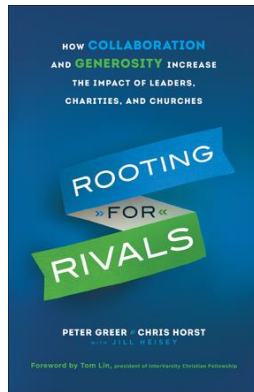


BOOK REVIEW

Rooting for Rivals: How Collaboration and Generosity Increase the Impact of Leaders, Charities, and Churches

By Peter Greer and Chris Horst with Jill Heisey

Reviewed by Tracy Kuperus



Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2018. \$16.99

In this engaging, well-written book, Peter Greer and Chris Horst do just what the title of their book states, viz. encourage leaders of faith-based charities and churches to replace competition with collaboration in the pursuit of Kingdom work. Greer and Horst are excellent storytellers. They draw on a wealth of examples from faith-based organizations to illustrate the point that “rooting for rivals” is possible and that partnership and radical generosity among like-minded organizations are freeing in the advance of God’s Kingdom.

Greer and Horst begin their book by setting the stage. The landscape facing faith-based organizations in the United States includes a short shelf-life for the majority of non-profits, a competitive, dog-eat-dog culture, and declining trust in churches and organized religion. These trends together contribute to faith-based organizations often viewing each other as rivals. But Greer and Horst argue that partnership (and radical generosity) is not only the correct posture for faith-based organizations as it mimics Christ’s call for unity among believers, it is also beneficial for faith-based organizations. When collaborating, these partnerships “leverage each other’s respective strengths and fulfill

their mission more effectively than they ever could” (24) if they worked independently.

Most of the book is spent on contrasting generous, open-handed leaders with those who are lone rangers. Greer and Horst argue that leaders who root for their rivals believe in a world of abundance and focus on the Kingdom, as opposed to leaders who believe in a world of scarcity and focus on clan (67). A two-by-two matrix is presented and four quadrants delineated with the seven spiritual virtues and vices displaying themselves in faith-based organizations based on how they view the world (in terms of scarcity/abundance) and their primary focus (clan/Kingdom) (78).

For example, the vice of greed displays itself when leaders adopt a scarcity and clan-based worldview. Leaders of this mindset convince the staff of their faith-based organizations that there are simply not enough resources, time, workers, and so forth to go around. The scarcity mindset runs rife among faith-based leaders as organizations seek to secure more for their clan, even when leaders know, deep down, that other organizations have greater needs (111). Faith-based leaders, in such circumstances, mimic the rich fool in Luke 12, who continuously lays up treasures for himself. So how should leaders of faith-based organizations respond to other faith-based organizations? With generosity of time, praise, and ‘best practices’ strategies. Greer and Horst go on to provide examples of organizations that have embraced ‘open sourcing’ with their rivals and the unexpected benefits in doing so.

The third focus of the book is its plethora of advice to leaders of faith-based organizations interested in turning vices into virtues. Among the bits of wisdom woven throughout the book are the advice that faith-based organizations should be willing to publish failed reports (to nurture the virtue of humility, 102) and to thank donors seven times for every ‘ask’ (to build the virtue of contentment, 168). In a chapter on pride and humility, Greer and Horst pose five questions that are worthwhile for leaders and staff members, perhaps even board members, of every faith-based organization to answer as they relate to the vice of pride.

This book is most valuable for practitioners working as leaders of faith-based non-profits and churches. Although we are told that the latter is the audience for the book, in truth, the audience is narrower. Evangelical (mainly white) leaders of non-profits based in the United States will find much that resonates in this book, but those who are outside this demographic might find portions of the book to be judgmental. For example, references to “an unreached country half-way around the world” (12) can be just as jarring as the phrase ‘undiscovered lands founded by European explorers’. If we have steered away from the latter phrase, shouldn’t we also eliminate the former?

Moreover, readers might wonder why the authors don’t highlight organizations like the Accord Network or CCDA, the ultimate team players in the field of faith-based global development and community development. Sharing time, resources and ‘best practices’ epitomizes these organizations – rivalry is not the only story among faith-based organizations. Or what about the book downplaying (overlooking?) the issue of duplication? Generosity and partnership among rival organizations are radical, but what if consolidation among the numerous micro-enterprise organizations serving the Global South occurred? True, unnecessary duplication is hardly the mark of faith-based organizations alone. Secular non-profits working domestically and internationally are also burdened by this reality. The wheels of advancing God’s Kingdom as it pertains to organizational duplication turn slowly.

Despite these shortcomings, *Rooting for Rivals* offers plenty of insight for leaders of faith-based organizations in the United States. Pursuing Kingdom success, not just organizational success, is the calling that Greer and Horst outline for their readers. Is it hard work? Absolutely, but a focus on collaboration and generosity is an affirmative response to Christ’s call for unity. It also leads to healthier faith-based organizations in the long run – a direction that many faith-based organizations would do well to embrace.

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