New England Book Festival, Honorable Mention- How to

Melanie E. Bates

Melanie E. Bates is a Policy & Communications Associate with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of the Nation's Capital. Prior to joining the ACLU, she was the Legislative Director for Ward 6 Councilmember Tommy Wells at the Council of the District of Columbia. Melanie is President of the Greater Washington Area Chapter, Women’s Lawyers Division, National Bar Association (GWAC). She also serves on the National Bar Association’s Board of Governors. She is a graduate of Hampton University and North Carolina Central University School of Law.

How Do Lawyers Lead?

In this brilliant work, The Lawyer as Leader: How to Plant and Grow Justice, Dr. Artika Tyner examines several concepts of leadership to determine how lawyers may best use their unique talents and knowledge to help the underserved population. Dr. Tyner states that a lawyer engaging in social justice lawyering critiques the laws by seeking out those whose voices are not traditionally heard. By doing so, the lawyer aids in empowering clients and promoting their self-reliance. Let’s take a look at three key principles discussed by Dr. Tyner that contribute to a lawyer’s ability to lead.

1. Lawyers acknowledge that each person has the power and capacity to serve in a leadership capacity and make a difference.

   Lawyers are privileged to have a license to practice law. They have an obligation to empower the community to effectuate meaningful change. As we learn from Dr. Tyner, the servant leader focuses primarily on the needs and goals of others. This type of leader seeks to invest in others so they can understand the power that they possess. The organizer finds his goal in creation of power for others to use.

2. Lawyers motivate others to follow their vision.

   Leadership starts with a vision. The most important part of life is beginning each day with purpose. Dr. Tyner notes that leaders must continually engage in a preparation process by mobilizing and educating community members to address a given social justice issue. The lawyer is skilled enough to know how to operate the levels of agenda setting by reframing emerging social issues. In turn, this inspires others to engage in the vision. As articulated by Dr. Tyner, community engagement is essential for a paradigm shift in the justice systems.

3. Lawyers understand that communication is essential for moving forward with progress.

   Lawyers are challenged to explore the question, “Do you grow the people that you lead?” The most effective way to answer this profound inquiry is to utilize various methods of communication to examine the landscape in which you lead. Experiences of the community inform the strategy. Leaders must comprehend and internalize these
experiences in order to move forward with the shared purpose. As Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, and Dr. Tyner notes, “Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

Dr. Tyner does an exceptional job providing readers with the tools to become highly effective social justice lawyers. This is a must-read for any law student, lawyer, or member of the judiciary interested in uplifting others to achieve a common goal.

*The views expressed here are her own.*