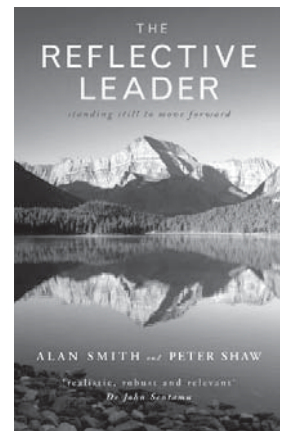


The Reflective Leader: Standing Still to Move Forward

Canterbury Press, 2011, paperback, xvii + 133 pages, £12.99
ISBN 978-1-84825-083-3

by Alan Smith & Peter Shaw

■ reviewed by Tim Harle



When MODEM convened an expert group from churches and business schools to identify the best books on leadership, they received a last minute nomination from an internet café in East Africa. The nomination was hardly precise: something about reflective practice by a bishop and someone else. Research identified the bishop as Alan Smith of St Albans and someone else as senior civil servant turned executive coach (and prolific author) Peter Shaw. They combined their not inconsiderable experience and wisdom to write *The Reflective Leader*.

Few books manage to refer to Jane Austen and Shrewsbury Town FC in a single sentence. This one does (p.126). That gives an indication both of its breadth and the authors' self-confessed activist tendencies. In sharing learning, rather than a natural inclination, they offer help to those who find reflection difficult.

Smith and Shaw begin by noting that reflection is essential for effective leadership: 'To be reflective is to be curious'. They gently introduce their Christian heritage through the Rule of St Benedict and Pastoral Rule of St Gregory the Great. Echoing a point from Gregory, reflected by recent authors such as Henri Nouwen, they suggest that contemplation comes before action.

As we have come to expect from Shaw, the book has a solid structure. Four main

sections each contains seven short chapters. Each chapter begins with a narrative of leadership. Each ends with questions for reflection. The format is designed for busy leaders, and makes the book easy to pick up and use in short sessions. The total of 31 chapters suggests reading, and reflecting on, a chapter daily for a month.

The flow of the book follows a pattern familiar from Greek philosophers through Descartes to today's individualised Western society. It begins with knowing yourself, before moving on to understanding others, creating a team, and reading context.

The chapter headings are hardly distinctive: create a positive culture, know your strengths. But there are surprises, such as the importance of a good crisis. The opening chapter, know what you are trying to do, sounds suspiciously activist, but emphasizes the balance between practice and reflection that runs through the book. In this regard, the authors compare favourably with Donald Schön's *Reflective Practitioner*, which is seen as a standard text.

Three closing chapters offer next steps. They are introduced by questions, beginning with, what happens when you stand and stare? Here the authors pick up an important point highlighted by Stephen Cottrell in *Hit the Ground Kneeling*. It provides the paradoxical advice encapsulated in the book's subtitle. ►►

Tim Harle is a Visiting Fellow at Bristol Business School, a Lay Canon of Bristol Cathedral and Vice-Chair of MODEM (www.timharle.net).



To return to the email from Africa, what would someone brought up in a culture of *ubuntu* make of this book? The *Reflective Leader's* questions appear designed for personal answer, rather than group discussion. Those who recognise the value of conversation, of group identity, of collective wisdom, of connecting with the surrounding environment, may want to turn this book on its head. To quote a plaque in the coffee shop in which this review took shape: sit long, talk much, laugh often.

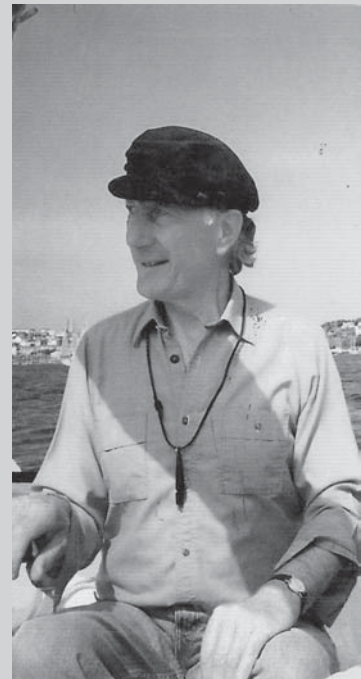
But the end result may not be too different. It is the cumulative effect of the book's encouragement to ask questions rather than the power of a single big idea that marks it out. Both those stepping out into leadership and those who consider themselves seasoned leaders could benefit from it. ■

You can read about the outcome of the best 21st century leadership books project at <http://www.modem-uk.org/bestbooks.html>.

Sandy Landale

We are sorry to announce the death of one of FiBQ's keenest subscribers and a veteran hero of the 'faith and work' movement.

Sandy Landale was born in 1932 and grew up in rural Dorset. After National Service he studied Agriculture and Economics at Cambridge and felt called to the priesthood, but his father persuaded him to do an ordinary job first. He took a temporary post with the West Midlands Engineering Employers Federation and was so captivated by the call to serve God in industry that he stayed there for the rest of his career. In some ways this was surprising, because the engineering sector in the 1960 and 70s was ridden with conflict between management and unions, and Sandy was a peace-loving man who hated conflict. Yet the grace of God was evident in the way he lived and worked beyond his comfort zone; he developed a theology to sustain him, drawing much inspiration from Colossians 1:17 and the Christ who 'is before all things' and 'holds all things together'.



Sandy was active in many faith and work initiatives, starting with Bruce Reed and Christian Teamwork in the late 1950s. He was a prominent figure in the conferences run by the UCCF Business Studies Group with the LICC in the 1980s, and played a major role in the establishment of the God on Monday Project (as Faith in Business was then called) at Ridley Hall in 1989. He was a great source of courteous encouragement to me in those early days. From him I learnt the importance of relating every major Christian doctrine to the world of business – from creation and fall, via the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus, through to the 'last things'. He served on the Faith in Business Management Team for 15 years, and spoke at a Ridley Hall conference as recently as 2006.

Sandy had a strong concept of lay ministry and was an active Lay Reader in Worcester diocese for nearly 50 years. His wide variety of interests included gardening, poetry and sailing. He supported Tim Royle in the setting up of the Lindley Educational Trust, and with his wife Liz ran many Christian houseparties.

Sandy died on March 23 2012 after a protracted and courageous battle with cancer. We offer our condolences to Liz and their four children. Their eldest son James will be familiar to many readers; he is the BBC's Deputy Political Correspondent. At Sandy's thanksgiving service James ended his tribute by saying 'we have lost a man whose judgment we trusted, whose good opinion we sought, and whose wisdom we relied on. It was an honour to have known him. It was a privilege to have loved him.' I couldn't agree more.

Richard Higginson