

Clarion Review ★★★★☆

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

Awakening a Leader's Soul: Learnings Through Immortal Poems

Gaurav Bhalla

Motivational Press (Sep 7, 2017)

\$20.00

978-1-62865-421-9

In a time of uncertainty, volatility, complexity, and ambiguity, a more grounded leadership style is needed to meet that challenge.

Awakening a Leader's Soul by Gaurav Bhalla is a solid business book from the mind of a poet.

The book seeks to help transition leaders of all stripes into more thoughtful, humble, and inspired people. It focuses on several areas of leadership development, including defining who the leader is and how they think and act, then looking beyond to the leader's world. Each of these areas is then considered using a mix of psychology and real-world examples and is supported by a piece of poetry.

Each poem is set up with a consideration of a practical aspect of leadership; that idea is then expanded with the poem, and some tools for reflection and discussion follow. Poetry is a great tool, because it's short, rich, and easily open to interpretation and discussion.

The book's take on leadership is a little old-fashioned but is sorely needed in today's world. The overriding notion is a leadership of self-awareness and self-understanding, which is very much at odds with today's powerful personality-driven politics on the world stage.

Leaders, the book says, are humble and thoughtful people, willing to take risks, persevere, and be mindful of who they serve and what that all means. This does feel like a bit of a hopeful perspective, given that today's leaders are also expected to be engaged in social media in an always-on society. The author's point is not that these problems aren't real, but that the thing that the leader can really rely on, and come to understand, is their own soul.

Other books have trod similar ground, but this one has a great whole-world focus that embraces the world's diversity. In a time of uncertainty, volatility, complexity, and ambiguity, the author argues, a more grounded leadership style is needed to meet that challenge. The case is made using a mixture of poetry, inspired words, and hand-drawn pictures.

The book is organized around chapters and sections, which it refers to as essays. Each could function as a stand-alone idea, but together they really do work to inspire the type of thinking the book hopes to achieve. For example, the use of Emily Dickinson's poem "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" suggests the need to reconsider the leader's ego. The sparseness of the poem contrasts well with the ideas presented.

Awakening a Leader's Soul resonates so strongly because the world needs more leaders like those the book seeks to create.

JEREMIAH ROOD (August 24, 2017)

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