

Learning and Leading in the Land of a Thousand Hills

An Unexpected Mission of Transformation and Joy

Praise for Learning and Leading in the Land of a Thousand Hills

In this life pilgrimage, there are few greater blessings than dear friends and mentors who can accompany us on the journey. *Learning and Leading in the Land of a Thousand Hills* represents such a journey. Claudio Morelli writes with wisdom and insight from his years of experience as a gifted educator and servant leader in Canada and Rwanda. He will make you ask important questions and give you insights you can use in your own journey from success to significance. I highly recommend it.

Richard Taylor – Vice-President of Student Life, Trinity Western University, and Co-Founder of the Wellspring Foundation for Education

Claudio's excellent book on leadership, based on his experiences working with us at the Wellspring Foundation for Education, weaves practical truth and everyday theology together in a profound way. Looking at issues such as the Rwanda Genocide and servanthood, leadership is examined through the lens of what it means to be human and frail, as well as a leader people can admire. A must read for all who seek to lead others with vision and humility.

Andy Harrington – Chief Executive Officer of the Wellspring Foundation for Education

With a love for leadership, a love for education, a love for Rwanda, and a love for Jesus, Claudio Morelli weaves together a narrative of encouragement for leaders who find themselves on the

edge of a new adventure. Both heartfelt and practical, Claudio Morelli encourages us to take that next step- trusting that the One who called us is faithful to the end.

Matthew Price – Lead Pastor North Langley, Community Church

To the reader of Learning and Leading in the Land of a Thousand Hills, time is of the essence, so I say to you who shudder at the thought of plowing through stacks of thick books to glean the essence of leadership, read this succinct autobiography by Claudio Morelli. Here you get not only basic and essential principles of leadership but see them in action applied in an environment of great need. Put these concepts into practice and you will be successful in influencing your world.

Don Krause – Retired teacher, Pastor, senior leader and mentor.

It has been a joy and inspiration to walk with Claudio from the very first days of his Rwandan journey, and to witness how an opportunity to use his professional expertise quickly became the catalyst for deep personal transformation. It took great courage for Claudio to take this leap of faith, during a season of life so often associated with a slower and more comfortable pace, and his obedience to God's call has made an immeasurable and lasting difference in many lives. I am so grateful for vulnerability and clarity with which Claudio not only shares his personal story in this book, but also translates his own learning into practical applications for leaders. Whatever your context, stage of life, or experience, this book will challenge you never to settle for anything less than what God has for you, and will encourage you with what is possible when you say yes to the adventure ahead.

Louise Reilly – Director of Public Engagement, The Wellspring Foundation for Education

This book is gracefully penned and candidly written. It demonstrates Claudio's response to God's call through his service with the Wellspring Foundation for Education. Claudio has contributed to God's restorative work in Rwanda using his knowledge, skills and experience. Claudio realized that in giving he received back, in filling others, he also was filled, in transforming leaders, his leadership also changed. This book is captivating, inspiring and resourceful. I've enjoyed every bit of its content from the beginning to the end.

Phocas Ngendahayo – Executive Director of The Abundant Leadership Institute in Kigali Rwanda

In *Learning and Leading in the Land of a Thousand Hills*, Claudio writes about stepping into an advisory position full of unknowns, both for himself and those he would mentor. But the opportunity resonated with his own personal vision, values and faith and so he took a risk and said yes. By reading *Learning and Leading in the Land of a Thousand Hills* one becomes the beneficiary of that experience and God's faithfulness in it. Claudio allows us into his personal journey of 'outside the box leadership'. You will be challenged to risk finding new ways to use your leadership skills that can revitalize your current role or open up new paths. There is much to be gleaned from the wisdom of this experienced, thoughtful educator and servant leader.

Gerry and Shirley Malnis - Life-long servant leaders and friends.

Learning and Leading in the Land of a Thousand Hills

An Unexpected Mission of Transformation and Joy

CLAUDIO MORELLI



Fireside Parliament Books

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Learning and Leading in the Land of a Thousand Hills: An Unexpected Mission of Transformation and Joy

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my dear and cherished wife Anne, whose life intersected with mine when we were both twenty-one years old. I thank our Lord for bringing Anne and I together forty-four years ago. Walking together through life's journey has been a blessing and a profound gift of God. Thank you so much for being an encourager, supporter and prayer warrior for me and our family.

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Foreword

If you've heard of the African nation of Rwanda it was probably through the inspiring and harrowing movie, *Hotel Rwanda*, that recounted the bravery of a hotel manager during the Rwandan Genocide in 1994.

Claudio Morelli's story is different and equally inspiring—and also set in the country of Rwanda. Weapons of war aren't mentioned in this book, instead, we learn that the path to peace is paved with education. Words, not weapons, smiles, not lies, and love, not hate are what bridge our differences as people. You'll read of the power of performing a great work of helping people discover their talents and contribute them to improving their lives and society.

As an experienced teacher and retired senior educational leader, Claudio was prepared to enjoy the next stage of his life slowing down and serving his family and community in beautiful British Columbia.

God had other plans.

Claudio got a call. Not a telephone call. Not a margin call. A call from God.

As Spencer W. Kimball shared, *“God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs. Therefore, it is vital that we serve each other.”*

As you'll read in this compact book, Claudio answered the call to serve and his inspirational message is an invitation to each of us to not put our calls on call waiting or call forwarding.

Claudio and I met over a decade ago at a Speed of Trust workshop at Sundance, in Utah. I had the opportunity to lead the course and

linked up with a kindred spirit in Claudio. He later invited me to Burnaby, BC to meet with leaders in his school district and I was able to witness the fruits of his leadership—teachers and leaders who had answered their calls to uplift children and their communities.

I hope you'll be inspired, as I have been, by Claudio's story of what's possible after full-time employment. You may be wondering what's possible for you. As is modeled in this account, look for a divine hand in the seemingly chance interactions with people you meet and the echo in your heart of unmet needs you sense and see in your world. Integrate the "Leadership Learnings" Claudio offers in each chapter and respond to his invitation to apply these lessons personally.

