steward for others (sometimes owners) in the organization.

In summary, this book did a good job of integrating Christian scripture with servant leadership whether or not one agrees with Roberts' assertion that servant leadership theory is God-directed and endorsed. Thus, for two reasons I would recommend this book to human resource leaders interested in embedding servant leadership principles in their organization. First of all, Roberts has included many useful tables and list of principles related to the different topics that a leader would find useful as they are applying some of the topics covered in the book. Secondly, as already mentioned Roberts does an excellent job covering change management, discussing followership and volunteer performance management.

#### REFERENCES

- Roberts, Gary E. (2015). Christian scripture and human resource management: Building a path to servant leadership through faith. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.