

BOOK REVIEWS

that spirituality and work are connected when workers “view their work as a calling ... there is a strong belief that a person’s work has a valuable purpose ... is consistent with their values and there is a sense of community with others at work.”

To better provide spiritual care for others, we must first identify and be comfortable with our own beliefs. *Spiritual Dimensions of Nursing Practice* will help readers do both.

KIM S. MOORE is vice president, nursing, Saint Elizabeth Regional Medical Center, Lincoln, Neb.

HOW TO HEAR THE MUSIC AND SPOT THE TALENT

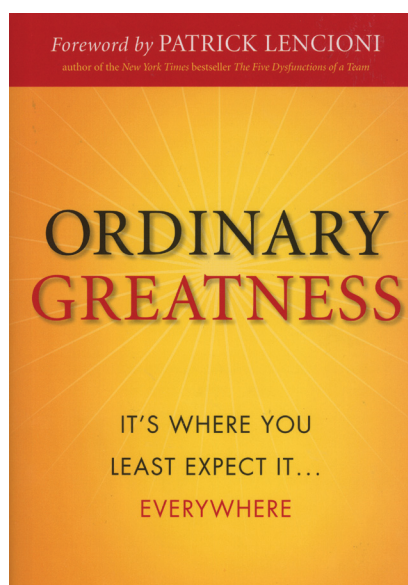
REVIEW BY SUELLYN ELLERBE

In a surprisingly insightful and concise guidebook for finding and encouraging greatness in employees, Bilbrey and Jones create a pragmatic recipe for making the most of human potential in your organization, drawing examples from a broad range of industries, including health care.

Threaded through the book is the story of how Joshua Bell, world-renowned violinist, stood in a Washington, D.C. Metro station one morning during rush hour and played six classical pieces on his Stradivarius as people hurried by. Nobody recognized him; hardly anyone stopped to listen.

The 2007 social experiment set up by the *Washington Post* won writer Gene Weingarten a Pulitzer Prize for “Pearls Before Breakfast,” his feature on the failure of most commuters to recognize the greatness of either the music or the musician. It is a striking example of how we miss the greatness all around us.

The authors define ordinary greatness as “superior and often unrecognized characteristics, qualities, skills or efforts found in a person who may be otherwise undistinguished; sometimes discovered in a response to unexpected circumstances.” In nursing we often find it when a particularly complex patient/family situation draws extraordinary efforts from the bedside nurses who are caring for the patient.



**ORDINARY GREATNESS: IT'S WHERE
YOU LEAST EXPECT IT ...**

BY PAMELA A. BILBREY AND BRIAN JONES

WILEY, 2009

192 pages, \$25

Seemingly from deep within, the nurses courageously address difficult ethical dilemmas, heart-wrenching family dynamics or compelling personal loss with grace, compassion and skill. These everyday heroes work among us in health care, though their efforts often go unrecognized.

Bilbrey and Jones advise leaders to

put in place processes, practices and systems to identify and celebrate greatness, and they offer a methodology that every health care manager can and should apply. From listening to staff and learning their stories to removing such blinders as our bias, busyness and preconceived notions, we learn that when, as leaders, we open our eyes and minds to the greatness within our organizations, amazing talent emerges.

An organization’s leaders need to determine the positive attributes they wish to sustain, negative ones they wish to eliminate and desirable ones they want to develop within the organization — then communicate those attributes to employees.

The authors found that once the attributes were identified, voiced and reinforced at all levels of the organization — combined with periodic culture assessments — the organizations they worked with began to see improved engagement in the workforce. Unless organizations are explicit about the culture they wish to create and sustain, the authors point out, “cultures develop by happenstance.”

In order to promote ordinary greatness in an organization, the authors recommend three implementation strategies: selecting employees for heightened engagement, recognizing involvement and participation, and

promoting accountability. While they are not new concepts, the strategies will help organizations achieve goals.

The authors also suggest taking deliberate steps to know employees at all levels of the organization. They emphasize the importance of a robust training and development program; the need to coach underperformers to reach acceptable levels of performance or to move out of the organization; and making managing talent a part of long-range strategy.

In my own work, I am often struck by how often we turn, time and again, to the same small group of employees to take on new projects. If we used every opportunity to know our staff, we in nursing leadership would soon discover the vast, untapped talent pool among us. If nurse managers truly knew the skills and abilities of each member of their team, they would be able to challenge and motivate all their employees to be a part of the entire enterprise. As engagement increases, so does accountability.

As Bilbrey and Jones note: "... accountability is nothing less than keeping promises," and it starts at the top. For leaders to elicit accountability from their staff, they must be role models of accountability in everything they do.

The authors also emphasize the need for leaders to change the way they view their world. Using a simple Q&A format, the authors show us how to assess our own ability to view our world in a way that allows us to recognize ordinary greatness.

Finally, Bilbrey and Jones end their book with a chapter called "Ordinary Greatness in Challenging Times." They emphasize that challenging times call on us to be even more cognizant of the talent around us; to carefully consider all decisions that affect our workforce, so that knee-jerk reactions don't render us incapable of responding when economic conditions change.

Health care has suffered during this economic downturn, but the authors point out that wise leaders will be ready to respond when new opportunities arise, using these keys: open, honest communication; continuing to reach deep into our talent pool for input and ideas; maintaining our resources, human and material at levels that allow for growth.

Although many of the processes and suggestions in the book are not novel, the way the authors present the material and the examples they use create a readable, digestible methodology that middle managers will find engaging and informative. I will be asking all of my leadership team to read and consider applying the approach described in "Ordinary Greatness." I know our employees have many hidden gifts yet to be discovered and extraordinary talents to share. I can't wait to see the greatness emerge in my organization.

SUELLYN ELLERBE is executive vice president, chief operating officer and chief nursing officer at Saint Clare's Health System, Denville, N.J.

EXCERPT FROM *ORDINARY GREATNESS*

... It was not the musician, the music he selected, or the instrument he played that prevented people passing through Washington, D.C.'s L'Enfant Plaza from recognizing greatness. Instead, the common surroundings, coupled with the perceived tyranny of their schedules, seemed to keep people on their original "track" without stopping to appreciate what was right in front of them. Joshua Bell's impromptu concert was not a destination or an event for which they had planned and saved. He appeared as they were transiting through a Metro station, and because of that, his performance was somehow seen as background noise and dismissed.

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