



Thriving Leadership

3 touchstones to remember

BY **ELLEN DUFFIELD**

SEVERAL YEARS AGO as I searched for insight on the important work of culture shaping, God led me to Genesis 1. The pattern of God's "Let there be..." as He creates changes when it come to His creation of humanity. God says, "Let us..." This caught my attention and changed the way I think about leadership – its calling and what it takes for leadership to thrive. *Us* is a powerful word.

Belonging

The inclusion of this one word suggests conversation and collaboration. Whether within the Trinity, with the angels, or with creation – scholars debate this – "Let us make them..." suggests that we are created out of and invited into community. No wonder we crave belonging and will do almost anything to fit in. We are created to belong and the alternative is alienation that devastates.

Being

We are also created to be our true selves. Made in the image of God we bear God's fingerprint, and our own. Each of us reflects something of the Godhead yet we may feel compelled to take on false selves for protection or inclusion.

For many women, identity-wounding begins at birth with mixed messages, missed opportunities, abuse and subsequent low confidence, and a developing sense of brokenness or "otherness." By age six, girls believe that boys are smarter;² by age seven, that attractiveness is more important than good character.³ A woman's confidence peaks at age nine,⁴ recovering much later in life if there is no intentional intervention during critical developmental windows. Add the intersectionality of race, economics, education, or ability and this magnifies exponentially.

As an aside, great camps, leadership programs, and team activities can be positive reinforcers of God-ordained mind-sets for girls. So can our words. Let's change the language of "nice girls" to the wisdom and moral courage of Deborah. Leadership development starts young. Let's ask our girls for their opinion. Let's help them choose good role models.

Contribution

Stewardship or contribution is the third marker of our creation calling and leadership. Stewardship. Contribution.

Our work – paid and unpaid – as well as what we uniquely bring when we enter any room.

God says in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make humanity. In our image. Male and female. And let them steward all we have spoken into being.” (my paraphrase) Even so, many women’s views are shaped by voices other than God’s. By middle school, girls believe they must choose between friendship or leadership. Many competent women struggle with low confidence – often for systemic reasons.⁵ Yet when a minimum 30%⁶ of the voices at decision-making tables around the world are women, organizations are healthier and so are communities. Levels of crime, terrorism and corruption go down and levels of health care, clean water, education, and peacekeeping go up.

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule... over all the creatures... male and female he created them.”¹

We would like to believe that we are moving toward the 30% goal, but global studies reveal that progress is slow at best, and that 18–35-year-olds are less likely than their grandparents to value equity.⁷ Let’s be clear. This is not a women’s issue. This is a leadership issue. This is a justice issue. This is a Kingdom of God issue. Male and female God created us.

How then can leaders create environments where both men and women can thrive? Those three

Genesis 1 insights into our creation calling also offer us three important and overlapping priorities for shaping the kinds of cultures where thriving leadership becomes more likely. As the image-bearers of God, we have the opportunity to create places of belonging, being and contribution.

Is your ministry/organization a place where people feel like they genuinely belong? Many people feel on the outside. Invite them in. Make it safe to offer feedback on how inclusive your organization’s culture really is. Second, consider whether you are intentionally creating places where men and women can *be*. Create opportunities for your leaders and emerging leaders to discover true identity. Affirm strengths and provide opportunities to develop gifts. Finally, create places of contribution: Notice expertise and invite meaningful involvement. Offer stretches and supports. Call out leadership traits.

Countless forces encourage alienation, distorted views of self and unhealthy views of stewardship and service, so what an opportunity for the Church to offer something different! Humanity was birthed from conversation. And it is through dialogue that we experience community, self-awareness, and opportunities to serve. Maximize the conversations you have. Genesis 1 shows us the way. **1**

Ellen is the Coordinator for the Paul Magnus Centre for Leadership Studies at Briercrest Seminary and an affiliate with Leader’s Village. She is a mother, grandmother and the author of *The Brave Way*, *Brave Women* and *A Theology of Belonging, Being, Contributing* (soon to be published).

¹ Genesis 1:26–27 NIV

² “Gender Stereotypes about intelligence emerge early and influence children’s interest,” by Lin Bian, Sarah-Jane Leslie and Andrea Cimpian Science, Vol 355, Issue 6323, p.389–392 Jan 2017. See report at science.sciencemag.org/content/355/6323/389

³ UK GirlGuiding study quoted in *The Guardian*, Sept 2017.

⁴ According to Clinical Psychologist Robin Goodman and Katy Kay and Claire Shipman, authors of *The Confidence Code* online interview at amightygirl.com/blog?p=27408&fbclid=IwAR0K30g-xNbd-UgMUPuZF6AiohdifW04vrkG7xouMjhkvS4MPI69sDIG4Yo

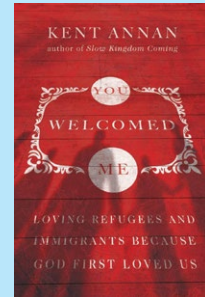
⁵ hbr.org/2022/10/how-confidence-is-weaponized-against-women

⁶ Important research by Harvard Business School Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter that has been confirmed in countless settings around the world

⁷ kantar.com/campaigns/reykjavik-index

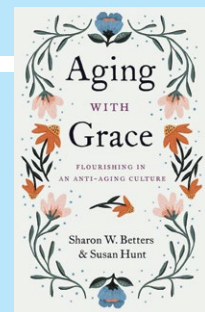


Bernice’s Picks



You Welcomed Me: Loving Refugees and Immigrants Because God First Loved Us
Kent Annan

\$22



Aging with Grace: Flourishing in an Anti-Aging Culture
Sharon W. Betters and Susan Hunt

\$23

All books available from Read On bookstore. Free shipping on all orders.

5 International Blvd.
Etobicoke, ON M9W 6H3
tel: 416-620-2934
fax: 416-234-8840
e-mail: books@readon.ca

READON.CA