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## Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Book Recommendation on Civic Leadership

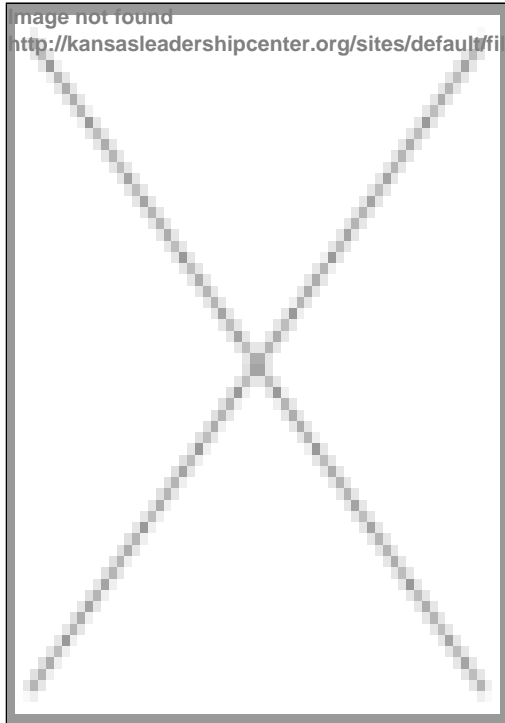
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Article: <https://ced.sog.unc.edu/book-recommendation-on-civic-leadership/>

This entry was posted on August 21, 2013 and is filed under Community Development, Social & Civic Assets, Sustainable Development

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A new book by David Chrislip and Ed O'Malley titled *For the Common*

*Good* is a highly recommended source of ideas on how civic leadership can facilitate meaningful change in our communities. The title captures how the authors argue we should redefine civic leadership. Rather than being motivated by personal interests (such as “not in my backyard” concerns), civic leadership that is focused on proactively effecting change for the good of the whole community can “help transform the civic culture of our communities and regions.”

When people talk about leadership they are usually referring to the idea of someone influencing others in order to get them to do what they want. Such leaders have a vision of some new direction for the group or organization to go in and the ability to motivate the members of the group or organization to act in ways that will help realize that vision. There is usually some sense of hierarchy or authority involved, with the “leader” being “over” the “followers.” Civic leadership is different. Rather than leading from the top, civic leaders lead from the middle. They bring together people that they don't have authority over, but who all share a common concern, to develop solutions and the means whereby they can work together to implement them.

Chrislip and O'Malley's book stems from their work with the Kansas Leadership Center whose mission “is to foster civic leadership for healthier Kansas communities.” From that work they derive four key practices of civic leadership:



- 1) Managing self, which involves self-awareness (an understanding of one's strengths, weaknesses, triggers, and so on). It also involves being willing to go beyond your comfort zone, to try new things and consider new ways of thinking. And it also recognizes that civic leadership is difficult and that taking care of oneself is paramount in sustaining leadership over time.
- 2) Diagnosing situations involves the ability to gather and interpret information and being able to examine and reexamine assumptions, beliefs, and interpretations so that one's map can be a trusted guide for how and where to intervene. Diagnosis skills also involve understanding who needs to be involved in civic change efforts, as well as where and how.
- 3) Intervening skillfully involves engaging in adaptive work in a very thoughtful manner. Civic leaders have a clear purpose and speak and act intentionally, from the heart, and with an attitude of experimentation.
- 4) Energizing others is perhaps the most important role of the civic leader. Civic leadership is ultimately about mobilizing people in a community around shared interests. This often involves bridging divides, inspiring a sense of collective purpose or vision, and developing relationships of trust throughout the process.

It is important to note that the conceptual points that form the core of the book (e.g. a discussion of adaptive challenges) are heavily influenced by the work of Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky, authors of *Leadership on the Line* and the *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. Much of the terminology is the same, but here in this book the Heifetz and Linsky leadership model is shown squarely in a civic leadership context. Many vivid examples (from civic leaders in Kansas) are used to highlight the principles. So even if you are very familiar with the work of Heifetz and Linsky, *For the Common Good* is still recommended for the many excellent illustrations of Heifetz and Linsky's concepts in a civic context.

*For the Common Good* is inspiring and is highly recommended for anyone concerned about or working for change in their community. It is also a practical book, with specific ideas for practice that you can apply immediately to your own community leadership challenge.

Civic leadership, as the authors say, "is an activity, not a position." Civic leaders can come from any sector in a community, and indeed, is needed across all sectors (public, private, and non-profit). Leadership is a choice, and thus anyone can lead and help stimulate progress and change in their community. *For the Common Good* offers good advice for how to get started.