I trust you will be guided to know what's next in your life's journey and that it will lead you to fulfill the great work you've been called to do and be.

You're in the hands of a great guide in Claudio, and in the even greater guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Happy trails,

Barry Rellaford

Co-founder of CoveyLink, the creators of *The Speed of Trust* and co-author of *A Slice of Trust*

Introduction - An Unexpected Call to Lead

“For I know the plans I have for you” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11

I remember the day when my plan changed following retirement from a successful career as a Superintendent of Schools. It was the day when God sent two life-long friends Gerry and Shirley, to deliver an unexpected message. This message was unanticipated, surprising and unpredicted. I had no idea it was coming my way. I thought I had figured out my retirement plans, but I was oblivious to the fact God was orchestrating something else for me. He used Gerry and Shirley and a visit over lunch to plant a seed which helped me to commit to serve and join the Wellspring Foundation for Education in Rwanda.

When Gerry pulled out a piece of paper and asked me to consider a job for the Educational Advisor at the Wellspring Academy in Kigali, Rwanda, I am not proud of what followed. After a quick perusal of the posting, I got up, left the table, and started to clean up the lunch dishes. My actions appeared rude and inconsiderate. I was unaware of what I had just done. My son Michael called me out. He urged me to stop and come back to the table to listen to, and to talk with, Gerry and Shirley. Tentatively, I returned to the table, and agreed to take some time to ponder this opportunity.

To be honest, my initial response was, “there is no way that I am going to do this.” Negatives regarding the position flooded my mind. The job was in Rwanda and necessitated that I would be far

away from my wife and family for long periods. I would have to leave the safety and comfort of our home and life in Vancouver. My mind never even considered the positives of the potential opportunity. Internally, I had already disregarded this scary proposition even though I said that I would think about it.

Upon reflection, I now see why I initially left the table and the conversation. I was afraid. My anxiety had clearly kicked in, and I spun into a negative downward spiral that happens to me when fear arises. I tend to avoid and bury these worrisome situations.

I knew in that moment of time God had something prepared for me and was now calling me to do it. I did not understand why I was asked to consider this task. I felt unprepared and was unsure about how it was going to unfold. I was being confronted by a critical decision, and I was not convinced if it was the right one.

After considerable discussion with my wife and family, and prayer, I decided to pursue the opportunity. Even though I was still afraid, I contacted Gerry and Shirley and stepped out in faith. My family said it best when they shared that although I had assumed that there were reasons for why I had spent over thirty plus years in public education, God had a different purpose. As one of my sons suggested, “God was preparing you so you would be ready to do this work for him in Rwanda. He is calling you.”

God has given me hope and a future to use my God-given gifts and experiences. Following my retirement, he opened the door for me to do something for others and be transformed in the process. He planned to use Gerry and Shirley. That message led me to a new vision and mission to serve a country and an education system in need.

Although this call to lead was unexpected, I placed my faith in God and acted with conviction to listen and to obey. For over six years, I have now volunteered and consulted with Wellspring. I have a passion for serving with and supporting educators in Rwanda. I had never imagined this challenge and experience for myself. I

never dreamed that I would be learning and leading in Rwanda. A beautiful country with resilient, resourceful, and courageous people. A country that suffered so much during the Rwandan Genocide. This invitation to serve in Rwanda has brought about tremendous discovery, learning, and abundant joy as I have visited and interacted with my colleagues at The Wellspring Foundation for Education. This includes the administrators, teachers, parents of the schools we serve in Rwanda, and above all, the resilient and faithful Rwandan people individually and as a whole.

I have come to understand that God works in many unexpected ways. Our responsibility is to step out in faith.



What follows in *Learning and Leading in The Land of a Thousand Hills* is a personal narrative describing the most significant experiences and learning I have encountered in my unexpected leadership journey to Rwanda. These experiences, among many other crucible moments, have had a profound impact on my transformation. I have been blessed by taking this step of faith and responding to God's call on my life and now seek to share experiences and inspire others to move out of their comfort zones.

This book describes my journey of discovery in Rwanda, beginning with how this unexpected call to lead originated, through to how my journey continues today. These stories highlight how I was called as a leader to serve an organization, and people from another country that is responding to their past tragedy with hope, determination, and forgiveness.

Each chapter concludes with significant leadership learnings that resonated with me personally. There is also the opportunity for you to react to how the section pertains to your own leadership journey.

I encourage you to take some time to jot your thoughts down, journal, and/or share with others. By sharing a part of my narrative, I pray that I will encourage you to be discerning and mindful of

Learning and Leading in the Land of a Thousand Hills

God's call, receive it as I did and take that first step in faith when God unexpectedly calls you to action.

Chapter 1 - An Enlightening Conversation

“Whoever can be trusted with very little, can be trusted with much.”
Luke 16:10

Why did I decide to partner with this organization and venture so far from home to serve and support a country and an educational system I did not know much about? A discussion with my friend and colleague Jeffery Komant,^{1*} co-founder of The Wellspring Foundation for Education, convinced me that I was doing the right thing. We had many discussions during my initial visit to Rwanda, but one conversation over a cup of fantastic Rwandan coffee was particular enlightening. I asked Jeff if he would dig a little deeper into the Wellspring Foundation, its vision and mission, the successes and the future plans for the organization. Jeff agreed and together we spent two insightful hours discussing Wellspring’s birth, its work and its ongoing service to the country of Rwanda.

What struck me as Jeff spoke was his deep conviction, passion and sense of responsibility, which he believes was fostered by his parents. He not only demonstrates this as one of the leaders of Wellspring today but has shown and acted on this from an early age. A crucible moment and the initial catalyst for the birth of the Wellspring vision was when Jeff encountered young Rwandan street children high on glue searching through dumpsters in Kigali. Jeff felt that God provided that moment to see the injustice and the

1. * In 2019 Jeff Komant has transitioned out of his former position at the Wellspring Foundation for Education and has returned to Canada with his family

lack of opportunity for these young children. This insight triggered a personal point of conviction. Jeff felt that he had to do something for these innocent children. God gave Jeff a glimpse of clarity that he needed to act on.

