

Book Review  
by Virgil O. Smith

**Management by Proverbs:  
Applying Timeless Wisdom in  
the Workplace**

Michael A. Zigarelli  
Moody Press,  
(Chicago, Illinois), 1999  
ISBN 0802461948

*Management by Proverbs* is an outstanding example of the process of integration of Scripture with the field of business. The author is an associate professor of management at Fairfield University in Connecticut. *Management by Proverbs* (he has also written, *Christianity 9 to 5* and *Can They Do That? A Guide to Your Rights on the Job*) will make an excellent addition to more

traditional materials in a management or general business course.

The book has 19 chapters, each based around a biblical principle of management. The chapters are organized into five parts. I have listed the parts and chapters at the end of this review.

Each chapter begins with an example of the principle being discussed (in some cases the example used is of a Christian explicitly trying to follow biblical wisdom, and in some cases is of a business firm just trying to manage well) followed by a discussion of the principle as found in Proverbs and other Scripture, and a brief overview of the related empirical findings of management scholars.

The biblical discussion is, of course, the heart of the book. One of the things that makes this work stand apart from others of the type is that in the introduction, Zigarelli explicitly lays out his hermeneutic for the interpretation of the book of Proverbs. His principles of interpretation are in five points: "Interpret Proverbs by Tapping the Original Language," "Interpret a Proverb in Light of Other Scriptures on the Topic," "Interpret Individual Proverbs in the Context of the Book's Central

Theme,” “Interpret Proverbs in Cultural Context,” and “Interpret Proverbs as Probabilities, Not Certainties.” The last of these refers to the fact that the proverbs were written as guidelines to behavior rather than absolute laws.

The overview of empirical findings that relate to the biblical principle discussed should be of particular interest to teachers of management. *Management by Proverbs* stands out from most other books of this type by this relating of scriptural principles to secular research, making it particularly valuable for the classroom. Zigarelli is explicit in holding the Word of God as the primary truth, but uses the empirical findings as adjunct information. In a few cases, of course, the empirical findings seem to contradict or at least lead to a different conclusion than the Scripture. Zigarelli handles these cases very well, discussing some of the possible problems in the research and occasionally noting that the research aims at finding what is most profitable in a monetary sense, while God is more interested in what is most profitable in a much broader perspective. This book is an excellent candidate for both personal reading and inclusion in an appropriate class.

**Part 1: Laying a Personal Foundation for Success**

1. Devote Your Work to the Real Boss
2. Regard Profit as a Means, Not an End
3. Be Humble
4. Prioritize Family Over Work

**Part 2: Building a Competitive Workforce**

5. Measure Twice, Hire Once
6. Offer Applicants a Realistic Job Preview
7. Select Carefully Your Management Team
8. Invest in Employee Training

**Part 3: Cultivating a Culture of Commitment**

9. Build Organizational Trust
10. Relieve Employee Stress
11. Value Employee Input
12. Develop Employee Careers

**Part 4: Evaluating and Rewarding Performance**

13. Measure Performance Validly
14. Deliver Criticism with Care
15. Reward Employees with Praise
16. Reward Employees with Profits

**Part 5: Controlling Workplace Conflict**

17. Restrain Workplace Gossip
18. Ensure Due Process
19. Discharge the Dross

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