

The Amaryllis Way: Growing Leaders Who Grow Leaders, by Derrick Mueller, is clearly the product of much observation and thought about organic leadership development. Indeed, Derrick Mueller is a leadership consultant, trainer and motivational speaker, focusing on the way leaders are “grown” like a garden. Additionally, he has a bachelor’s degree in communication and counseling, a master’s degree in administration with a major in organizational leadership and a doctorate in Ministry. These opportunities, in addition to his position as president of Emmanuel Bible College, have shaped his philosophy of leadership development. This philosophy is more than what the traditional business book would teach, drawing upon Mueller’s counseling and ministry backgrounds as well as his understanding of business. Indeed, this book picks up the new rally cry of recent business literature – relationship – and applies it to yet another sphere - leadership development.

As I’ve alluded to already, the overall theme of The Amaryllis Way is that leadership development should be an organic process, where an older leader takes someone with potential under their wing and teaches them all they know, being available for questions along the way. And one of the primary lessons the mentor will teach is the necessity of continuing the chain, by having the mentee eventually become the teacher to someone else. But throughout the story there are numerous other lessons that come out, all harmoniously

presented within the gardening metaphor.

The smaller lessons that comprise most of the story are both biblical and reasonable. A few examples include: “connection and relationship are keys to developing personally, the first step to a desired future,” “there is wisdom in getting others to interact and improve on the plan,” “to plow is to cultivate deeply and to cultivate deeply is to create connections

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and relationships with those with whom you work . . . it is to prepare an environment which will enhance growth,” and “it’s a leader’s job to plow in the compost, to take the failures and disappointments as lessons and use them as soil for new growth and new initiatives.”

Although the Amaryllis Way is a short book – 140 pages in all – it does include reflection questions, which, I found very thought provoking and which could be an excellent tool for leaders, especially those

mentoring future leaders.

Mueller presents his philosophy in the form of a parable, a more personal genre in congruence with his leadership philosophy. The points of relationship and teaching by example are powerfully portrayed through the parable, however, Mueller includes so many ideas in the parable, that the format somewhat detracts from the clarity of the lessons he is trying to teach. As I read, I could tell that Mueller is passionate about what he wrote and excited about all the various lessons you can learn by looking at leadership development from the perspective of a gardener cultivating his plants, but the excitement wasn’t matched by clear structure or a comprehensive summary at the end. Additionally, Mueller’s characters are flat and thus hard to identify with. Although great writing would have been nice, it is not a necessity. The fact is that what Mueller is trying to teach through the parable is worth enough to make up for the shortcomings of the story.

After reading the Amaryllis way, one can’t help but either wish for such a mentor, or be grateful for those who have taken you under their wing. I think Mueller also wants his readers to respond by reaching out to someone with less experience and helping them grow. Even though this book is not a great piece of literature, it does convey the wisdom of a man who coaches leaders for a living and is zealous about what that should look like.