ENCOURAGING THE HEART: A LEADER'S GUIDE TO REWARDING AND RECOGNIZING OTHERS. By James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999. 175 pp. $22 ISBN 0-7879-4184-0

Encouraging the Heart addresses the most important attribute of a leader and that is about the principles and practices that support the basic human need to be appreciated. The other four leadership attributes (challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, and model the way) are only effective if you encourage the heart.

This is not a soft approach to leading. It is not for those in leadership who are afraid to give power away. Leading with heart helps tap into the power of humans fully engaged in their lives and work. This power comes from encouraging the heart.

The authors have organized the book into three parts. In part one, they discuss how we as humans are starved for recognition and how so much of our leadership training has been based on the lone leader that solves all problems. Their own research of thousands of leaders in all walks of life confirms the importance of heart in leadership. Their research is compelling! They introduce the seven essentials of encouraging (set clear standards, expect the best, pay attention, personalize recognition, tell the story, celebrate together, and set the example) and provide stories about leaders that have practiced encouraging the heart and the results of that work. The essentials are fully discussed in part two of the book. To help leaders understand their current ability to encourage the heart, the authors also introduce the encouragement index. This is a quick and easy tool to assess current abilities.

In part three we learn that leadership is personal and we must develop a personal voice. Connect your voice with touch and you will encourage the heart. The last chapter provides an excellent selection of ideas to help the reader along with encouraging the heart. The ideas are collected into the seven essentials and provide more than enough information to help move directly into the journey of becoming a truly powerful leader.

We learn some critical leadership lessons in part two of the book. We learn that commitment flows from personal values. If the work is not significant and does not support personal values, there will be little heart behind the effort. Leaders need to make sure people understand why they are doing something through goals and feedback. The authors discuss the Pygmalion effect – people perform to the expectations set. Leaders that understand this, believe in the abilities of their teams to do great work. A leader that is not curious simply will not notice his/her team doing good work. Curiosity prevents the development of a distorted view of reality, production declines, and the destruction of a manager’s personal credibility. Great leaders make recognition personal so that they do not make the costly mistake of under appreciating valuable team members and they use stories to put a human face on success. Stories tell us that someone just like us can make it happen.

Creating a culture of celebration provides a powerful foundation for a fun and fulfilling work experience. Leaders must model a fun place, a culture of celebration and recognition. The authors propose that we live “DWWSWWD”, do what

we say we will do. Leaders must take the first step and go first so as not to let opportunities for creating fun and encouragement pass. If people do not believe in the messenger, they won’t believe the message.

I found this to be one of the most compelling leadership books I have read. The book clearly outlines the critical characteristics of leaders that build organizations through the development and inclusion of others. Even though I felt that I knew a lot about developing powerful teams, I found that I still am learning and particularly need to practice celebration and fun! I have integrated these characteristics into my own definition of leadership.

The strength of this book is in the organization and the clear concepts presented. The book is referenced which makes it easier to use for research. The authors present a compelling argument for rewarding and recognizing others based on research. Those looking for a linear approach to leadership, or those who believe power is to be accumulated will find this book lacking. I would give this book five out of five stars.

If you are a leader hoping to truly make a difference. If you are a leader that has the courage to love, give power away, provide people with authorship, and significant work, you have chosen the right book to study. Read this excellent book and you will be on the way to encouraging the heart.

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