Jeff stated, “It is my responsibility to listen and to act ... our response is not optional ... to whom much has been given much is required ... the believer’s job is to respond with action and commitment ... when God calls don’t get in His way, cooperate with Him and don’t mess up what God has called you to do.” From this first moment of clarity, Jeff then set out to act on his conviction to help Rwanda’s children. Three questions drove his passion:

1. Can education play a role in helping Rwanda’s children?
2. Can an organization partner with Rwandan educators to bring something unique and distinctive to improve education in Rwanda?
3. Can an organization mobilize and engage Rwandan educators to improve education and support the rebuilding of the country?

Jeff felt that there was a need for an organization to, “genuinely come alongside as God’s servants to equip, support and ultimately influence the next generation of leaders in Rwanda.” Jeff did not know it at that time, but these three questions compelled him to continue his personal conviction and responsibility to act. “I launched into it full speed. If God tells me what to do, I get on with it.”

With prayer, with faith and after speaking to his father, Jeff contacted his friend and eventual co-founder, Richard Taylor.^{2*} Upon Jeff’s return to Canada, he met with Richard and together after much prayer and discussion, they embarked on a mission to create this organization that would provide a unique and distinctive way of supporting the education system in Rwanda. The birth of

2. * Richard Taylor has moved from the Wellspring Foundation for Education and is now serving as the Vice-President for Student Life at Trinity Western University in British Columbia Canada

The Wellspring Foundation for Education was just around the corner!

The first step for Jeff and Richard was the development of the Wellspring Academy School. Their goal was to create a sustainable and successful Christian school based on the vision of the Rwandan people; led by Rwandans. Jeff and Richard ventured out to raise funds which neither had any experience doing. Their initial efforts resulted in a significant investment of capital to provide the start-up funds to initiate the first stages of building the school. Jeff stated, “It was a miracle that people we did not even know gave money to something they have not seen, will never touch or experience but felt that they could in some way be part of.”

After this initial planning, Jeff and his new wife, Jodi, returned to Rwanda to begin the clearing of land for the Wellspring Academy. The initial vision was now being actualized. Jeff continued, “Richard and I have always had a deep sense of caution about not making a big deal of what we did by raising the money and starting the school and what we have continued to do today. God uses people and He was using us to do His work and still is.”

The next phase of development for the Wellspring Foundation in Rwanda was the educational leadership of Yvonne Dyer. Yvonne became Jeff’s tutor during her time with Wellspring. Her greatest contribution to Jeff’s learning was her belief in the power of in-service and professional development. Yvonne’s leadership and influence led to the initiation of the School Development Program. This model program utilizes trained Rwandan teachers to work with school leaders, teachers, parents and children to bring transformation in the people and the communities they work with. Jeff shared that, “the model and structure of the School Development Program works and that the core values of the program are important, and we stick to them. Yvonne was God’s gift to us and was the right person to lead and learn from.”

After a little more than a decade The Wellspring Foundation for Education has flourished. “We are privileged to be a leader in the education sector in Rwanda. Through God’s blessings, miracles and a lot of hard work by credible people we have developed a mature, aligned and trustworthy organization. We want to be seen as servant leaders developing, modelling and sharing innovative solutions. Our goal is to make a profound influence in Rwanda’s education system and to be a catalyst to help out other organizations and partner with them to change lives in this country.”

Through the work, support and prayer of many people The Wellspring Academy is now a successful Christian school with over 700 Kindergarten to Grade 12 students. The school celebrated its ten-year anniversary in March 2012, was recognized recently as an exemplary school by the city of Kigali and graduated its first class of grade 12’s in 2016. In addition, the School Development Program is an exemplary model of educational transformation in the Gasabo District of Kigali positively affecting thousands of children and communities. The School Development Program has now been launched in the Rubavu District in the Western Provinces of Rwanda spreading further transformation to another needy school district in Rwanda.

When I asked Jeff what the next steps in the Wellspring Foundation journey his commitment to service appeared again. “Personally, I am passionate about Wellspring and the work we have done here in Rwanda. But there is still plenty of opportunity and challenge. We can do more, our God is a huge God and I feel that we can kick it up a notch, improve and refine more things here in Rwanda and in the neighbouring countries like Burundi and perhaps the Congo. I really feel that we should be further in our journey.”

This conversation inspired me. I knew then that I had made the right decision in listening to God’s call to serve in Rwanda with Wellspring. Partnering with Jeff and other members of the

Wellspring Team has given me a renewed purpose and mission. I am blessed and honoured to do what I can to serve and support.

LEADERSHIP LEARNINGS

Leaders display a deep conviction, passion and a sense of responsibility to make a difference in this world.

There will be a crucible moment in your leadership journey when you will be called to respond to a need with commitment and action.

People will follow and contribute to a leader who actively communicates and applies strategies to achieve their vision.

OVER TO YOU

After reading this chapter this is what I learned, and this is what I intend to activate for my own leadership growth.

Chapter 2 - A Personal Transformation

Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

As my three sons were growing up, one of their favorite activities, and admittedly mine was playing with Transformers. Long before the popular Transformer movie series came out, Transformer toys were a hit. Manipulating the toys into monster trucks, super heroes and villains was a lot of fun. The conversion of a toy does not reflect a real-life transformation, however. Unlike moving parts on a Transformer, the change of an individual can be elusive, perplexing, and taxing. Personal life transformation is an arduous and life-long process. Yet, it can be rewarding.

My personal transition was initiated during my first exploratory trip to Rwanda. I had not yet committed to serving with the Wellspring Foundation for Education. This first trip to Rwanda was an opportunity for me to see if the vision and mission of Wellspring was the right fit.

