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BOOK REVIEW

Taking the Lead: Strategies and Solutions from Female Coaches

Edited by Sheila Robertson; The University of Alberta Press, 2010; 282 pages. Cost: \$34.95 USD.

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Eleven different authors contribute to this chaptered book; each sharing their specific expertise from the fields of leadership and coaching. As university professors, former national team coaches, high performance athletes, and consultants, the authors have impressive credibility, and are excellently suited to write a book such as this. Individually and collectively they have professional, academic, and practical knowledge about coaching and leadership, and the use of their varied writing styles is an asset to the book.

Taking the Lead has several explicit purposes. For one, it serves to advocate for the “essential role female coaches can and should be playing to improve coaching in Canada” (p. vii). The book also intends to promote a strengthening of female leadership within sport, and aims to provide “guidance on how to make the sport community more welcoming, supportive, and respectful of female coaches” (p. ix).

Supported by the Canadian Coaching Association and by the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport, *Taking the Lead* offers an update on previously published articles from the *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching*. It contains 11 chapters and has several suitable full-page action-shots of contemporary female coaches. Although it is intended for readership amongst the broad sport community, it is perhaps more particularly situated as a guide for female coaches. While the content is uniquely Canadian, sport community members, and most particularly female coaches from across the globe, will find valuable information to inform their approach to coaching.

The content of *Taking the Lead* is, by and large, a presentation of the challenges facing female coaches, coupled with strategies to overcome such barriers. Each chapter deals with a particular challenge such as issues of discrimination, the ways in which family and coaching obligations are juggled, the lack of role models/mentors, job instability, insufficient remuneration, and the lack of professionalization within career coaching. Practical solutions to overcome these challenge, as well as information about successful communication skills, and how to increase the population of female coaches, are offered for consideration by sport administrators and coaches.

The main shortcoming of *Taking the Lead* is a redundancy between chapters. On a literal level, the same studies are introduced and presented several times. More generally, the overall impact of the book is lessened when the overlap and redundancy of themes between the chapters is only sometimes acknowledged. For example, some authors do a good job of creating links between their chapter and the other chapters. Unfortunately though, these links are rarely acknowledged. While the book claims to have self-contained chapters allowing for non-

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sequenced reading, in reality it fits somewhere in between true self-contained chapters of singular focus and a traditional book that flows and builds. This is because whilst the chapters try to deal with singular issues, the authors are forced to rely on the same limited literature to support their claims. Admittedly, the themes discussed (obstacles facing female coaches/professionals and the ways to overcome these obstacles) are significantly interconnected. However, a stronger collaborative effort and organizational direction by the editor could have resulted in a more poignant and succinct book.

The authors of *Taking the Lead* apply an inconsistent approach in dealing with the aim to increase the number and profile of female coaches. Specifically, some authors have a bias toward efforts concerning senior-leadership positions and high-performance sport, whereas others speak to a more comprehensive sport system which includes coaching and leadership at varying levels of participation. The unique experiences and expertise within a certain domain of sport (i.e., elite, developmental, or recreational) enriches the collective content of the book. What is missing is recognition of the unique perspective being taken. That is, some authors write through an exclusively high-performance lens. Without such declaration there seems to be an assumption by each author that everyone is writing about the same context. A more explicit presentation of each coach's focus would have helped the reader see which advice is best suited to coaches from varying domains.

This book provides a comprehensive overview of the barriers facing female coaches and addresses these barriers through multiple perspectives. A strength of the book is the varied writing style of each of the contributing authors. The authors write in a clear, jargon-free style and the assortment of narratives, anecdotes, profiles, referenced research, and research summaries provide interest and diversity for the reader.

Likely the greatest strength of the book is the inclusion of numerous practical solutions and advice for coaches and sport administrators. While more research and writing is indeed needed to clarify the thorny and evolving barriers facing female coaches, the naming of these barriers is not new information. Where this book differs, and does provide novel information, is in the presentation of so many valuable and practical solutions. The authors are to be commended for their use of charts, bullet point reminders, and reflective questions that collectively serve to guide coaches and sport administrators toward more inclusive sport environments which support greater female leadership.

Although not specifically referenced, the appendices provide even more resources to readers. Specifically, Appendix 2 lists sport-specific, provincial, and national coaching associations, while Appendix 3 provides a reference of all the *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching* articles between 2000 and 2009.

Considering all things, *Taking the Lead* is a good book that should be considered as 'recommended reading' for all female coaches. Several chapters are also quite relevant to sport administrators and coach educators, and would serve to guide them toward more equitable and inclusive practices.