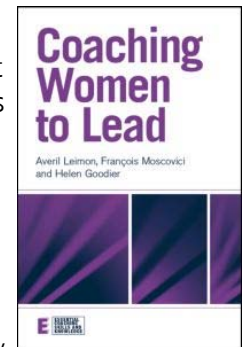


# coaching women to lead

**Averil Leimon, Francois Moscovici and Helen Goodier (Routledge, 2011)**

This is an excellent, useful and timely book. When it comes to furthering our understanding of the needs of women leaders, I think this really hits the spot. It's not written from a 'church' perspective, but by combining research about women leaders with coaching insights and tools, I can imagine this book being useful to all who coach mentor women leaders in the Church, women leaders themselves, and those interested in leadership more broadly.



What I also found helpful about this book is that it builds on recent research (for example, the replacement of the term 'glass ceiling' with that of 'labyrinth', and debunking the idea of separate 'gender styles' in leadership), and also brings an array of new tools and insights. This book complements Kate Coleman's (reviewed in November 2010): where Kate's gives stories, identifies issues and points to solutions, this is underpinned by research and brings new models and tools. With a little adaptation (for example in 'career stages', where at least for ordained women, the stages will be different), it applies very well to women leading in the Church, especially as we struggle to understand the relative lack of women in more senior posts.

The book makes a 'business case' for women leaders: companies with women at the top do better than those without them. Surely this applies to other organisations too! Not all measure effectiveness in terms of money, but the underlying dynamic is about effective leadership, where we see that God's original 'team' of male plus female is the most successful. It is also commonsense to argue, as the chapter does, that if we want 'the best' leaders, then to choose from both sexes is more likely to achieve this.

The authors cite the often-quoted insight that women will look at a job description and think they can't do it all, so may be unlikely to apply. And the danger is that if women don't apply for demanding roles then the message is that they are not interested. It's at points like this where coaching (or mentoring) might help women to apply. Women may also need help with developing confidence and self-esteem, doing vision (or believing they can do it) and developing resilience.

Key to me were some findings from research published in 2009 on the main barriers and strategies to women's advancement. This found that women most valued networking for mutual support, increased confidence, role models, knowing one's strengths, and 'career planning', among other things. Like so many books focusing on women's leadership, this one highlights the significance of role models; this has profound implications for the Church, where in some churches young women lack the role models who might help them to see themselves as leaders.

The chapter which gives a 'systematic approach to coaching' gives a list of key factors critical for women's development, and works through them. Each section gives coaching questions and scenarios, which would readily translate to a Church context. The authors make the important point that there is no 'one size fits all' model, and that women are all different. Coaches (and women themselves) also have a dilemma: 'do you coach women to fit male designed and dominated organisations, or do you work with them to be authentic and successful in their own way?'

Another chapter gives a new model of leadership, the 'Balanced Leader'; each aspect of this model is discussed in turn, and the authors give pointers to where women face greater challenges. This is followed by a chapter on how to develop a women-friendly organisation. In both of these, much is directly transferrable to a church context. A profoundly helpful book, not too 'academic', and which I hope will be widely read.

Rosie Ward © CPAS 2010