For two weeks, I observed a country embarked on a transition. I witnessed a country determined to change and develop with renewed energy and focus. The Wellspring Academy School was my home base for service. It was an ideal place to experience an on-the-ground example of transformation in action. The school is dedicated to empowering a new generation of learners and leaders.

During this initial visit, I was privileged to observe and speak with many of the community partners that founded the school.

I spent considerable time with the founders and trustees of the school, including The Wellspring Foundation Team, Christian Life Assembly Church, and the Wellspring Academy Board of Directors. My personal highlight, though, was spending time in the school's classrooms interacting with students, teachers, and leaders of the school.

What I found inspiring were the school's intentional actions to activate their vision to "produce a new generation of servant leaders to bless Rwanda and display the best of Rwanda to the world and to educate and equip students to become highly skilled, godly leaders and agents of community transformation." Not only was the vast majority of the community partners able to recite this vision, but they realized that through the delivery of a high-quality and sustainable educational program the school could actively play a part in Rwanda's transformation.

Although the school may not have the most up-to-date resources or access to technology that the Western world is accustomed to, the Wellspring Academy community is contributing to improving the life chances for the students of the school. A highlight of my visit was my attendance at the primary and secondary school assemblies that were led by students. These assemblies were more like worship services. Students and teachers sang, clapped, and prayed. Hearing beautiful voices singing with joy is an experience I will not forget.

After this first exploratory visit to Rwanda, I returned home and realized that I was in the process of a personal transformation as my new friends in Rwanda are undergoing. I started this adventure as a journey of discovery for a new season, unsure of whether serving in Rwanda was something God had planned for me. The people I met and the remarkable experiences I encountered during this visit left a significant impact. Just as I enjoyed transforming Optimus Prime a long time ago, a more personal and meaningful transformation began to occur in Rwanda.

I left Rwanda with a renewed sense of purpose and mission that strengthened my servant's heart. I fully embraced and committed to serving the people of Rwanda through the work of the Wellspring Foundation for Education.

LEADERSHIP LEARNINGS

Sustainable change and transformation take time. It is a life-long process of self-discovery.

Leaders display a deep conviction, passion and a sense of responsibility to make a difference in this world.

Successful organizations hire and support people who are committed and aligned with the mission and vision of the organization.

Leaders consistently review and activate their purpose for leading.

OVER TO YOU

After reading this chapter, this is what I learned, and this is what I intend to activate for my own leadership growth.

Chapter 3 - Do Not Ignore the Truth

Buy the truth and do not sell it— wisdom, instruction, and insight as well. Proverbs 23:23

Rwanda is known as The Land of a Thousand Hills, and in my personal experience, you could also say that Rwanda is also the Land of a Thousand Smiles. I have found the people friendly and full of warmth and joy. For a country and people that suffered such significant loss and experienced so much grief due to the 1994 Genocide, it is impressive how hopeful this nation's people are. When the discussion of the 1994 Genocide occurs though, the smiles do tend to vanish. I can understand why, as I continue to visit Rwanda.

For me, the warmth and joy disappeared for a while when I took in an informative, moving, and emotional visit to the Kigali Genocide Memorial. I wanted to further my knowledge of the country and to do so; I needed to look at Rwanda's history, including the events and impact of the Genocide. This visit gave me a realistic perspective on what the people and culture went through during this time.

All individuals would be moved by the Genocide Memorial exhibit. This experience out of all my experiences in Rwanda was the most impactful. A range of emotions washed over me during my two hours at the Memorial; sadness, disbelief, grief, loss, and anger. While sitting close to the mass graves, I asked myself, "Why did this happen, and why was this not prevented from happening?"

What became evident while moving through the exhibit was that actions to stop the atrocities from happening could have occurred. Information was apparent that such crimes were happening. Leaders took little or no effort at the outset to prevent the Genocide. The world's initial response was to ignore and to seek more conclusive evidence. Leaders in other parts of the world, not wishing to face the truth and information that they were receiving from Rwanda, ignored the situation, and did not act. The resulting consequences were devastating, with estimates of over 20% of the population killed, many injured, and so many scarred emotionally.

Rwanda's experience is a sobering example of what can happen when you ignore the truth. However, I have also realized that consequences also can occur in much less severe situations. Ignoring truth happens daily. Don M. Aycock and Mark Sutton in *Still God's Man*³ propose that when we ignore truths and disregard situations we do not like to hear, we tend to react with apathy, disbelief or we get angry at the individual or situation. Many of us do not want to face the truth because it requires difficult decisions, taking definitive action, and courageous leadership to face the truth and effect change.

Many find it much easier to avoid, deny, or point the blame elsewhere. It takes strong-willed, principled leaders to confront challenging situations to combat inaction. Even though it may be hard to deal with and act on complex issues, it is the courageous leader who faces these situations to avoid consequences from occurring. Thankfully, there were leaders who intervened to prevent the Genocide from continuing.

Most of us rarely face such situations that occurred in Rwanda, but I believe we can all learn a valuable lesson from this sad and emotional time in history. Two life-altering hours made me realize

3. Don M. Aycock & Mark Sutton, *Still God's Man: A Daily Devotional Guide to Christ-like Behaviour* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003), pg.58.

that I need to take personal responsibility for my actions, not ignore the truth, and respectfully confront those who harm others.

Regretfully, in a short period, it is estimated that over 800,000 people died. The repercussions of the Genocide still reverberate throughout the country. However, the people of Rwanda are remarkably resilient and hopeful; their focus is reconciliation and forgiveness. It is now over twenty-five years since the Genocide and the process of reconciliation continues. The country is forgiving but is not forgetting. “Never Again,” is the call to action for the Rwandan people. They have not ignored the truth, and they are a notable example for all of the world to emulate.

LEADERSHIP LEARNINGS

No matter what your level of leadership, you have a personal responsibility to deal with and act against injustice.

Strong-willed and determined leaders are not afraid to confront difficult situations and take definitive steps.

