

**Keep Them on Your Side: Leading and Managing for Momentum, Samuel Bacharach, Platiun Press, Massachusetts, 2006, pp. 234, \$19.95, ISBN-13:978-1-59337-729-8**

The world is changing. Clearly, then, leaders are increasingly being confronted with a multitude of situations – each having its own set of hurdles and challenges. Thus, the need for guidebooks and instructional materials for leaders and how best they may deal with these situations is pressing now more than ever.

Samuel B. Bacharach's *Keep Them on Your Side* is a new and timely addition to a host of literature on the subject. The book purports to contain ideas that would help leaders becoming managerially competent and proactive in both sustaining momentum and keeping good people on their side. The author further avers that leaders who are managerially competent can go the distance because they know that there is more to momentum than the mythical "big mo."<sup>1</sup> (Bacharach 2007: 26)

In his book, Bacharach expounds the basic skills a leader must have to sustain momentum, keep people on their side, and prove his/her managerial competence in the workplace. In his words, "momentum is the most important essential part of implementation." The key to long-term success in any organization, according to him, is to maintain sustainable momentum for initiatives to achieve specific goals. He states further that to specify what the momentum you need, you have to avoid inertia, procrastination, bureaucratic bottlenecks, stall tactics, hesitation, and all the things that avert you from rounding at first base. To be a true leader, one needs to be proactive by getting a critical mass of people and sustaining momentum by keeping them on your side.

Specifically, the author posits that one can sustain momentum through walking the tightrope between directive and facilitative leadership, and by following the eleven principles of managerial competence: (i) be clear about the subjective bottom line, (ii) make adjustments but don't overreact, *Cultural Momentum (Motivate to Sustain Focus)*: (iii) create a problem-solving culture but don't process things to death, (iv) pump up the collective but don't forget the individual, (v) celebrate but don't worship idols, *Political Momentum (Mobilize Support & Anticipate Opposition)*: (vi) don't let the coalition mindset slip away, (vii) don't feed the Trojan horse, (viii) beware of counter coalitions, *Structural Momentum (Maintain Resources and Capacity)*: (ix) create hierarchies but don't forget teams, (x) provide resources but don't be a welfare agency, (xi) give autonomy but define parameters.

The author elaborates in detail each of the eleven principles. In addition, he provides cases and real-life examples to explain the principles abovementioned. For example, in discussing the principle of mobilizing support and anticipating opposition, the author cited the case of Carly Fiorina of Hewlett Packard (HP) for lacking managerial competence and support for her agenda. It has resulted in failure to sustain momentum at HP leading to her resignation in February 2005. On the contrary, he sets Lewis and Clark as models – leaders with political and managerial competencies.

The book provides the following benefits to its readers and academics and researchers dealing with organisational leadership:

*Use of simple language and real-life cases.* The author uses simple language, expresses his thoughts and ideas in a manner that is easily understood, and illustrates through real-life cases and samples to support points more clearly. In this way, complex concepts are easily understood. The easy understanding is further aided by cases and illustrations. For example in explaining momentum, the author used several examples in addition to simplifying the concept.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bacharach refers 'big mo' as big momentum in this book.

*Practicality, Relevance and Helpfulness.* One caveat we saw is that it would seem that the book always tends to say that everything is a balance between two opposing views (e.g. creating hierarchies but at the same time not forgetting teams). While this may be true in some situations, this certainly is not true in all situations. This tends to paint the picture of a proactive leader in the secular world as timid and one who is always balancing the tightrope. It may be that in certain contingencies, yet leaders have to be definite on where they stand on certain issues.

Other than the one aforementioned, we find the book to be practical, relevant and helpful. It is practical because the book avoids the ideological and normative debates on leadership. Rather, it confronts real situations leaders are normally engaged in and proposes specific actions. It is also relevant because it takes into account political considerations. It particularly highlights this aspect as the most important consideration. As we all know, most programs fail nowadays because they lack understanding of political context when planned. The ability of the author to summarize the key points with charts was particularly helpful as it presents a visual image easy for readers to remember.

*Ability to Personally Connect.* In between reading the pages of the book, we had to consult and reflect on our working experience whereby a personal connection is reached. It made us pause and ponder what we had done wrong, right and how things can be further improved. We believe that if we are confronted with the same situation again in the future, we will be better equipped to handle it. For example, we thought we have tended towards the facilitative type of leadership. And it is true that most of our time has been spent in meetings – to debate on concepts, ideas and strategies. While this is important, getting into action is also important, as rightfully pointed out in the book. After all, at the end of the day, what gets done becomes the very measure wherein which you judge your performance.

Overall, the book is about the process of becoming a managerially competent leader. It is worthwhile reading for any well-meaning student or leadership scholar because it uses simple language and real-life cases to convey its messages and clearly illustrate a point. In this regard, it makes the stories very interesting and full of life. Secondly, it is practical, relevant and helpful. It uses charts and diagrams to illustrate the points. Further, it deals with the minutiae of day-to-day management and gets down to the details. It is almost a step-by-step process. Last but not least, the book makes it easier to connect past experiences and ideas to the current leadership mapping and discourses.

---

Reviewed by Allen Yu Hung Lai, PhD Candidate, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, Singapore; and Jowil Mejia Plecerda, Project Coordinator of Road Watch and Consultant for Department of Social Welfare and Development, The Philippines.