

# Beautiful Leadership: Your Personal Framework for Authentic Impact

By Dawn Stallwood

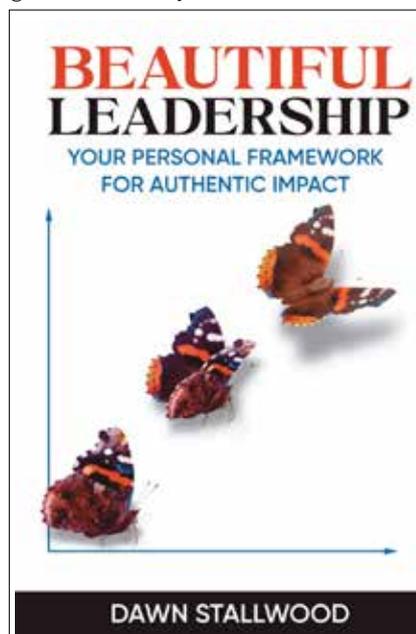
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Dawn Stallwood is deeply appreciated by those who have participated in Faith in Business over the last few years. An active and highly effective Trustee, she has spoken at several retreats and meetings of Faith in Business Monthly. She has now taken one of the recent annual themes, Beauty at Work, and turned it into a near-comprehensive book about Leadership. I hope that *Beautiful Leadership* will be widely read by FiBQ readers. It deserves to be.

Dawn (I will use her first name as I know her) is a leadership counsel, deal negotiator, collaborative expert, international lawyer and notary. She is a trusted advisor of existing leaders and facilitator of emerging leaders. She therefore has a great deal of varied experience on which she draws to good effect. The book is intended for three groups of ‘fantastic’ people: those currently in leadership roles, those who aspire to leadership positions and those who follow or support leaders. Its orientation is mainly towards business (and most of Dawn’s examples are from business) but the principles of leadership discussed apply to other areas of life as well.

Dawn identifies (the word she uses) as a Christian, having come back to faith in 2013. She states at the start that this informs her approach to leadership but she holds back on showing how until the end of the book; chapter 22 explores in depth ‘The Faith Connection’. She writes ‘After much deliberation with family, trusted advisers and business friends, I decided to consolidate my faith-based reflections into a single chapter.

Some wanted it at the front, others at the back. It has been a lively debate’ (p.331). I think she made a wise decision. The book will hopefully be read by a wider audience because she isn’t constantly expressing a Christian ground for every recommendation.



The distinctive feature of Beautiful Leadership is its clear and simple structure. Dawn uses the letters of the title to spell out nine beautiful qualities and ten leadership practices. These correspond to the left and right wings of a red admiral, the emblem of the book, which she sees as a ‘potent symbol for growth and transformation’ (p.15). The nine qualities are:

- Brave
- Empathy
- Authenticity
- Unpretentious and Uplifting
- Transparency
- Imperfection
- Faithfulness to Role

- Unifying
- Lead to Serve (and to Love)

The ten practices are:

- Listening, to Learn
- Execution
- Adaptation
- Difficulty
- Empowerment
- Resilience
- Space and Setting Boundaries
- Hold
- Improvement
- Practise, with Purpose

A chapter of the book is devoted to each one: defining, exploring, illustrating, recognising challenges, asking questions and offering advice. Dawn is highly transparent (appropriately, since it is a quality she commends) and is frank about the ones she herself finds difficult to practise.

In reality, the qualities and practices tend to merge into each other, so the distinction between the two is rather artificial, and there is a good deal of overlap between several, which contributes to an element of repetition. Arguably, that is no bad thing, because it means that Dawn reinforces her key points. Most of the qualities/practices are unsurprising and would feature in many other books and articles on leadership. But a few stand out and are therefore worthy of comment.

I liked what Dawn wrote about Imperfection. She says that good leaders are honest about and own their imperfections. ‘Leadership is an experiential discipline. It is one of striving, failing, learning, and trying again’ (p.91). ‘Imperfection, managed well, is a leadership strength’ (p.107).



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On Difficulty, Dawn cites with approval Steven Bartlett of Dragons' Den fame: 'The hard way is the fastest and easiest way in the long run.' In short, difficulties need to be faced and not avoided. She thinks that the hardest difficulties are attached to relationships with people, more so than tricky commercial situations.

What she says about Space and Hold is equally worthy of note. Many leaders are busy people who are space-deprived: 'in the leadership context, space does not just happen – it must be deliberately cultivated, actioned and protected' (p.257). And sometimes it's very important that leaders resist the temptation to rush. A matter may need more time to consider so it's good to hold, to exercise restraint and delay a final decision, while also explaining the reason for the hiatus.

The advantage of using a mnemonic device is that it makes Dawn's principles of leadership memorable. That was why she adopted it, for her own benefit as much as other people's. A possible disadvantage is that it could be an unhelpful constraint if some words one might wish to use about the subject don't begin with the letters of Beautiful Leadership. So are there some important aspects

of leadership that I think are missing from Dawn's schema?

I was a little surprised that none of her 'I's comprised the word Integrity, which is frequently mentioned in surveys as a highly prized quality in leadership. However, she does use the word Integrity in the chapter on Unifying, pointing out that Integer is a state of undivided whole or completeness and a leader should aim for this. Much of what she writes about Authenticity and Transparency is also relevant to Integrity.

I do think there's another key aspect of leadership that begins with I which doesn't really get a mention. That is Initiative-Taking. Dawn is strong on the responsibility of a leader to get things completed (see her chapters on Faithfulness and Execution) but what about their role in getting things started? In situations where an organisation or project lacks a clearly designated leader, how do we identify who is the leader? Surely it is the person with drive who grasps the initiative, who investigates resources, commissions individuals and makes sure things happen on time.

Another neglected topic in leadership literature is the significance of Charm. Charm is about using an attractive

personality, powers of persuasion, good communication skills and ability to get people 'on your side' to motivate and inspire them. There are resonances here with Empathy and Empowerment, which Dawn does write about. I wouldn't argue that Charm is essential to leadership, and there is an obvious danger that it can be used to manipulate people. But I do believe that, rightly used, it can be very effective, and well-functioning teams often respond to a leader who is charming.

This brings me to Dawn's chapter on The Faith Connection, which I think is excellent. She writes that her faith convinces her that effective, attractive leadership is part of a larger plan – God's plan.

She makes a very good job of grounding all her nine qualities and ten practices in the biblical story. Jesus – not surprisingly – features frequently. I would simply add that there are some great Initiative-takers in the Bible (eg Nehemiah) and for an example of using personal charm as an aid to persuasion, how about Paul's letter to Philemon?

Thank you Dawn for putting your whole self, body and mind, soul and spirit, into writing this very personal book. 



**Richard Higginson was Director of Faith in Business at Ridley Hall from 1989 until his retirement in 2018. He was then Chair of Faith in Business from 2018 to 2023. He is a founder-editor of FiBQ and the author of several books, including Faith, Hope & the Global Economy and (with Kina Robertshaw) A Voice to be Heard.**