Do not ignore or avoid the truth. Invite feedback and act without defensiveness to criticism.

OVER TO YOU

After reading this chapter this is what I learned, and this is what I intend to activate for my own leadership growth.

Chapter 4 - One Courageous Team Will Not Ignore the Truth

For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man. 2 Corinthians 8:21

The 1994 Rwanda Genocide brought about a significant amount of pain, grief, and hurt among the people. This anguish continues to this day, yet Rwanda is a shining example of how one can deal with reconciliation when there is life-long grief. Rwanda is dealing with the truth of what happened in the past, and although painful, it has made tremendous progress. An impactful weekend demonstrated to me how the Rwandan people are living up to their commitment to making sure “Never Again.” Through candid, courageous, and vulnerable sharing, I witnessed this reconciliation process in action.

During a weekend retreat of the Wellspring Academy Board of Directors in Kigali Rwanda, I heard the heartfelt and painful stories of people whom I had never met and also who had not known each other. These people had come together as a new Board of Directors, of which I have the good fortune of being able to work with and serve. This orientation retreat was the first meeting, so the new Board did not have much experience working together.

The first activity was what I thought would be a typical ice breaker activity. I was surprised though, when one of the Directors, a young leader new to the Board, asked us to share our stories using three guiding questions.

1. How did you get to know God?
2. What do you like in life?
3. What is one thing that people may not know about you?

When my friends in Rwanda shared their stories, I was humbled. First of all, I was astonished at how transparent they were. Their vulnerability touched me. My new friends shared some profound comments including family members killed during the 1994 Genocide, siblings that died because of lack of food and nutrition, families having to leave Rwanda to go into exile because they feared death, lost homes and long-term grief and depression. Perhaps the most impactful part of the sharing session was when one member with deep emotion, apologized to his Rwandan brothers and sisters for what happened in the Genocide. As a Hutu, he felt profound sorrow and regret because of the Genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi. The words written here do not encapsulate the emotions and feelings as my friends described the situations that they and their families faced and are still dealing with to this day.

Although painful and emotional, from my observation, this sharing session produced an immediate bond, fellowship, and trust among the Board members. Such frank, open, and sincere sharing without judgment or criticism was an incredible statement that honest and open communication was valued and appreciated. Even the most painful and difficult conversations were accepted with grace and love. This opening activity set up the rest of the weekend for great success, and further progress moving forward. I learned so much during this experience. For me, what started as what I thought was just another “get to know you” activity turned into one of the most humbling and influential retreats I have attended.

Everyone does have a story to tell, but in many sharing sessions, most share surface-level details. Not the intimate details where masks disappear, and you get a clear view as to who this person is, why they behave as they do and how they take responsibility for their actions as the one team member did when he apologized. This

level of sharing during this Wellspring Academy retreat was atypical and rare. I was blessed to see a courageous team that has not and will not ignore the truth.

LEADERSHIP LEARNINGS

Transparent and authentic leaders practice open, courageous, and vulnerable sharing.

Honest sharing produces commitment, fellowship, and trust between leaders and their followers.

Leaders who do not wear masks act with integrity and honesty.

OVER TO YOU

After reading this chapter this is what I learned, and this is what I intend to activate for my own leadership growth.

Chapter 5 - The Day When I Was Informed, Equipped and Inspired

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. Ephesians 4:11-12

Friday mornings at Wellspring in Rwanda are exceptional. “Wellspring Church” is a morning where the Wellspring Foundation staff in Rwanda gather to worship together in song, prayer and in devotional time. These mornings are one of my highlights each week that I am with my colleagues in Rwanda.

One Friday in 2018, stands out. In two hours, I observed and experienced the fruits of successful leadership. It was two hours that all leaders strive to deliver, and followers want to be a part of. It was a session where all of us in attendance were informed, equipped, empowered, and most of all, inspired.

I did not expect to be impacted by this meeting going into it. The meeting was a time for the various departments of the Wellspring Foundation Team to report on their progress. With all honesty, I thought it was going to be an ordinary meeting where nothing remarkable and noteworthy would be presented. I was wholly mistaken and apologize to my fellow colleagues.

These servant leaders shared many of the attributes of the Law of Addition where leaders:

1. See themselves first and foremost as adding value to others by serving them.

2. Pursue love and service to others and not pursue power and prestige for themselves.

3. Improve the welfare of people, not their own wealth and status.⁴

One leader humbly, and with tears welling, described how he is so appreciative that everyone on the Wellspring Team is one team. That they are all working together selflessly. That they mutually support one another and that they are not worried about obtaining individual credit. He was so thankful that the successes that are being achieved are because the Wellspring team is a team of servant heart leaders. This leader issued effusive praise for all of his colleagues from the support staff in the office headquarters, to the drivers who take the leaders out to schools, to the office management staff and to the Country Director. He personally thanked them and gave them credit for helping him to achieve success and above all, to the successful outcomes of the school communities they serve.

This leader was not the only leader who shared his praise for his colleagues. In fact, all of them did in what has become a trademark of the Rwandan Wellspring Team. They encourage and affirm each other all the time by not only using their words, but by their selfless actions and by their constant encouragement.

My colleagues in Rwanda definitely have a passionate cause. They share a mutual belief that there is no obstacle, roadblock, or mountain that will prevent them from reaching, equipping and empowering students, parents, and communities in Rwanda. Their task is a bold one, but they are achieving success and are well on their way to achieving their mission of ensuring a bright future through the provision of quality education. The Wellspring Rwanda Team touched me this particular Friday. They reinvigorated and strengthened my own resolve and calling to humbly serve using my head, hands, and heart even when facing difficult challenges.

4. John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), Chapter 5.

LEADERSHIP LEARNINGS

Meetings can be motivating, uplifting, and rejuvenating with prayer and worship at the center.

Servant leaders serve first and never expect to be served.

Passion, commitment to a common cause, and supportive teamwork can overcome leadership challenges.

OVER TO YOU

After reading this chapter this is what I learned, and this is what I intend to activate for my own leadership growth.

