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Business

For bruised work environments

D. Murali

Contrary to common thinking, it is not power, wealth accumulation, and hierarchical control that make for success, say Susan and Thomas D. Kuczmariski in 'Apples are Square' (www.kaplanpublishing.com).

Success is about two things, they add. One, how you feel about yourself, meaning self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-perception. And two, the impact you have "at home, at work, and in the community."

The book, well written in a simple style, presents a new model of leadership that is based on leaders serving their constituents rather than vice versa.

"The new model cultivates multiple leaders, empowers individuals, enables them to be recognised and valued, and connects employees and managers by building strong relationships."

To know how the new model works, you need to read about the inspiration behind the book's title: an anecdote that Christopher Zorich, a former defensive lineman for the Chicago Bears and the Washington Redskins, loves to narrate.

"My mom had to go through some rough circumstances, but she always kept a positive attitude... Sometimes we didn't have food in the house, so we would either not eat that evening, or we would go to the local supermarket. It closed at 9:30 pm..." says Chris.

"We'd search through the dumpsters for food, and look for rotten apples and stuff like that. We kind of made a joke about it sometimes, but I didn't know apples were round until I was older. I thought all apples were square because my mom would take a knife and cut or square off the bad spots. Then, we would sit and eat our squared apples."

Just as Chris's mother took rotten apples and literally reshaped them into something edible and appealing, we, as a society, need to take bruised work environments and reshape them into dynamic, inclusive, and collaborative organisations, explain the Kuczmariskis. Persuasive analogy.

Like the 'six sides of a square apple' (that is, cut on the four sides and also top and bottom), our leaders should have 'six unique qualities that are unknown to most leaders today,' insists the book. The six qualities are: humility, compassion, transparency, inclusiveness, collaboration, and values-based decisiveness.

What is humility? It is about caring for the relationship, rather than your own power base, defines Virginia Gilmore, founder of the Sophia Foundation. "Humility is not always having the answer, but being the person who steps aside and lets the other person step out in front of you." A leader lacking this essential quality can't nurture the other five qualities, declare the authors.

Now, who will tell our leaders?

Business



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