
Book Review:

Steward Leadership in the Nonprofit Organization

By: Kent R. Wilson
InterVarsity Press, 2016
216 pages

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Tapping into his deep experience, Dr. Kent Wilson has written a readable and well researched book suggesting that leaders in nonprofit firms should embrace steward leadership. Nonprofit leadership, he claims, is a little different from business leadership because the primary identity of the nonprofit leader is as a steward of resources that belong to others. Therefore, steward leadership should be the model for nonprofit leaders.

Wilson develops his argument persuasively. He first discusses the historic role of stewards in the Greco-Roman world, ending with nine characteristics that apply to contemporary management such as continual learning, ability to motivate others, and so forth. Next he uses biblical integration to show how Biblical (Hebrew) stewardship differs from the classic ideal. A critical requisite for a good steward in both systems is to be trustworthy to the owner and to the people managed. However, Wilson argues, Biblical stewards, in addition, are accountable to God. “People fulfill their stewardship by ruling as the image of God—peaceful and benevolent—according to the pattern set by the divine owner” (p. 52).

A strength of the book is the clarity with which Wilson presents his thesis. Comparison charts and graphs are presented throughout; these make the key points easy to understand. Another strength is Wilson’s masterful presentation of the different leadership models, how they apply to each other and how they apply to Steward Leadership. For example, he shows in detail how the Steward Leadership model differs from Servant Leadership. Ultimately he concludes that Servant Leadership is a subset of Steward Leadership.

These strengths, plus a well-articulated discussion of how non-profit leadership differs from business leadership, make the book valuable for scholars and students of leadership. Practitioners would also benefit. Throughout the book, Wilson has current nonprofit leaders discussing the issues they face. This ‘reality check’ adds a valuable practical element to the book.

At 216 pages, this book is a useful supplement for leadership or organizational behavior classes at both the graduate and the undergraduate level. It summarizes the leadership material expertly, makes a persuasive case for Steward Leadership, and presents the practical implications of the model.