Chapter 6 - Why These African Leaders are Passionate About Tackling Trust

And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. 2
Corinthians 13:6

As a course facilitator for The Wellspring Foundation for Education's Abundant Leadership Institute, I had the privilege to teach a week-long module on leadership to a bright and engaging group of leaders from Rwanda and Uganda. Working with these committed educational leaders for a week in November 2017 was an exciting and inspiring time. The mutual passion that we shared for informing, equipping, and empowering one another as leaders was energizing.

Halfway through the week, we were focusing on the importance of leaders building and enhancing trust with the people they work with and serve. Stephen M.R. Covey's book *The Speed of Trust* provided pertinent information on trust. In his book, Covey shares the results of a cross-country survey reported in 2005 by British sociologist David Halpern. When participants worldwide were asked to respond to the statement, "most people can be trusted," only 18% of individuals surveyed in a sampling of countries on the continent of Africa reacted positively. As a comparison, the Netherlands response was 60%, North America was 34%, and Scandinavia was 68%. Silence enveloped the room as I shared these findings.⁵

5. Stephen M.R. Covey, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (New York, Free Press Simon & Schuster, 2006), pg.11.

Although there was initial silence, the group overall was not surprised. Members of the group indicated that lack of trust among people might be one of the most significant roadblocks and challenges to not only building and enhancing positive relationships among people and among organizations, but also to the successful growth and development of African countries.

The group shared that even though leaders know it is essential and necessary to build trust, it is often avoided because the task seems impossible and too difficult to tackle. The group communicated that leaders tend to skirt the issue and not go deep to find out more and act to do something about it. In the past, I had realized that trust was an issue in Africa, however, the vulnerability my colleagues shared demonstrated their concern, and in some cases, despair. I truly understood for the first time how difficult this challenge will be to overcome.

Lack of trust has been ingrained in the culture of many countries in Africa due to a variety of reasons and circumstances. The Genocide in Rwanda is a prime example of where a lack of trust between people still exists. Although twenty-five years have gone by since the Genocide where neighbors, friends, and family members turned on one another, my colleagues shared that distrust is still pervasive. The Rwandan government and people have made great strides in its reconciliation process; however, more time and effort are required to improve trust levels.

Yet, this group does not see hopelessness on overcoming the trust challenge. They are trying to improve trust and are having some success. They see it as a slow and sometimes painful process. In fact, their commitment and passion for improving their countries through education for students, parents, and communities make them feel hopeful.

However, they were being realistic about the work that it will take to change from a culture of distrust to one where trust between people and organizations becomes foundational. They felt

that open dialogue, communication, and creating awareness are the first steps in moving forward. My friends were not afraid of leading what seemingly is an impossible task. It is easier to avoid the discussion. It is less threatening to talk about it in a safe and trusting environment that we had during the week. But as my colleagues exited the classroom door on Friday afternoon after a week of being in what they called a “think tank,” they were headed out to the reality of what they are facing at their schools, at home, and in their communities.

But I could not think of a better and more passionate group of people to entrust this challenge too. One person said, “It has to start somewhere, one step at a time. Maybe we are the ones to do it.”

LEADERSHIP LEARNINGS

Lack of trust can be a significant roadblock when attempting to build sustainable, trustworthy relationships in organizations.

At times leaders avoid tackling trust issues as it is a challenging and often difficult process to rectify.

Building and enhancing trust and removing distrust is a process that will take time and commitment to make it foundational in organizations.

OVER TO YOU

After reading this chapter this is what I learned, and this is what I intend to activate for my own leadership growth.

Chapter 7 - Why A Wellspring Vision Trip Can Be A Catalyst to Reconcile & Redeem

“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Luke 21:28

One of the most moving experiences I encountered serving with Wellspring was a sharing session at beautiful Lake Kivu following the conclusion of one of Wellspring’s Vision Trips. Annually Wellspring invites interested individuals and groups to visit Rwanda for two weeks to experience and learn about the country and the work of the Wellspring Foundation. During one vision trip I was fortunate to be part of, the vision team participants contributed their thoughts on what they experienced, what they learned and how they are now challenged after spending their time in Rwanda.

The team experienced a nation of people who are genuinely committed to embracing change despite numerous obstacles. The team observed dedicated teachers, students, leaders and community members selflessly contributing to a country in transition. They found resilient and industrious people working vigorously to provide a home that many of us in the west would not consider living in. The team learned about the history of Rwanda, including the tragedy of the Genocide and its continuing impact on the country.

The Team members were visibly emotional as they shared, and it was evident how the vision trip experiences transformed their lives. Here is a sampling of some of the comments I heard:

1. People are modeling servant leadership.

2. Remarkable healing and reconciliation has occurred.
3. I will now view success and achievement differently.
4. This trip has challenged me to be more grateful; to see the blessings I have.
5. I will apply what I have learned, go home and do what God calls me to do and seek His affirmation, not others.

Why did the team open up and share so explicitly, and why were tears shed? Experiencing hardship and pain, joy and hope and how the process of reconciliation and redemption has taken place in Rwanda significantly impacts you. Rwanda's history causes you to become more self-aware, and it causes much-needed reflection. You begin to better appreciate the prosperous life that we have in the west.

A visit to Rwanda also brings you face-to-face with reality and these experiences that the Rwandan people have gone through, and still are. It cannot help but change who you are and how you view your own life. You begin to measure what your life is all about in comparison to what the people here face.

This experience was a humbling experience for the vision team as it has been for me on each of my visits to Rwanda. You venture out of your comfort zone and out of your day-to-day routines to a place where reconciliation is evident.

The Rwandan people are models of transformation. You cannot help to question your efforts at offering grace, forgiveness and love to all. As one team member expressed, "I am deeply humbled by how we have engaged with the people. I am shifting out of my comfort zone and wondering what it will mean as a leader. I have a strong sense of anticipation upcoming."

