

Book Review: *Fables for Leaders*

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Editor's note: Book reviews are an irregular feature of the Quarterly; interested authors, reviewers and publishers may contact the editor for information.

Book Review: *Fables for Leaders*. By John Lubans with illustrations by Béatrice Coron. Salem, Ore.: Ezis Press, 2017, 201 pages. ISBN: 978-0-692-90955-3, \$26.99.

Books about leadership abound—one can easily spend one's life reading the classics alongside the new releases and reinterpretations. Ranging the gamut from self-help to academic treatise, a significant portion of these books use fables as an illustrative tool. For example, you may have heard the plaintive question of "Who moved my cheese?" or have delved into Patrick Lencioni's extensive works, most notably dealing with death by meeting.

The strength of fables when discussing leadership topics is their ability to offer digestible questions around morality and values in a way that appeals to a love of stories and storytelling. This makes the questions more relatable and opens the reader's mind to discussion and contemplation.

Lubans' new book presents over 100 fables, most with accompanying illustrations. Following an introduction, the fables are gathered into seven thematic chapters: Us and them, office politics, the organization, problems, budgeting and strategic planning, the effective follower, and the effective leader. Each chapter contains several fables organized around subthemes like "Looks can be deceiving," "Group think," or "Jumping to conclusions." The fables themselves are gathered from traditional sources like Aesop and European folklore, but also contain some more modern sources as well as creations by Lubans. The fables are fully credited at the conclusion of the book.

Each fable is followed by Lubans' commentary. In an accessible and friendly manner, he shares what thoughts arise in him when reading the fable, and relates the stories to workplace conundrums. One of my favorites, "The Cowardly Lion" from Aesop, about a lion that's frightened by the sound of a nearby toad, was presented alongside analysis about 'talking big but doing nothing' along with a note about how some translations of the fable end with the crushing of the toad, and how that can impact the lesson learned.

Lubans is a respected voice in both librarianship and leadership studies. He is the author of [Leading in the Middle: And Other Contrarian Essays on Library Leadership](#) (ABC-CLIO, 2010) and has worked in several administrative positions in higher education. He has served as a Fulbright Scholar and visiting professor at the University of Latvia, teaching about democratic workplaces.

I found this book thoroughly enjoyable both in content and in design. The presentation of the fables and accompanying text provides an excellent launching point for conversation among fellow library

workers. I could see this book being the basis of a leadership discussion group, with meetings to discuss one or two of the fables at a time. Discussing a fable might also liven up a staff meeting or serve as an icebreaker activity for an association or organizational retreat. Overall, the approach of analyzing and discussing leadership through the lens of fables allows us, in my opinion, to consider more deeply the values involved, which can be a welcome departure from librarianship's primary focus on the development of leadership skills.