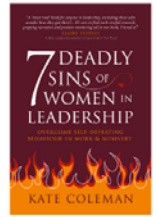


# 7 deadly sins of women in leadership: overcoming self-defeating behaviour in work and ministry

Kate Coleman (Next Leadership, 2010)

There are some books which are worth reading, and there are some books which are a must-read. When it comes to this book I totally endorse Elaine Storkey's cover commendation, that this is 'a must-read book for anyone in leadership.' The book was shaped by the pilot course of Next Leadership's leadership development course of the same name, and through its mentoring and equipping network.



One of the most striking things about the book for me was that the seven 'sins' ring so true with my experience of listening to, working with and mentoring women. They are:

1. Limiting self-perceptions
2. Failure to draw the line
3. Inadequate personal vision
4. Too little life in the work
5. Everybody's friend, nobody's leader
6. Colluding and not confronting
7. Neglect in family matters

Personal stories, research, case studies, biblical material and practical wisdom are woven together in a unique way, and in addition, each chapter ends with a page of 'coaching tips', which encourage the reader to work through a particular issue, using the questions provided. Kate Coleman's own story ensures that the book focuses, not as so many do, just on *white* women's experience of leadership, but on that of black and Asian women too. It's a book for all Christian women who are leaders, both in ministry and in the marketplace.

The title may need some explanation, as indeed it is given in the book. The 'sins' which Kate identifies are not moral ineptitudes, but 'destructive patterns of thought and behaviour that thwart the leadership God calls us to exercise.' These may originate in a variety of ways, which each chapter explores. It is notable how many of the 'sins' seem to stem from ways in which women have reacted to situations or experiences, and have then internalised.

For example, the first 'sin' concerns how women see themselves. Young girls are often full of dreams, but by adulthood those dreams have often been ground down, and many women are lacking in confidence, full of internal road-blocks. In addressing sin six, the difficulty some women find with confronting rather than colluding may stem in part from the fact that women who are 'tough' are considered 'unfeminine' (but if not 'tough', they are weak leaders), thus giving women who are leaders multiple obstacles to negotiate.

But the book is about transformation as well as accurate diagnosis. So the chapter on the first 'sin' helps women to identify her limiting beliefs and to replace those with empowering ones. The chapter on conflict helps women to see how important managing conflict well is for leaders, and how to avoid collusion, using some very practical pointers towards good confronting and peace-making.

Reservations? I had just two. One is the difficulty of speaking of a 'female style' of leadership. Of course this book depends on there being challenges particular to women as leaders, which I certainly believe there are, but I think the book makes too much of gender stereotypes about how women lead, which are increasingly refuted by research. The other may be a pitfall of self-publishing; the book would have been better served with some good copy-editing. But these are minor reservations in a book which has inspired me, and which I hope and believe will help to equip and inspire many women leaders.

Rosie Ward © CPAS 2010