

Leading Without Power: Finding Hope in Serving Community

by Max De Pree • Jossey-Bass, 2003



Reviewed by
Judith Cole

For those of you wanting to learn more about Servant-Leadership, here is a concise and readable book written by a person who practiced Servant-Leadership in the

corporate world for 45 years and in the nonprofit world for nearly that many. From his service to his various communities, Max De Pree found hope and joy.

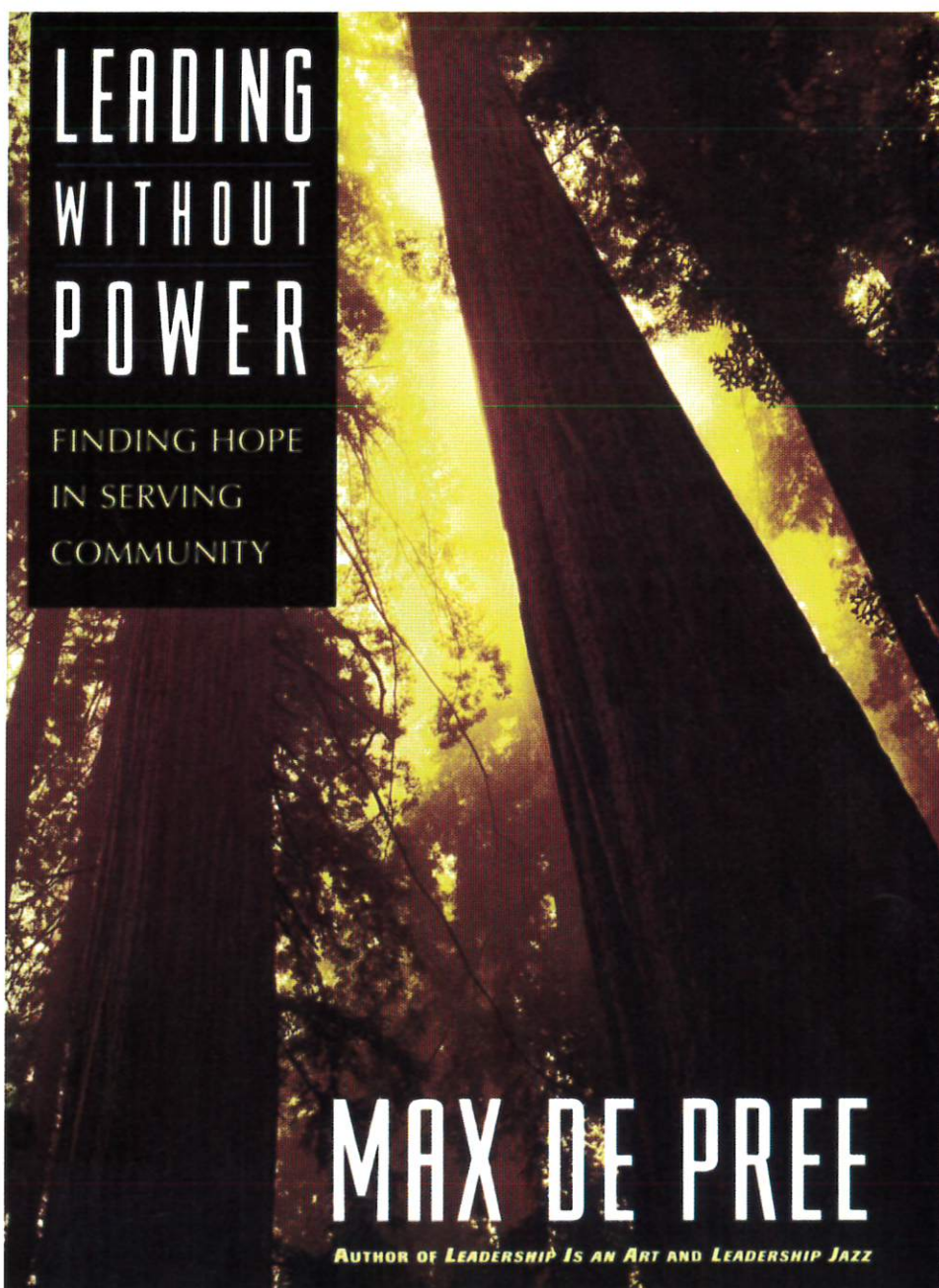
Today, as I pulled my car to a stop at a traffic light, in front of me idled a Hummer, bearing its "Support our troops" and "W4" bumper stickers. Next to it was a small hybrid automobile, its stickers shouting, "Save our planet" and "Bring our troops home." The scene spoke volumes about the dichotomy in our social, political, economic and religious fabric. While more people than ever can afford to drive pricey vehicles and live in million-dollar mansions, many people are walking away from materialism and searching for meaningful ways to contribute to the improvement of society and humanity. Charitable giving has been steadily increasing during the past decade. Volunteering in nonprofit agencies is also on the rise.

