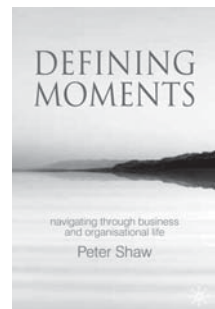


# Defining Moments: Navigating through Business and Organisational life

Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, hardback, 256 pages, £24.70  
ISBN 978-0-230-57720-6



# Effective Christian Leaders in the Global Workplace

Paternoster Publishing, 2009, paperback, £10.99  
ISBN -13: 978-1-93406-884-7

both by Peter Shaw



■ reviewed by James Allcock OBE

**D***efining Moments* is aimed at people at any stage of their careers in business, the public services and the voluntary sector who are already in positions of leadership or aspire to be. It is not an academic discussion of the issues which face people in employment. One of its great strengths is that it is written by a man with wide experience of very senior positions in the Civil Service and who is now an Executive Coach and Partner in Preasta Partners. The author can be 'met' by turning up the website of this company. He is also Visiting Professor of Leadership Development at Newcastle University Business School and a Reader in the Anglican Church. The Foreword is a warm endorsement of the book by Dame Leslie Strathie, Permanent Secretary, HM Revenue and Customs.

The aim of the book is to help people of all ages and at all stages of their careers to flourish as people and to realise their potential. Surely we all want to do that and this is the appeal of the book. It proceeds by examining six areas of our experience to help us to identify and deal with the road-blocks, the self-inflicted wounds and the failures to realise the truth of our situation which together inhibit our personal development and our progress in our chosen field of work.

The first section is about realising the truth about our own abilities and the situation in which we find ourselves. The second is about reflection; taking time to savour successful outcomes and to avoid hasty decisions about matters of consequence. The third is about dealing with frustration, crisis situations and handling our anger so that the outcome is creative. The fourth is really about acceptance; acceptance of the welcome and the unwelcome and the analysis of what we learn from these experiences so that they have permanent value. The fifth is about the discovery of and the development of our creativity so that it blooms in our working lives. The sixth (which I found difficult to understand) is about cutting out the surrounding noise which distracts us and finding a comfortable, sustainable and efficient rhythm to our working life. Each subject is copiously illustrated with case studies and ends with practical questions to help us to progress.

Now I come from a generation that knew nothing of executive counselling or the kind of advice that this book offers. I cannot imagine the first Permanent Secretary for whom I worked (Sir David Pitblado, who had been Churchill's secretary) writing a Foreword to a book like this. These issues could not be discussed. Brace up, pull ►►

▶▶ yourself together and just get on with it is the only advice we were likely to get to wing us on our way. I don't naturally warm to this kind of book. But as I read on, more and more incidents - defining moments indeed - came flooding into my mind from my own career.

When I failed the Foreign Office exam; when I was sacked for insubordination; when I was so frustrated I paced up and down all night in my digs; when I was kept as a kind of mascot in the private office of the chairman of a nationalised industry and didn't know what to do; when I worked for a towering autocrat who would brook no point of view but his own and didn't know how to handle the situation; and many more. I really could have done with the friendship and advice of Peter Shaw *on many occasions* at times like these. My career would have been very different.

I have no doubt that many of you reading this review are harbouring anxieties, frustrations and secret hopes about your careers. Maybe you have no one at the moment to whom you can talk about these things. I guess the book is cheaper than an interview with Peter Shaw at Praesta Partners so if I were you I would start with this book!

When I read *Defining Moments* I thought there was the shadow of another book on every page: a book specifically to help committed Christians to handle Christianly their own development as persons and the issues they face in the secular world of work. I expressed the hope that one day he would write it, and then discovered that he has (plus a dozen or so more on related topics): *Effective Christian Leaders in the Global Workplace*.

Again there is a commendation from the senior ranks of the Civil Service, this time Sir Hugh Taylor, Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health. He writes "If as Christians with leadership responsibilities at work we are not living out, experiencing and drawing on our faith when we are at work, we are diminishing ourselves and, more importantly, the work of the Holy Spirit in what is necessarily a big part of our lives." This book is written to help save us from precisely that.

Again it has in mind those who work in the private, public or voluntary sectors and draws on the wisdom of numerous people in positions of leadership. And again, each

section includes questions for reflection. The book takes us through four Rs:

*Rooted*: who and what are your beliefs, values and actions rooted in?

*Radical*: how best do you live and act at a time of economic and global change in a way that applies Christian principles at work and ensures that difficult decisions are made well?

*Reflective*: how do you listen, learn and keep nourished, retaining a good balance of life while coping effectively with failure and disappointment?

*Renewed*: how do you ensure that you keep learning and thinking ahead about your contribution and the use of your gifts, time and energy - with an openness to taking next steps according to the prompting of the Holy Spirit?

Notice these are all questions. In the end readers are invited to answer the questions about their own lives for themselves. But the book provides a wealth of biblically based analysis of the issues we face as Christians. Let me whet the appetite. "When is toughness or forgiveness the right Christian response?" Ever faced that one? I think so! Or what about "what is the right balance for you in the future in terms of how explicit you are about your faith and when you would choose to talk about it?" Ever wondered about that? I hope so. The author is offering to help us with these and many other pertinent issues.

It is not a book which *deals explicitly with political or 'green' issues*. It does not tell you whether, for example, Christians should support the limited liability principle, or companies source supplies provided by child labour, or what is the proper share of wealth that should go to the country owning the resource, or whether we should eschew fossil fuels in favour of renewable ones. But all these issues are implicit in the section on radicalism.

My own experience tells me that we need not wonder if we are known to be Christian. Our colleagues know instinctively that we march to the beat of a different drum. And they are endlessly intrigued to see what being a Christian means in the workplace. To face this challenge we need all the help we can find. Frankly, because of its explicitly Christian basis, this book interested me more than the other. I'm sure it would interest you too. The amount of material is a bit overwhelming. To derive the most benefit from it, I would recommend reading it in chunks and thinking about it before moving on. ■

James Allcock

James Allcock OBE spent his career in the energy industry, culminating in his being Director of Gas Supplies at British Gas.

