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Leadership in Dietetics: Achieving a Vision for the Future by Anne M. Barker, Mary Beth Foltz Arensberg, and M. Rosita Schiller

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Anne M. Barker, Mary Beth Foltz Arensberg, and M. Rosita Schiller, *Leadership in Dietetics: Achieving a Vision for the Future*. Chicago: The American Dietetic Association, 1994. 230 pp. \$33.00.

by Theresa I. Gonzales

Susan Calvert Finn, President of the American Dietetic Association, writes in the Foreword of this book that it is "written primarily for students and practicing dietetics leader-managers." With this I would whole-heartedly agree, but would also add that the book has a somewhat broader application as well. *Leadership in Dietetics* gives a handy overview of various models of leadership and their implications even as it specifically emphasizes the implementation of such theories and strategies in the dietetics environment.

Each chapter begins with a delineation of the chapter objectives, and ends with a brief case. The cases utilize concepts outlined in the previous chapters and include discussion questions. The chapter objectives along with the case study approach make this an ideal teaching tool for dietetics leader-managers.

The initial chapters begin with a review of traditional leadership theories and processes. This section provides an abridged version of contemporary environmental, contingency, and transformational leadership theories. Following this review, the text describes important elements of the current health care environment in order to make the case for the emergence or necessity of new models of leadership. The authors validate the need for new ideas in the leadership area, especially given the dynamic nature of health care. The authors call for dietetics leaders to become "transformational leaders" and explain many of the important aspects of leadership, especially transformational leadership, with operational definitions, reinforcing the practical value of this text.

Once the foundation is laid for the development of new leadership theories in dietetics, other organizational elements are discussed. Discussions of organizational behaviors and values are well developed, but the authors present a rather rudimentary view of contemporary organizational designs and how organizational designs are determined and implemented. It would have added value to the discussion of leadership if models of classical and contemporary

principals of organization were further developed with their corresponding impact on leadership styles.

Since much of this text emphasizes the use of transformational leadership, much time is spent on discussing various models of organizational change, vision, and culture. The authors give a concise account of the most critical elements in these areas. Most management theorists would agree that in order for companies to be successful in today's global environment, transformational leaders are needed. Barker, Arensberg, and Schiller outline in detail the skills required of dietetics leader-managers in order for them to become transformational, and also discuss the key qualities of vision, empowerment, self-understanding, and motivation. But several critical questions are not addressed: Given the need for transformational leaders in order for health care firms to survive, and given that transformational leadership requires a different skill set than past leadership, can these new skills be taught? Can one teach a dietetics leader-manager how to be a transformational leader? Like many other leadership texts, *Leadership in Dietetics* avoids such questions and simply assumes that these skills can be taught and learned.

The authors do a fine job of articulating the responsibilities and techniques of transformational leaders. They spend a great deal of time in emphasizing how transformational leaders should behave, how they should use power, and which methods to employ in order to guide "followers." Most of the writers in the area of transformational leadership suggest that a critical element in the use of this leadership style is "charisma." For example, in their widely used text, James A.F. Stoner and R. Edward Freeman note that "Charismatic or transformational leaders are leaders who, through their personal vision and energy, inspire followers and have a major impact on their organization" (*Management*, 1989, p. 480). But although many current writers suggest that charisma is necessary in order for transformational leaders to bring about the much-needed change within organizations and within people, Barker, Arensberg, and Schiller do not fully explore the charismatic nature of transformational leadership.

Subsequent chapters articulate the requirements to success in utilizing the transformational model. The issues of organizational vision, culture (described here as social architecture), and trust are discussed. Some excellent information is presented here and the

examples and discussions at the end of each chapter can assist with implementation of the ideas presented. Within these chapters there is an in-depth discussion of delegation and group work. The need for delegation is explained as well as its importance in stimulating new ideas and increasing employee motivation. But two critical aspects of delegation are absent from this discussion. First, in order for the delegation process to be successful, there has to be a recognition of the need to delegate not just responsibility for tasks and decisions, but the requisite authority to perform the tasks or make the decisions. Much current literature in the area of delegation and organizational behavior emphasizes that one of the key downfalls of delegation is that leader-managers do not recognize the importance and in some cases do not want to delegate authority.

Second, if delegation is to be successful, and employees are to be engaged in group decision-making, they must be trained in the decision-making process. The text discusses the importance of various decision-making models, but there is little discussion of the application of these models when delegating decision making. It is as important for leader-managers to understand the "rational approach" to problem solving as it is for employees when they have been delegated responsibility and authority in these areas. Delegation requires training both on the part of the dietetics leader-manager as well as their subordinates.

The text ends with a chapter on "Leadership in Groups and Teams." This chapter briefly addresses the issues surrounding types of groups and group leadership. There is a wealth of good information condensed here, giving the practitioner a basic understanding of group dynamics and how to lead groups. Group behavior and the management of groups are major challenges affecting leader-managers in all work environments, and since the concepts of group work, teamwork, and self-directed work groups are being utilized more frequently in health care, this chapter may be a useful starting point for future writing in this area.

In sum, *Leadership in Dietetics* provides an excellent review of current leadership theories and models. In particular, the dietetics applications and examples make this an excellent guide for practicing dietetics leaders-managers, and, more generally, the theory of transformational leadership is presented in such a way that any

manager, not just those involved in dietetics, would find this a useful book.