Why are so many choosing to become involved in the work of nonprofit organizations and why are so many called to serve others? De Pree suggests that core values such as love, hope and charity are becoming increasingly important to us and that our spirits are lifted when we commit ourselves to working for a common good. With their high moral purposes, nonprofits have become vehicles of

hope that can build a better world.

Traditional ideas about power and leadership are antithetical to those associated with Servant-Leadership. In a nonprofit organization whose vision is expressed in a beautifully construct-

ed mission statement, leadership is driven by love, shared values and goals, and helping others realize their potential. It is in the light of working for love and searching for potential that Servant-Leadership emerged. De



Pree offers ideas, observations and musings about creating places of realized potential, and how to move beyond mastery to find joy.

In the first chapter, De Pree describes a place of realized potential as open to change, unsettling ideas and contrary opinions. It is a place where people are given an opportunity to grow and learn, to do meaningful and challenging work and where they abandon obsolete projects in favor of new and innovative ones. It is a place where measurement and quantification are less significant than nurturing moral purpose and assessing matters of the spirit. It is a place of trust where people forgive the mistakes made while undertaking risks. It is a place of celebration that identifies, honors and rewards outstanding performance.

De Pree addresses the difference between organizations that merely meet certain needs and serve a particular purpose and those that become movements. As with places of realized potential, a movement can be recognized by constructive conflict of ideas, shared vision, innovation and an increased level of trust.

Movements are distinguished by the stories they tell as a way of teaching, preserving and remembering.

Movements are defined by a leadership that enables, enriches, lifts spirits, holds accountable and then lets go. Movements are characterized by a high level of participation and representation. Movements easily deteriorate into mere organizations when their stories are used to manipulate people, when job descriptions replace expectations, when risky choices are eliminated in favor of surety, when rules dominate decision-making and when leaders fail to hold the group accountable.

Determining group accountability is the mark of effective leadership. While it is far easier to measure output, De Pree offers several questions for consideration in measuring input. What is significant to the organization may not be easily quantified: commitment,

happiness, love of learning, enthusiasm, the mystery of potential. Success depends on matching the right people with the right jobs, not just accepting willingness for competence.

De Pree reminds us that the roots of service are nurtured in healthy families where love, learning, productive relationships and accountability begin. It is there that our innate sense of right and wrong is enhanced and where we learn that we don't always get our way. We learn about contributing to a common good and about celebrating milestones. Vital organizations have many qualities similar to the energetic and enthusiastic people in healthy families. Nourishment, truth, accountability, discipline, authenticity, respect, justice, tolerance, simplicity, fidelity and hope are just some of the attributes epitomized by vital organizations moving toward their potential.

The author poses insightful questions regarding vision to help organizations "become what we are not now." The job of the leader is to determine how to achieve a mission. Leaders must prepare the voyage and help the travelers know how to participate. A novice can't learn to sail without risking tipping over the boat; therefore, a willingness to risk seems to be the essential element in affecting change. "The degree to which we are prepared to take risks," De Press explains, "determines the degree to which we as individuals and organizations can reach our potential." He invites us to consider another kind

of risk: that of being unprepared for success.

More than anything else, this book is about hope and optimism for the future as opposed to the dismal destruction of hopelessness. De Pree believes that hope is directly related to an ability to make choices. He notices that the word *volunteer* is rooted in the Latin word *velle* meaning "to choose." Nonprofits create choices and build hope. Our choices determine our journey.

In conclusion, De Pree reminds us to distinguish between strategic planning and leaving a legacy. "A strategic plan is a long-term commitment to something we intend to do," he argues. "A legacy results from the facts of our behavior that remain in the minds of others. ... What you plan to do differs enormously from what you leave behind."

Judith Cole is immediate past president of AOSA.

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