

# Leading the Millennial Way

By Simon Barrington with Rachel Luetchford

SPCK, London, 2019, 174 pp. Paperback, £9.99. ISBN 978-0-281-08077-9.

This is a book that starts well, but ultimately promises less than it delivers, and is beset by some serious problems concerning methodology.

Its fundamental idea, to explore the attitudes of the millennial generation, with a particular focus on how they receive leadership and exercise leadership, is excellent. It is based on face-to-face interviews with 50 millennials and a further 442 online. Millennials are defined as people who reached young adulthood in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, men and women born between 1984 and 2000.

The book is the result of a fruitful collaboration between Simon Barrington, a non-millennial leader (actually a Baby Boomer) who was CEO of the relief organisation Samaritan's Purse and is now a consultant with Forge Leadership, and Rachel Luetchford, who is very much a millennial and works to provide restorative aftercare for survivors of human trafficking.

Part One, 'The environment millennials are leading in', provides a sketch of the contemporary work context and how the attitudes of millennials are shaping this. For instance, many organisations are becoming more flexible about conditions of work, not only because of the advance of communications technology, but also because the younger generation are demanding a healthier work-life balance, and refuse to accept that commitment means a readiness to

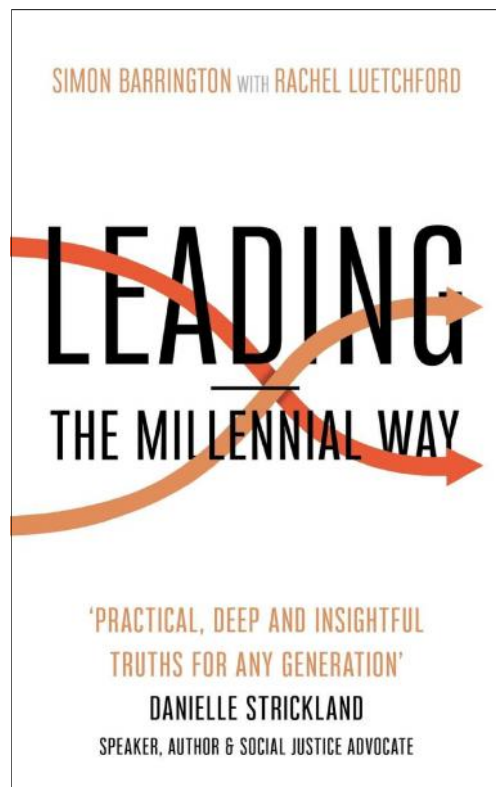
stay in the office later than 5.30. The authors contend that millennials have been unfairly stereotyped as slackers, self-centred, disloyal, concerned with instant gratification and lacking in respect for authority. They are better understood as direct, seeking instant feedback and wishing

is not 'What do you do?' but 'Who are you?' This underlying belief causes us to generate towards businesses that are ethically conscious and good corporate citizens, finding those businesses attractive to work in" (p.33).

Part Two, 'Marks of the millennial leader', introduces us to the five 'I's' of leadership. The research reveals that millennial leaders want to:

1. Be secure in their **identity** but are really wrestling with their need for approval
2. Lead with **integrity** but are wrestling with the fear of failure
3. Be fully alive yet are wrestling with how to have the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual **inner strength**
4. Create space for **insight** and creativity, but are wrestling with whole-life balance and blurred boundaries
5. Have a strong desire to **influence** and make a difference with how to do that well.

These are certainly admirable aspirations. The authors are refreshingly honest about the obstacles to achieving them but full of practical advice about how these obstacles can be overcome. This is the strongest part of the book. It includes such gems as 'In the same way that our fear can lead to the very result we fear (fear of not being liked leading to not being liked, fear of failure leading to failure), the cure for the fears that hold us back from



to see each work instalment as fitting on the path of a greater purpose. Rachel says "The massive challenge for millennials is to make the whole of society part of this transformation towards purpose, so that people in my generation don't have to leave to join a charity, because businesses will all be driven towards long-term sustainability" (p.16). She comments: "The key question for us



**Millennial businesspeople**

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being vulnerable is equally circular: being vulnerable’ (p.75).


In Part Three the authors concentrate on the 5<sup>th</sup> of their ‘I’s’, Influence. Here I felt that the book tailed away somewhat. This is partly because Simon seems to take over and the distinctive voice of Rachel gets lost to view. This is somewhat ironic: we are supposed to be listening to millennials, but the Baby Boomer takes over as their medium of communication.

More fundamentally, I have real problems with the way that the research on which this book was based has been used. The authentic, distinctive voices of the 50 interviewees scarcely come through at all. Generalised statements about millennials are simply made on the basis of what they said. On the rare occasions when an individual is cited

they are usually given a different name. For instance, on pp.58–60 we hear the fascinating story of the CEO of an anti-trafficking charity but she is introduced as ‘we will call her Megan’. Perhaps the interviewees requested anonymity but if so this seems to be at odds with their alleged concern for directness, authenticity and transparency. When Kina Robertshaw and I interviewed 50 Christian entrepreneurs for our book *A Voice to be Heard* all but a handful were willing to be identified by their proper names – and this was from a mainly older generation. There is a curious contrast here.

My other concern is the muted nature of the Christian perspective. Apparently most of the millennials interviewed were Christians, but the impact their faith makes on their attitudes doesn’t come through at all. Simon and Rachel are up front

about the fact that they’re Christians, and occasionally indicate the difference this makes; for instance, Simon says that his pastor has been a great help as a mentor. But in a book published by SPCK, one is entitled to expect much more by way of Christian input, critique and commentary on such issues as identity, integrity and inner strength. Indeed, the claims made by SPCK in their supporting blurb are simply not borne out by the contents of the book. The blurb says that the research drawn on in the book showed that the church ‘has been hugely significant in the development of millennial leadership opportunities, often stretching millennials beyond what they felt ready for’.

If this is true, that is very good news indeed. But why be so reticent about citing the detailed findings that justify such a claim? 



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