LEADERSHIP LEARNINGS

Leaders who venture out and seek opportunities to learn, change and grow are not satisfied with being in a comfort zone. They want to contribute to a better world.

Leaders who experience real-life situations of hardship will be transformed.

Leaders recognize that God expects us to practice grace and forgiveness. As God forgives us, we must forgive others.

OVER TO YOU

After reading this chapter this is what I learned, and this is what I intend to activate for my own leadership growth.

Chapter 8 - Serving in my “Element”

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. Romans 12:6

The Wellspring Foundation needed an educational advisor; I needed to find a purpose and mission following retirement. God has his plans, and I am so thankful that He brought Wellspring and me together to meet both needs.

For me, a burning question following my retirement was, “Am I still able to make a difference by impacting and influencing others?” After leading, mentoring, and coaching during my career as a senior educational leader, I believe I still had a responsibility to impact and influence others in this new season of life. The opportunity that Wellspring provided opened up a new prospect to not only make an even more significant impact internationally but also to bring personal satisfaction, joy, and affirmation. Dr. Ken Robinson, in his book, *The Element*, describes those areas as the intersection of what you are good at and love to do. “It is using your God-given talents and strengths to engage in the things that excite and provide passion.

6. Sir Ken Robinson, *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009).

I have discovered that for me being a servant leader and serving others has been my calling. I view servant leadership as an honorable vocation with a critical mission. I see every day as an opportunity to change and positively impact other peoples' lives, whether it is in your family, at your workplace or with friends. As a servant leader, two challenging questions emerge for me:

1. Do I put myself in positions where I do serve, and am I positively impacting the lives of people?
2. Do I do everything in my power to ensure that I am putting forth my best effort?

I have been fortunate to utilize my servant leadership strengths with Wellspring. This opportunity has fuelled my passion for service. It truly is a role that provides me with a purpose, a mission, and a chance to work in my "Element."

Phocas Ngendahayo, a colleague in Rwanda, mentioned to me that, "Right now you are the right person in the right place at the right time to make a world of difference for students and leaders here." I don't know if I can live up to Phocas' affirming comment, but I do know that serving in Rwanda feels right. In this season, I am accomplishing my mission of service with a servant's heart, that indeed is my "Element." Serving in Rwanda is allowing me to utilize my strengths to impact, and change lives. Wellspring needed my help, and I needed Wellspring's support to help the country of Rwanda.

LEADERSHIP LEARNINGS

Leaders believe that they have a life-long commitment to impact and influence others.

Leaders discover their "Element" early and continually seek opportunities to lead in areas that give them personal satisfaction and joy, and in areas that they are successful.

Leaders align their “Element” with their purpose, mission, and service.

OVER TO YOU

After reading this chapter this is what I learned, and this is what I intend to activate for my own leadership growth.

Chapter 9 - My Rwandan Leadership Walkabout Continues

Save us, Lord, our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. Psalm 106:47

Early on in my leadership career, I was fortunate to have attended leadership seminars taught by Dr. Peter Norman, a professor of education at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby BC, Canada. At that time, Peter talked about change and the role each leader can play in impacting and in influencing change. He pointed out that as a leader, you need to look beyond yourself and your current sphere of influence. Impacting your current circle is only a starting point. It is necessary, but it is not good enough for leaders to stop there. Peter challenged leaders by proposing that if we want to effect sustainable change, leaders have a responsibility to stretch beyond and impact further spheres from self to family, to community, provincially, countrywide and ultimately to the world.

Peter's work had a significant impact and certainly influenced me to look beyond and always consider a long term and forward-looking view of leadership. His work and words played out in my career and ultimately, in my commitment to serve in Rwanda. What Peter shared was strikingly similar to the insight's shared by my family. They pointed out that my educational career had moved as Peter proposed. I moved through a growing progression from my start as a classroom teacher, to a school as a principal, to a school district leader as a superintendent, to a provincial leader in working

with international schools, and now the opportunity to influence globally in Rwanda.

Initially, I approached this new opportunity with fear and apprehension for I am uncomfortable about venturing away from a safe home that has familiar people and consistent routines. I had to step out of my comfort zone and confront the unknown, meet new people and learn about a new culture. Additionally, I was alone and not surrounded by my loved ones to be there with me and depend on their immediate support and care. For someone who suffers from anxiety, going to Rwanda was scary. Craig Groeschel, in his book, *Soul Detox*, suggests that fear immobilizes people. Many fear not knowing what the future may hold or worry about things they can't control.⁷ He encourages people to break free of fear and act courageously.

I was afraid, yet I did act in spite of that fear. I have realized that there was indeed a higher purpose beyond leaving the comfort of home and helping a school in an African country. There was a purpose to venturing out on my own. The aim was placed on my heart by God to find my calling and to influence, lead and to serve. To continue to build my servant heart so that I could help others in other parts of the world. To use my God-given strengths to influence and lead beyond the borders of self as Peter most rightly recommended and challenged me to do so many years ago.

My journey to Rwanda was and still is my walkabout. As described, it has been a journey of self-discovery. It has also allowed me to further my calling to serve and has helped others discover their calling and hopefully influence their leadership walkabout. Although my service in Rwanda continues, I still feel that this is only a beginning, and God only knows what paths the walkabout will lead.

7. Craig Groeschel, *Soul Detox: Clean Living in a Contaminated World* (Zondervan Books, 2012), chapter 8.

LEADERSHIP LEARNINGS

Leaders have a responsibility to look beyond their current sphere of influence to impact and always consider a long term and forward-looking view of leadership.

Effective leaders break free of fear and the unknown and lead courageously despite fear.

OVER TO YOU

After reading this chapter this is what I learned, and this is what I intend to activate for my own leadership growth.

Afterword - An Exhortation to the Elderly: Keep Breathing Life into Your Dry Bones

Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones. I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life (Ezekial 37:4-5).

