

## BOOK REVIEW

# A Review of "Professionalizing Leadership"

Barbara Kellerman, New York, NY; Oxford University Press. (2018)

Review By: David Huston, Lt Col, USAF

In this new book, Barbara Kellerman rips apart the ubiquitous tagline by programs that claim to tout the effectiveness of leader development without the presence of any rigorous measure to prove it. She claims that leaders as a profession, unlike doctors or lawyers, lack any means for certifying what it means to have been accepted by the profession as a leader, with the one exception being the United States military (p. 54-55). Based on this claim, she unpacks what she views as how the world at large should address this issue in order to improve how leaders should be developed. Specifically, leaders must develop professionally in order to act in an increasingly ethical and effective manner.

Dr. Kellerman is a professor of Public Leadership at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Educated at Sarah Lawrence College and Yale University, she is the author of numerous books on leadership and a frequent commentator with the media. Kellerman is a co-founder of the International Leadership Association and currently directs the Kennedy School's Center for Public Leadership.

The first part of the book examines the history of leader development and relates it to current trends and to future application. She explains that the ancient philosophers limited leadership to the few; however, the Enlightenment changed this model such that anyone now had the potential to rise up against leaders and replace them through both violent and non-violent means. Then, in the 1960s and 70's in the United States, higher education focused on leadership from the management perspective. Today, the leadership industry revolves around three constructs: leader education, training, and development. Education consists of the cognitive aspect of understanding what a leader is. Training focuses on building the skills necessary to "do" leadership. And most importantly, development emphasizes "a qualitatively different state of being" (p. 64) which results in improving how one leads. The key to development is that it is a long term effort, demanding the "passage of time" (p. 75). To put it more bluntly, Kellerman stresses that leader development is not something that happens simply by attending a one week executive workshop.

The second part of the book describes the disarray and lack of coherence that exists in leadership theory and pedagogy, followed by a description of the “markers associated with achieving professional status” (p. 116). The third part of the book hits on three areas. First, that leadership should be viewed as a system of three equal constructs: leaders, followers, and contexts (p. 123), and that within this system there exists a range of leaders from horrible to great. Second, she highlights institutional failures and successes of those who have attempted to tackle improving this system. Third, Kellerman concludes by offering models for how to learn and teach leadership, while emphasizing that “in the end it is up to leaders to develop themselves” (p. 180).

This book highlights significant areas for improvement for how the professionalization of being a leader should occur. One lesson for the United States Air Force Academy (USAF), and other service academies, is that these institutions must fully realize and commit to the notion that their purpose is the foundational step of the professionalization of citizens into leaders for their respective service. Doing so should change how these institutions are structured and how resources are prioritized. Two main efforts of (1) offering a liberal education set in the context of leadership theory and (2) practicing leader skills relevant to being an officer can accomplish this mission. The final product of our service academies should be a certified leader at the foundational level of development.

Additionally, the United States Air Force could potentially have a positive impact on the larger leadership development community. Again, Kellerman sees the military as leading the charge on leadership development. The USAF has the opportunity to help the community of practice by providing a template to be used by other leadership development organizations for their specific context. This template could be based off of Air Force Doctrine Document Annex 1-1 “Force

Development,” a document that describes a model for leader development that occurs through a “continuum of learning” that includes education, training, and experiences. This concept defines eight competencies such as *Communicating* and *Strategic Thinking*, and 25 sub-competencies, such as *Develops and Inspires Others* and *Builds Teams and Coalitions*. Some of these leadership competencies and sub-competencies are specific to the military and may not serve other contexts, however, all are measurable. These sub-competencies could become the “go to” template for the leadership development field. In order to do this, the USAF would first have to determine a method for certifying leaders with it.

Overall, Kellerman provides very useful insights to developing leaders and professionalizing potential systems of development. For leaders to be effective, and developed effectively, the enterprise—according to the author—truly needs to be seen as a distinct profession. Her assertions are valuable and directly applicable to military professionals.

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