Review of *Leading Generously: Tools for Transformation*, by Kathleen Fitzpatrick

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Near the beginning of *Leading Generously*, Kathleen Fitzpatrick drops a quote from Timothy Snyder's *On Tyranny*: "Institutions do not protect themselves. They fall one after another unless each is defended from the beginning" (10). Fitzpatrick's book is indeed about defending our institutions: our universities, libraries, and all the collective structures that enable and sustain our scholarship.

Leading Generously very deliberately follows Fitzpatrick's 2019 book, *Generous Thinking*; she calls it a "handbook for putting some of the ideas of *Generous Thinking* into action." But where the previous volume focused on the "what" and the "why," *Leading Generously* aims to address the "how." Many of her earlier book's themes are prominent here too: how to make collaboration possible, the dangers of academic metrics and hierarchies, and our ongoing need to define and articulate value in the academy and in the humanities. Interestingly, the role of community engagement gets a slightly different positioning here than in her previous book; she notes, "that work alone cannot transform a campus culture into one that is genuinely inclusive and equitable" (2).

A genuinely inclusive and equitable campus culture is a good description of what Fitzpatrick is after, and this is a truly ambitious work. While it takes pains to be pragmatic and concrete in its insights and examples, it remains . . . awfully *ambitious*. Perhaps that's entirely appropriate to the problem: the polycrisis of the university in the twenty-first century. Fitzpatrick begins by assessing this problem space: the multiple crises—labor, economic, and political—faced today (post-pandemic, or, as she charmingly puts it, "when everything went kerflooey" [143]) in North American educational institutions and the special role of leadership in these crises. Her diagnosis of the state of higher educational leadership—certainly across North America—was full of resonance for me. I recognized so much in my own institution, a 30,000-student public university in western Canada. The political and economic differences in higher education between the United States and Canada are many, but Fitzpatrick's account of the crisis of leadership is right on the money. Her narrative of six years of rolling crises at Michigan State University brought to mind a whole series of local crises over the same time frame.

What Fitzpatrick means by "leadership" is purposefully broad. She explicitly acknowledges the book is not aimed at "chancellors and presidents" so much as all those within the university community who lead, making a case for leadership from within, from below, from the interstices of the institution, and not merely the executive: "If we hope to rebuild our culture's faith in our institutions of higher education, we have to begin by rebuilding our faith in them" (5). Fitzpatrick wants to take the focus off individual leaders, and the cult of the individual in leadership generally, and instead help build "cohorts and collectives, groups of grassroots leaders who can work together" (7). This sets the tone for how she presents leadership throughout the book: a decidedly *political* and *relational* process founded on teamwork, trust, and solidarity.

The failure or devaluing of these foundations is a key facet of the crises we face today: both symptom and cause of the erosion of collegial governance and the rise of a professional-managerial upper administration that often prioritizes different values. Fitzpatrick holds that "we, collectively—faculty, staff, and students as well—not only have the agency but also the responsibility to step forward, to take action, and to demonstrate that we belong to the institution as much as it belongs to us" (37). This feels so real to me; my own institution is governed by sedimented layers of policies and semi-official practices, scattered all over the institution at different layers, motivated by numerous different forces, and not centrally managed in any coherent or strategic way. Our leaders in the upper administration talk and act as if it is, but this fabric of policies and practices is more accurately a tangle, with lots of holes in it. What actually holds it all together as a functional learning and research institution is *us*: the faculty and all the people who share and embody a set of (sometimes vaguely articulated) core values. This is an arrangement that works when it works and doesn't when it doesn't, but the stakes are high. To the extent that we forget this, or divest this responsibility to a professional management layer, we doom both ourselves and the entire project.

The middle (and longest) section of *Leading Generously* is titled "The Tools," and here Fitzpatrick provides twelve short treatments on people, yourself, vulnerability, together, trust, values, listening, transparency, nimbleness, narrative, sustainability, and solidarity, respectively. To my mind these are not so much "tools" as an interlocking set of structures for *integrity*—not just integrity of individuals, but of the institution itself, which is properly the responsibility of leadership broadly construed. They are, she says, ways of seeing ourselves and our work in the context of the "ethical commitments" (57) we bring to our institutions.

The chapters on vulnerability, trust, and transparency in particular spoke to me as a cluster of mutually reinforcing qualities that I see as woefully absent from my

own institution's leadership. And in that, I also see the sketches of an alternative framework—into which many of Fitzpatrick's other tools quickly mobilize themselves: people, together, listening, narrative, and sustainability. And from that larger cluster emerges what I think is the vision of this book: a kind of institutional culture (including the formal leadership but is not limited to it) based on a deeply collaborative, responsive approach to running an institution and dedicated to the collective well-being and agency of its community. "Trust," she writes, "is a virtuous cycle, expanding as it is nourished" (108).

"The Tools" ends with an exploration of solidarity. Here Fitzpatrick champions the idea of a single union covering an entire campus community, regardless of status or rank. Perhaps surprisingly, she is prepared to question how tenure works in this context: "I'll say it bluntly: defending the privileges of tenure worsens things for everyone else, and it winds up undermining the best of what tenure is supposed to be" (166). Fitzpatrick asks instead what we want tenure to do for us (for starters, job security and intellectual freedom) and suggests that such protections could be more equitably distributed across the campus.

The penultimate section of the book, "The Stories," consists of five tales of transformation, of structure, community, hiring, review, and leadership itself that highlight the work of specific individuals at specific institutions. These are stories of people working out their institutional responsibilities by talking, working across structural boundaries, and collectively imagining how a set of agreed goals might be met without relying on institutional dogma or inertia and that all champion the idea of empowerment of the teams and individuals who bear the weight of the institution.

If there is a weakness in this book it is in the apparent distance between its ambition and the means available to realize it. The ideals championed in this relatively short volume (approximately 200 generously leaded pages) are high minded, conceptual, and could easily enough come across as utopian to someone struggling within a dysfunctional and paranoid institution today. But what Fitzpatrick wants from leadership—and from all of us—is fundamentally a change of self-image. In the success stories she highlights, people with responsibility saw themselves as having a particular kind of agency, unburdened by fear or dogma. And as such, her prescription isn't to *make your institutional structures work like this* so much as to *believe that you are capable of changing your institutional structures*. In that particular sense, perhaps *Leading Generously* isn't so different from other leadership manuals on the market. What distinguishes this one, then, is its emphasis on a set of relational and cooperative values—the tools Fitzpatrick enumerates—that offer a conceptual vocabulary to help us collectively re-imagine our agency.

Author Biography

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