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## ***Becoming Colleagues: Women and Men Serving Together in Faith***

BY: CAROL E. BECKER

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Recent movie series depict leadership teams that guide followers to resist evil and restore good. The Harry Potter series matches an adult team of men and women wizards with the child team of two boys and a girl. James Bond always teams with a woman. The Star Wars series includes women within male leadership teams. Interestingly, in an older series, the Lord of the Rings, men dominate as leaders, with women portraying more traditional roles. These few examples illustrate two general shifts in contemporary leadership: the emergence of teams, and the addition of women. With these shifts taking place over the final decades of the last century, Carol Becker specifically considers the multiple dynamics that occur between mixed-gender leadership teams in congregations, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations.

A senior consultant at Growth Design Corporation, Becker began her research by investigating the central question of the book, "What must happen in order for men and women (working together) to have a more effective and mutually satisfying ministry together"? Grounded in research she gathered for her earlier work (*Leading Women*, Abingdon, 1996), she conducted a series of focus groups in her Presbyterian tradition. She had previously worked with over thirty-five women and eight men in thirteen Protestant traditions. Using several qualitative research strategies that included interviews, focus groups and some site visits, she surfaced various criteria for successful mixed-gender leadership teams. Becker then tested these criteria by conducting in-depth interviews with twenty-three mixed-gender teams representing various traditions in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The book reports her findings, offers stories that illustrate the struggles and successes of specific leadership teams, and suggests ways for others to form effective mixed-gender leadership teams. Becker begins by identifying several characteristics of an effective team. Leadership teams must

accomplish work, demonstrate interpersonal health, meet the demands of the organization, and increase the capacity of the individual members as well as the team as a whole. To this end, Becker identifies nine criteria that mark effective mixed-gender teams. She develops each of these criteria through stories reflecting actual experience, anecdotal feedback, and interviews. She further clusters the first five criteria under an umbrella descriptor of "reflective/ meaning those processes that are more interior in movement. She clusters the final four criteria as "active," describing those criteria that lead the team to outward action. The reflective-criteria cluster moves the team members toward inner work on: themselves as individuals, the team itself, team processes, work, effectiveness, and relationships. The reflective criteria demand careful listening and take time. They lead to belief in each team member, shared values about what the team does and how it does it, knowledge of the other, respect, trust, understanding of differences as men and women and as leaders with a variety of styles, and other interpersonal characteristics.

The active-criteria cluster moves the team members, and the team itself, outward. In this category, Becker includes issues of communication as well as how team members work together to accomplish a task. Perhaps the key criterion in this cluster concerns the use of influence or the ability to use power. At this point, Becker draws extensively from her previous work on gender differences. She notes that power, how one approaches power as well as how one uses it, differs between women and men. Finally, she develops strategies that both men and women can employ to become allies for each other. This final section invites team members to lead together effectively, change systems, and model newly creative and empowering methods of leadership.

Becker reveals a deep understanding of the current leadership literature. She attends to leadership theory, team theory, group development theory, theories of diversity and inclusion, and communication. Students in my class found the theories relevant to both gender-mixed teams as well as culturally-diverse teams. The stories make the theories quite relevant and practical. She offers suggestions for how teams might learn from those highlighted in the book and delineates separate strategies for men and women. At times her work has

provoked a negative response from some of my male students, who found her work on patriarchy too generalized, not allowing for the exceptional male who does not reflect the characteristics her research has surfaced. This volume is less generalized than her first. At the same time, in neither volume, does Becker soften her evaluation of the effects of the history of patriarchy on both women and men. She calls women to accountability for their part in their own oppression. And she surfaces suggestions for both women and men as they each seek to shed the effects of a patriarchal system in an effort to discover new ways of being in partnership with each other.

Becker suggests that leaders of congregations, educational institutions and other church-affiliated nonprofit organizations would benefit from the findings in this book. My students in pastoral leadership have found this text helpful in challenging them to new ways of conceiving their tasks as pastors. If we are to believe the gender-partnership leadership so effectively portrayed in current movie scenarios, a book such as Becker's offers faculty, students, pastors, leaders of groups, and others an opportunity to name issues and struggles while practicing new understandings and behaviors. She invites leaders of all levels to embrace the kind of dynamic gender-mixed leadership team that our movies portray and that our organizations need.

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