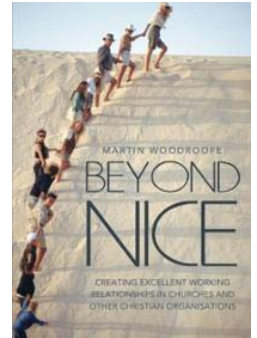


Beyond Nice

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■ **by Martin Woodrofe**
reviewed by Robin McKenzie



I was humoured by the title of this book when it arrived. My own business related research was based on a book entitled *Beyond....*, and clearly Martin Woodrofe has used this as a hook for management academics and practitioners. Woodrofe's main concern is his perception that Christian organisations are reluctant to confront properly the difficult issues within their organisation. Instead, he contends, people look to be "nice" to one another with disastrous effects in due course. This avoidance behaviour is counter-productive in that people are very far from being nice. Woodrofe's aim is to improve leadership and relationships, as seen in the book's subtitle, *Creating Excellent Working Relationships in Churches and Other Christian Organisations*.

Beyond Nice is divided into three sections. The first section includes eight reasonably long chapters, each one looking at a different issue within Christian organisations, including relationships, agendas, leaders and followers, professionalism, and volunteerism. Each chapter has a similar format in that there is a discussion of the issue, followed by a managerial tool that could be used, concluding with a suitable story to illustrate.

Section 2 is a biblical review of mostly gospel material looking at the life of Jesus. This is grouped into seven much shorter chapters, starting with *What Did Jesus Do?*, and including *Authority and Expectations*, *Confronting Difficult Issues*, and *Personal Responsibility*. The biblical insights here are a series of short reviews of selected passages. These, in general, are indeed related to the chapter title.

Section 3 includes eight chapters plus a conclusion. Here Woodrofe identifies some areas of human resource management such as the need for good interviewing, encouraging healthy relationships, hiring appropriate leaders and then supporting them, and finding ways to encourage and grow volunteers. This last

section of the book is based on interviews with 36 English-speaking chief executives of Christian organisations or senior executives in other organisations who have Christian faith. Two thirds are UK based, with a good clutch of US based people, together with a smattering of Europe based people, and two Australians. Woodrofe draws lessons from one or two of his interviews and concludes each with a helpful *How Can I Apply This?* Section 3 has the greatest authority within the book, probably because the thinking and tools outlined are part and parcel of Woodrofe's professional expertise. He tells us that he has had 25 years of hiring people for organisations.

I would like to have had more guidance in some areas of the book: clearer links between chapters; the theological thinking sometimes feels somewhat thin; and he makes the implicit error of suggesting that business has a monopoly in excelling in managerial practice. However, my major concerns are twofold.

First, I was unconvinced by Woodrofe's main argument. I believe the issues that he identifies in church life are the result of poor managerial understanding and practice. In my observation and experience, it is these failings that give rise to the need for church leaders to be "Nice".

Second, it seemed that the 25 years worth of experience appears to have been discounted as a source of inspiration. I would love to have read stories and cases from his experience, and his theological comments and feelings on these experiences. The book therefore feels rather more lightweight than it perhaps should be, given the excellent pedigree of the author.

I wish to commend any new author on their efforts. It is always difficult to take the woolly fuzz of ideas that drives authors to set down something of what they believe in. For attempting to do so, Woodrofe deserves credit. I hope that this offering is the not the last time that he puts electronic pen to paper. ■

*Robin McKenzie is a former editor of this journal and a vicar in Fenstanton, a village near Cambridge. His background is in engineering, marketing and business research. He has recently written a companion book to one of the foundation courses he teaches, *Product design and Engineering: An Introduction to Definitions, History, Theory and Cases*, published on Amazon Kindle.*

