



Thoughts from Linda:

*Caring Enough to Lead
How Reflective Practice
Leads to Moral Leadership*

Leonard O. Pellicer
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My husband, Tony Dunkel, serves as Director of R&D for our firm, DNA Consulting, while he is also pursuing his EdD at Baylor University. His research and dissertation focus on collaboration and transformational leadership. His past two years have been filled with research and reading, and for November, I have selected two of the leadership books recommended by Baylor in their doctorate curricula. During 2023, we'll review several of their choices.

I want to begin with this one as it deals with the topic of the *motivation to lead*, building on the seminal work of Robert Greenleaf in his work on servant leadership. Written by a professional teacher and school administrator, this very personal story is an easy and interesting read. It holds several fundamental truths of leadership, told through his experiences as a young teacher and school leader for over 35 years.

Leonard Pellicer is eminently qualified to author this book. He retired in 2007 as the Dean of the College of Education and Organizational Leadership at the University of LaVerne in LaVerne, California. Before that, he had served on the faculty of the University of South Carolina for 22 years, being named Distinguished Professor Emeritus. Before his educational career, he was a Fulbright Scholar, working in Southeast Asia and the Republic of South Africa. Dr. Pellicer has consulted with over 100 school districts and is the author of more than 75 publications. He has recently written his first book of fiction, called *Indigo Dreams*.

This book is the third edition and aims at educators and leaders or aspiring leaders of all types. While his message of what it means to be a caring leader does transcend industry and occupation, it heavily reflects his own experience in education. I can imagine no more caring group than the 3.1 million teachers in America today. As a

former teacher myself, having begun my own career in a high school classroom when I was only a few years older than my students, I enjoyed his storytelling ability and these specific examples of leadership in formal and informal learning. Every message in this book applies broadly to leadership.

As the title indicates, this book is devoted to motives underneath the function of leading. It is organized into 22 chapters, with titles such as: *What Is a Leader? Why Should Leaders Care About Caring? What Do I Care About? Am I Willing to Share Power? Why Am I Doing This? Am I Willing to Jump for the Trapeze? Am I Taking Care of My Water Buffalo? Honey, Do These Pants Make Me Look Fat? What Do Leaders Owe to Those Who Follow?* and *Your Leadership Becomes You*.

Other than the first and last chapters, the others are stand-alone, so this book can easily be picked up and read by browsing or from top to bottom, which is the strategy I pursued. I also appreciated the approach at the end of each chapter, called "Take Time to Reflect," where he offers 2-3 questions for individual or team reflection, as advertised in the book's title.

As Dr. Aretha Pigford, one of the five tenured black faculty at the University of South Carolina's College of Education, noted in the Foreword to the first edition, "this book helped me to take a journey down a new path, a path that challenged me to see leadership from a different perspective, a path that shifted my focus from the 'behaviors' to the 'being' of leadership." She went on to note the book's key message: "Authentic leaders are people who do what they do because of a genuine desire to make things better for others. The fact that a personal sacrifice might be required does not stop them. Simply stated, they care enough to lead. Caring enough—that is the primary motivation for authentic leadership..."

He uses personal stories to illustrate his message. He also references many of my favorite 'leadership coaches' such as Warren Bennis, Max DePree, Ron Heifitz, Robert Greenleaf, and Meg Wheatley.

Throughout the book, he uses firsthand experiences to illustrate key points. One of my favorite chapters deals with an experience he describes of a ropes course that he and several other colleagues taught during a summer institute while at the University of South Carolina. These are quite common in the world of 'self-development' seminars and workshops in industry and education.

The story he tells is of a young Korean woman who had not been in America that long and had language issues with English as her second language. She had also not had time to develop many friendships and was somewhat 'on her own' in this experience. The ropes experience, even simple ones, can be challenging, and in this case, they offered a much more challenging 'high ropes' course where the participant was pulled up to essentially the top of a pole many feet in the air. The participant was well-haltered, so it was not dangerous, although it certainly felt that way. The task was to jump to a trapeze bar that flowed back and forth and catch it! If you missed, it was not a problem, as the safety halter would jerk a little, catch you, and lower you to the ground.

In this story, this young woman summoned the courage to attempt the high ropes course and made it to the top, but then she froze. She couldn't even speak, and it became a tense situation. She was evidently petrified at the thought of jumping to the trapeze bar, even though she had seen others jump and miss and then gently be lowered to the ground.

After a few minutes, the very supportive and caring group of co-participants on the ground persuaded her to try the jump, and somehow, she did it. Although she missed the trapeze, she was guided gently to the ground. Upon landing, Pellicer noted, "she received more love and adoration from the group than anyone else who attempted the exercise during the entire day." He continued, "I am more convinced that this happened because everyone realized just how much more courage it required for her to perform the exercise than had been required from any of the others who attempted the feat that day." It was a beautifully told example of 'love and caring in action.'

A masterful storyteller, Pellicer chose interesting subjects for his message and connected the dots well to a key tenet of leadership in a way that helps the reader to make meaning quickly and easily. He carefully interweaves the concept of providing a safe, caring culture with the other value of encouraging risk-taking. This chapter and its unfolding are illustrative of the progression through the book. The stories are memorable and, like parables of all types, provide a succinct metaphorical analogy.

As he works with the concept of caring, he deals with two aspects: 1. caring enough to lead others and 2. how to care for ourselves. I'll close this review by addressing these two separate questions and his answers/advice.

1. As to the primary question of our motives for leading, he addresses the question of “why lead?” and offers words of wisdom from Heifetz and Linsky’s book, Leadership On The Line, by noting:

“So the answer to the question, Why Lead? It is both simple and profound. The sources of meaning in the human experience draw upon our yearning for connection to other people. The exercise of leadership can give life meaning beyond the usual day-to-day stakes—approval of friends and peers, material gain, or the immediate gratification of success—because, as a practical art, leadership allows us to connect with others in significant ways. The word we use for that kind of connection is love.”

2. He addresses the second part of the caring question in one of his final chapters, entitled “Can I Care Enough to Be My Own Best Friend?” Here he offers 11 suggested ways that leaders can exercise appropriate caring for themselves.

These are good questions/topics for all of us as leaders for some additional reflection.

1. Embrace the notion that developing a loving relationship with myself is a primary life goal.
2. Accept that becoming the person and the leader I want to be is a never-ending journey.
3. Define and prioritize my values.
4. Practice becoming the person I want to be until that person becomes me.
5. Emphasize doing what’s right rather than not doing what’s wrong.
6. Remember that the only real joy in life is the result of serving others.
7. Find comfort in knowing that the more you struggle, the more you serve.
8. Go up on the balcony and down in the basement from time to time to observe the dance.
9. Never forget that motive means everything to those you lead.
10. Maintain an optimistic and grateful attitude.
11. Remember that significant growth can’t happen without reflection.

This book is a very good read and deals effectively with the simple but most foundational issue for all of us as leaders: caring enough to lead. I highly recommend it.