

Book Reviews

Lessons from Mergers: Voices of Experience

Nancy Linenkugel

Health Administration Press, 2000, 176 pp., \$35 (paperback)

IN THE PREFACE OF THE CANDID AND refreshing book "Lessons from Mergers: Voices of Experience," Nancy Linenkugel acknowledges that her own opportunity to gather firsthand experience interviews compelled her to make this wisdom available to others. The subtitle gives the main content of the book and is the focus of the author's doctoral dissertation.

The setting for the interviews is the health care ministry, an area certainly experiencing mergers and various types of joint ventures. Linenkugel notes that between 1994 and 1999, 3,997 health care facilities were involved in mergers—more than half the number of hospitals in the United States. The highest rate of activity occurred in 1996. The up side and down side of mergers can be traced throughout the conversations of the many people who participated in the book's interviews.

The voices of experience include executives, board members, department managers, physicians, employees, patients, and community representatives. The knowledge gathered is so extensive that it could be applied to mergers in general, not just the health care field.

In organizing the myriad conversations, the author gleans insights on why organizations merge, what they hope to accomplish, how the fit and the governance structures emerge, how merged organizations handle employees and their perceptions, and how to evaluate outcomes. In the mergers studied, business fit and culture fit were not enough to guarantee that mergers could achieve the desired goals. Factors of timing, motivation, and leadership, among others, contributed to success or distress. Linenkugel draws the interest of the reader without offering definitive answers. She lets the voices of those with experience speak for themselves.

After the introductory chapter, each of the remaining chapters is organized in a somewhat similar fashion. Critical factors are offered in a concise manner followed by many and diverse voices. The

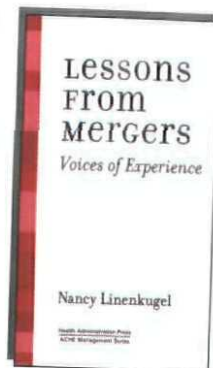
author intersperses paragraphs highlighting collective thoughts and providing insights. At the end of each chapter, a section titled "Clues and Hallmarks" asks questions of the readers in a probing manner, such as "Did you detect anything that indicates . . .?" This call to take time for reflection gives readers pause to discover their own insights.

Contributors to the book are candid and practical. They speak from firsthand experience in their particular role in the health care ministry and offer their thoughts both before and after a merger. The resulting success, the eventual failure, or the state of financial struggle that ensued is noted in each instance.

The final chapter offers a succinct summary in the form of tables comparing elements that contribute to successful mergers and those elements that cause less-than-successful mergers. The author then offers some words of advice she has gathered. These closing pages make the book a treasure of summary wisdom.

This book could be considered by health care system leaders who are preparing for some type of consolidation, joint venture, or merger. CEOs might use this book with staff to foresee experiences of staff, physicians, and community leaders. Although some of the comments are predictable, the questions at the end of each chapter could guide a small group in preparing for what to expect and how they might develop processes for participation in their respective groups. Taking time to learn from the voices of those who have preceded us adds to our own wisdom and eases the path for others.

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BOOK BRIEFS

Handbook on Religion and Health

Harold G. Koenig, MD, Michael E. McCullough, PhD, and David B. Larson, MD, Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, 712 pp., \$65.00 hardcover

Physically not quite a "handbook," this impressive tome comprehensively and systematically reviews the overwhelmingly positive relationship between religion and mental and physical health. The critical analysis includes more than 1,200 studies and 400 research reviews conducted in the 20th century. The authors use this material to provide comprehensive theoretical models to explain how religion might influence health.

Broken down into eight parts, this book thoroughly discusses historical context, the debate on religion's effect on health, religion and mental health, religion and physical disorders, religion and use of health services, clinical applications, priorities for future research, and studies on religion and health categorized by health outcome.

The breadth and depth of this book aims to lay a foundation for the emergence of a new way of practicing medicine that involves the body, mind, and spirit—and it definitely succeeds in that goal.

A Primer for Health Care Ethics: Essays for a Pluralistic Society, Second Edition

Kevin O'Rourke, OP, ed.

Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 2000, 352 pp., \$21.95 (paperback)

THIS SECOND EDITION OF ESSAYS WRITTEN by faculty members of the Center for Health Care Ethics at Saint Louis University Health Sciences Center is intended for and will appeal to a wide audience of readers. The editor, Kevin O'Rourke, OP, rightly points out in the introduction that decisions about health care ethics affect all

persons in society. This book will serve as a useful tool to engage those beyond the circle of health care professionals and scientists in the important discussion of contemporary issues in health care ethics. Moreover, the

text is a wonderful source of continuing education for individuals or groups within the health professions, such as hospital ethics committees.

Essays are organized by topic, covering 10 general themes. Part I covers

principles and core values, wisely including fundamental essays from the first edition. Topics important to those in the clinical setting, such as informed consent and the use and removal of life support, are generously addressed, as is physician-assisted suicide. Although the topics of genetics and research are included, they are explored in much less depth. Part 10 is an interesting sampling of issues that contain no obvious unifying thread. I recommend it to readers because of the importance of such topics as pain relief, suffering, the need for compassion, and disclosing imperfect care.

The essays contained here are quite brief; they focus on an issue, principles, logical reasoning, and conclusions. This model serves to develop or reinforce a basic framework for ethical reasoning for the reader. Perhaps the greatest value of this collection lies in its usefulness as a starting point for discussion. With proper facilitation, these essays will generate discussions to further understanding on specific issues as diverse as cloning, managed care, physician-assisted suicide, and many more. More importantly, they will enable discussants to hone their critical thinking and reasoning skills. Anyone interested in promoting a greater awareness and discussion of issues in health care ethics will find this book an invaluable aid.

*Rebecca Pruitt, MSW, JD
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BOOKS RECEIVED

Loving Your Job, Finding Your Passion: Work and the Spiritual Life, Joseph G. Allegretti, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 2000

Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights, Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 2000

The Veneration of Life Through the Disease to the Soul, John Diamond, Enhancement Books, Bloomingdale, IL, 2000

Managing Ethically: An Executive's Guide, Health Administration Press, Chicago, IL, 2001

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This is the day we
discovered the ocean.
And I learned jellyfish
aren't made of jelly.
And we laughed so hard
we swallowed the seal.

This is the day we got to
all forget I was sick.



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