

***Leading from the Second Chair: serving your church, fulfilling your role, and realizing your dreams,***

**Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson (Jossey-Bass, 2005)**

This is not a brand new book, but one I've only recently discovered. For various reasons, women often find themselves in assistant or junior roles (the 'second chair') as either a curate, an associate vicar or a non-stipendiary minister. If we are in this role, how do we make the most of it, whether it is a phase on the way to overall leadership or a long-term position?

Many of the frustrations of ministry come about because of difficult relationships. Some curates find their training incumbents difficult to work with, and long for the time when they can move on. Associate ministers in larger churches sometimes experience difficulties: how much of a leadership role do they have, or how much are they just an assistant to the vicar, with limited scope to develop their own areas of leadership and take real responsibility?

This book is written by two leaders with extensive experience of being in the 'second chair'. They have also talked to a number of others, whose stories and insights are used extensively in the book.

I liked the overall tone of the book, and its message – that playing second fiddle may be hard, but it is possible to thrive in it. After a couple of introductory chapters, the authors explore three paradoxes of leadership in the second chair: being a subordinate but also a leader; having a deep perspective but also a wide one; and being contented in the role but not losing sight of dreams for the future.

This book would make thought-provoking reading for anyone who is leading from the 'second chair' and wants to reflect on how to make the best of that situation; how to thrive when one has growing experience but is not the overall leader. There is a helpful section on trust, and the need to build trust and respect the overall leader.

In the section on deep/wide, there are useful pointers on how to support the first chair leader, how to build teams, and how to be a pulse-taker, a vision amplifier, a leader multiplier and a gap filler.

The third section, on contentment/dreaming, I found particularly valuable in its insights. All too often, the authors note, second chair leaders lose sight of contentment because they are living in the future. 'Contentment in the second chair is your choice to stay and grow and excel, for a season, regardless of current circumstances.' The authors remind second chair leaders to keep dreaming, but in the meantime to support their first chair's dreams.

I found the book fascinating because it's the first time I have seen this situation explored in a book (which is why the authors wrote it) , but at the same time frustrating because it's American (and envisages mostly large, multi-staffed churches) and written by two men. I'd love to see another book which addresses this issue from the point of view of women, and some of the particular challenges which many 'second chair' women leaders face in the church today.