

Book Review: The Longview: Lasting Strategies for Rising Leaders

by Carrie Cavanaugh



I'd never thought of the distinction between vulnerability and humility before. But The Longview has a chapter dedicated to just that and explains when each is appropriate. This is just one of the more unique insights that Roger Parrott shares in this book on leadership. There are some great books on leadership and there are some that fall far short as they present predictable advice; The Longview is well-worth a read in that it covers ground that other books fail to address.

Roger Parrott, author of The Longview: Lasting Strategies for Rising Leaders, is the president of Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi. At thirty-four, he is one of the nation's youngest college presidents, but as his book attests, his youth doesn't indicate any lack of wisdom. Roger has a PhD in higher education administration from the University of Maryland. In addition to leading Belhaven, he is active in advising a variety of ministries in the US and abroad, such as the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, Mission America Coalition, and Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

Parrott also practices what he preaches; Belhaven College has been identified as a Best Christian Workplace based on a thorough faculty and staff engagement survey. The survey results identify Belhaven's leadership in the top

quartile of Christian Colleges and Universities in communication effectiveness and leadership character. Faculty and staff feel Dr. Parrott is transparent in both frequency and depth of communication. Perhaps most importantly, they feel communication is two-way street.

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The chapter titles of The Longview give a good indication of the wisdom held within its pages: “Lead as if You’ll be there Forever,” “Deflate Your Ego to Expand Your Influence,” “Vulnerability May Get You In, But Humility Keeps You There,” and “Keep Your Eyes on the Horizon and in the Rearview Mirror,” to name a few.

The Longview derives its title from and begins with good theological

justification, “We live in a quick-fix, immediate-impact, short-view world. But we serve a longview God.” How true it is that one of the attributes of God that we should be a witness of to the world is His faithfulness. It may not be the world's definition of success, but I agree with Parrott that it is what pleases our King. Even the secular world is catching on to the drawbacks of a multi-career perspective; The Harvard Business Review concluded, “Nobody these days gets much time to show what he or she can do.” Parrott goes on to explain, “For many, it might be discouraging to truly feel ‘locked in’ to your job. But contrary to the mantras of popular career gurus, this is one of the best things that could ever happen to you and your ministry, because only from that immobile position will your outlook on leadership be revolutionized.” Of course we need the opportunity to grow and advance, but knowing that you will be with an organization for years to come does change the way you look at the long-range goals and good of an organization.

Another chapter, “Deflating Your Ego to Expand Your Influence” addresses the problems that come with personality driven leadership and conversely the strength that a humble leader can give to their organization. Parrott points to the all-too-familiar trend of charismatic pastors of mega-churches falling in disgrace and devastating their

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churches. Parrott then explains that from a biblical perspective leaders are pretty far down on the hierarchy: 1) God, 2) The mission, 3) The People you serve, 4) The team of employees who do the work, and 5) The leaders who serve the team. This is a good list for any leader to keep before them to develop an attitude like Christ of servant-leadership. Four suggestions are given in how to move away from ego in one's leadership: Keep Quiet, Seek Balance, Ambition is Ok, and Confront Sin. In these suggestions I appreciate Parrott's balance in putting others first, but also not giving up on being all that God has called you to be for His glory. Again, the Harvard Business Review affirms the blessing a humble leader can be to his organization, "Those who make it to the top – and stay there peacefully – all share a remarkable sense of proportion and a high degree of self-awareness, despite widely different personality and management styles. Their secret? Powerfully modest habits of mind and behavior."

Another important facet of humility that Parrott mines out is that, "In an effort to be seen as humble, many leaders have wrongfully substituted vulnerability for humility, and in doing so turned a self-centered spotlight on themselves, laying the groundwork for leadership deterioration." He further explains that although employees may at

first appreciate the sense of equality that vulnerability affords and a leader may enjoy the sense of acceptance that comes with this openness, they will in the long-run limit their influence and forfeit their long-term viability. Although leaders have struggles just like the rest of us, Parrott asserts that not revealing those to the world is one of the sacrifices one assumes when becoming a leader. So, how does one achieve humility without giving in to the vulnerability, the "cheap imitation of humility"? The answer lies on one's motives; "leaders who wish to come across as vulnerable are often ego centered and thus prone to more serious problems because their attempt to be vulnerable deflects attention from an internal or external probing of more serious issues."

Many leadership books emphasize the power of recognizing your staff, but this is the first that has given some helpful qualifications on how to do that in a way that doesn't become cliché, "To give credit away meaningfully, leaders need to personalize the recognition they give and express it when it is not expected." Something as simple as telling someone you appreciate their work over a cup of coffee or a hand-written note fall under this category. Also, making the person feel that they are the one thing you are focused on means a lot. Of course there is also a place for more formal recognition in front of

others, but Parrott warns to be careful not to make this formulaic.

One of the hardest things about being a leader is being the bearer of bad news. Parrott explains the importance of not sugar-coating things. He explains that it helps staff to know that they can trust their leader to lead them through the challenge if he is honest from the start; "Houston we have a problem . . ." is the correct way to start the explanation.

Leaders are often involved in policy making and Parrott addresses a weakness that can occur in this process as leaders react to problems and create policy as a result. He encourages leaders to ask, "Does this policy serve your good employees?" Just because one employee abused the system doesn't mean that a policy needs to be implemented that could discourage the rest of the staff. This is just one of a chapter full of suggestions regarding policy development.

It was fun to read The Longview since I live in Jackson, Mississippi and know a number of alumni and staff at the university. It's been clear that there is a high degree of respect for the institution and its leader amongst those in the community, which I find as no surprise having read this book. Parrott is clearly a thoughtful leader who is living for something greater than himself.