My unexpected mission to Rwanda breathed life into my bones. My service with the Wellspring Foundation allows me to pursue an opportunity to continue to influence and lead. An 84-year-old friend of mine is a perfect example of God continuing to breathe life into him. At his age, he would be the first to admit that his body may be slowing down, but he would also be one to admit that he sees himself as someone who has a responsibility for leading, mentoring and shepherding. He is not ready to give this up. He is alive, and he continues to fuel his passion. In fact, he is so committed that after many years of prayer, he is working in collaboration with others to establish missional communities in a new area of our city.

There are no dry bones evident in my good friend as he continues to allow God to breathe life into him and into me as his friend. He is someone whom I am trying to emulate. My friend is not the only one as there are many more examples of women and men who are continuing to be active as elders. However, I think there are many more who are reluctant to. I have heard from the reluctant ones; the ones who are headed to the valley of dry bones if they are not careful. In fact, you may be one of those. Here is what I have heard from the reluctant ones. First, I don't know what my passion is, and even if I do discover it, who would want to spend time with me?

Second, at my age what could I possibly contribute to someone else? And third, I am too old, tired, and have nothing more to offer.

You may be tired and deserve some time away from leading, contributing and influencing whether it is with your family or at your workplace. You have done so for a long time and now feel you deserve a break. But after a while, when a growing unrest starts, you begin to miss that buzz and energy from being around people and doing something with and for a purpose. You begin to wonder will I ever be able to recapture the zest of helping someone out or influencing people. Usually, what happens is you begin to wonder what's next. What is really sad is when you start complaining, you give up and you become inactive.

There is no real reason why you cannot revitalize your sense of purpose and worth. In all honesty I suggest that you first get over your complaining, second get over yourself and that feeling that you deserve a break, and rise up because there are far too many people, groups and organizations that need you to step up and step out to lead. You have spent a considerable amount of time developing and refining your abilities as a leader. Just because you are now an empty nester or because you have retired from your job, why would you let all that expertise go to waste? You have such a lot to offer. Many are looking for seasoned and experienced individuals to lead and serve.

It is not too late no matter what your age or whether you think you are able to offer something of value. It is not about having the right qualifications; it is about your willingness to serve and to be available to help. It's really about preparing and then offering your heart. All of us have value, and all of us have abilities that can contribute and influence.

Although my bones did not go dry after retirement, I did begin to question my purpose early on. I went through a bit of a dry spell wondering what's next. I am so thankful when Gerry and Shirley came calling on behalf of Wellspring, and I am grateful of the encouraging voices of my wife and family. Today my bones are

still very much alive. I continue to have a sense of purpose, worth and value. I am contributing to helping others and organizations.

I believe your dry bones can also be revived again, and I am inspired by others who refuse to dry up. Like Sumi and Anne, both women leaders who are passionate about their calling and continue to lead women's groups and mentor younger women. Or Rob who loves coaching and continues to do so even though he has no kids of his own to coach. Or my friends the Komants in Burundi, who continue to plant churches as missionaries and don't believe in retirement. And Rick who is still active in educational leadership by serving students, teachers and other instructional leaders in several countries in the world.

The one thing each of these leaders has in common is that they would be considered elderly, people well into the second halves of their lives. In fact, some are 80 plus years old. They do not see themselves as being too old to contribute and are offering so much to so many. These individuals would all say that continuing to lead, serve and contribute gives them many unexpected benefits. Leading at an advanced age gives you a purpose and a mission. You feel valued and worthwhile. Most of all it helps you to stay alive and well. By contributing at what many would call "old age," they are breathing life into others and as a result, are reaping benefits as people half their age.

Richard Rohr in *Falling Upward* shares that, "mature societies were meant to be led by elders, seniors, saints, and "the initiated". They alone are in a position to be true leaders in a society, or certainly in any spiritual organization. Without them, the blind lead the blind." ⁸ Candidly, we need more elders to maximize their commitment to guide, support and prevent the "blind leading the blind". We need to hold others elders accountable who are not sharing their giftings and experience to help lead and mentor others.

8. Richard Rohr: *Falling Upward, A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2011).

Regardless of age, elders should believe that they have the capacity and power to think, contribute, and be significant and influential. Elders must be encouraged to believe that their experiences and leadership matter and can be used and revived as they enter the later stages of their lives.

Elders, your passion and commitment are needed. Open your eyes, ears and heart. Listen to God's call to give your life purpose and significance. He will breathe life into you again. He did it for me by calling me to Wellspring and He will do it for you. Just listen. For as Craig Groeschel definitively stated, "you're not dead, so you're not done!"⁹



I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly (1 Peter 5:1-2).

In *Learning and Leading in the Land of a Thousand Hills*, I have described my mission of "tending the flock of God" by reaching out to the people of Rwanda. But what I have come to realize is all of us have a flock to manage, whether it be your partner, children, grandchildren, family members, friends, co-workers or communities. Tending the "flock of God" is our responsibility. Whether it is a flock of one or a hundred, it makes no difference. We are all part of God's flock and just like our Shepherd searches and tends to us; we need to do the same. Blessings as you listen to God's call.

In love and friendship, Claudio Morelli

9. Groeschel, Craig, Craig @craiggroeschel. "You're not dead, so you're not done!". June 16, 2013, Tweet.

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Proceeds from the sale of *Learning and Leading in the Land of a Thousand Hills* will go to support the service and work of the Wellspring Foundation for Education. Please consider donating to this amazing organization that is changing lives of so many Rwandan students, families, communities and the country of Rwanda. You can learn more and give by navigating to the Wellspring Foundation for Education website at www.thewellspringfoundation.org.

About the Author



CLAUDIO MORELLI is an educational leader, consultant, and writer. For over forty years Claudio has activated his servant heart to teach, mentor and influence individuals, school districts, organizations and communities in Canada, China and in Central East Africa. In the second half of life, Claudio believes that we all have a responsibility to continue to use our God-given gifts to serve. He is using his giftings to exhort and encourage all elders to march boldly in faith and not shy away from their commission to influence, inspire and lead all generations.

