

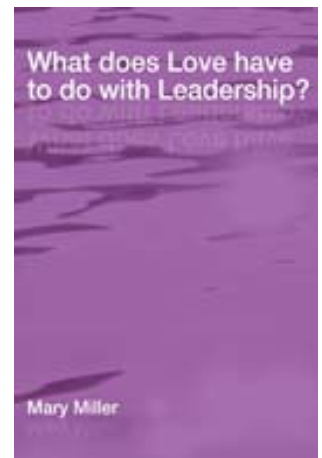
What does Love have to do with Leadership?

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by Mary Miller

■ reviewed by Terry Garde



Let me start with a confession: I spent my entire management and leadership life getting my teams to reach and maintain standards of performance; and if the question posed in the title of Mary Miller's book had been asked of me, it would have been met with a bemused shrug and likely response 'Very little, if anything at all!'

Christ's command to love one another as he loved us was kept in the confines of my marriage, family, and selected folk at church on Sundays and midweek bible studies. But from the time I stepped out of the car at work on Monday mornings till the following weekend, my entire world of work was based on performance, on attaining daily production, cost and safety targets in the never-ending quest of mine management. And I was successful in worldly terms, rising from a learner mine surveyor to managing director of a large chrome mining and smelting company in Zimbabwe. But love? If anything I could claim conditional love, in that if my colleagues and subordinates reached the requisite high standards they were on side; otherwise they were judged and found wanting. What I thought of then as the alternative, unconditional love (agape) has virtually no place in business or any organisation where work is based on a contract of employment setting out enforceable performance conditions. So, what does Mary Miller have to say in support of her book's provocative title?

Mary, a strong Christian, is an Affiliate Professor in the Master of Arts in Curriculum Instruction (MACI) program at Colorado Christian University; President of Women Mentoring at Work; and a Board Member of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. This book is a summary of her PhD thesis in Transforming Leadership theory, mostly informed by research done in organisations using the methods of Action Science pioneered by Chris Argyris. This slim volume is split into two sections; the first three chapters give a theoretical and conceptual framework for love and leadership, and the final four chapters are about implementing transformation. Ms. Miller is convinced that what it means to be transformational can be learned and applied 'within your own unique cultural and organisational context.' (p2)

Miller argues that in choosing to transform an organisation, including the leader and followers, love is a value that can be implemented. The first chapter identifies love as a general basis for empowerment and thus sets the scene for what follows. The second chapter asks what kind of love should be implemented in leadership and if love is not dependent on emotions, what then? Drawing on Fromm and Frankl, Miller maintains that leaders must deliberately choose to function in love, not being reliant upon the personal feelings created by the behaviour of the followers; and this functioning in volitional love as empathy on the part of the leader can be perceived by the follower. This harmonises well with the overall message of the New Testament to love one's neighbour. In Chapter Three, Miller explains how leaders can value

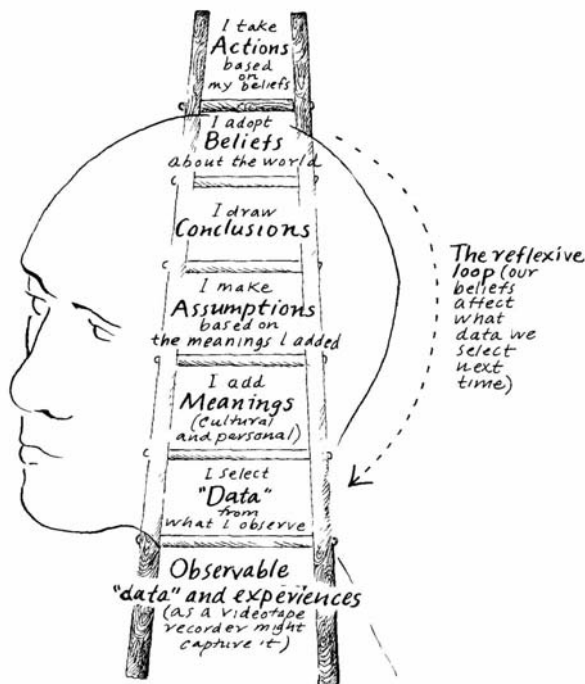


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►► transformation; however prior to implementation of this value, we need to make an internal decision to act in love. Two concepts from Argyris are used to help leaders: one to understand their thinking in reaching a decision and, two, how learning takes place through reflecting upon consequences of actions based on values. I would add a further step prior to making a decision, and that is to pray about it, preferably overnight.

In the 'practical' section, starting with Chapter Four, Miller first applies Argyris' 'Ladder of Inference' to the technique of empathetic listening, i.e. using communication with followers to allow leaders to gather information regarding meanings, assumptions, conclusions and beliefs held by both parties in order to learn. Miller's thinking has progressed from love as a power; through love functioning as empathy-in-action; through how to decide on adopting love as a value-in-use to the act of listening; all on the part of the leader. Then, Chapter Five looks at the medium of interaction between leaders and followers, and argues for the leader to adopt one of mutual exchange where there is little power difference between the two parties. In fact



Argyris' 'Ladder of Inference'

mutuality should enable power sharing, which Miller believes allows organisational transformation across cultures. Chapter Six discusses the potential for creating a learning environment based on all the foregoing behaviours on the part of leadership, particularly mutuality, and introduces aspects of team building and succession. Miller closes her book in Chapter Seven expressing a desire for qualitative measures that will track the positive consequences of this transformation in leadership. She believes that 'to the extent we choose to be transformational in our approach towards others, to that extent we will be impacting others with love' (p90) hence answering the question she poses in the title of the book!

There is no question that Miller has found a way for Christian leaders to fulfil the command to love each other as I have loved you; e.g. we believe Christ functions in love; we believe we have direct access to God through prayer; we believe God hears our prayers; we believe we are on His team to transform the world and finally that we are always growing spiritually.

Unfortunately the change from thesis to book is marred by heavy handed editing which should be rectified if the book sells well enough to warrant further print runs, as I sincerely hope it will. This is not another autobiographical book written by a successful leader; as Mary Miller says, this approach is not always weighed against theory or informed by research into leadership. Instead, Miller's approach via principles and research findings allows for significant reflection on the part of the Christian reader.

I am now in my sixties, my management days are behind me, and Mary Miller's surprise book answered a question I never asked, even as a fellow Christian, about love and leadership in the context of work. Yet, beyond work, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 provide principles of love in leadership that can be applied to any sphere of influence, even Christian approaches to research! These concepts are very deep for me and it may take the rest of my life to absorb the lesson that love listens, so ably unbundled in this fine book. Thank you Mary Miller! ■