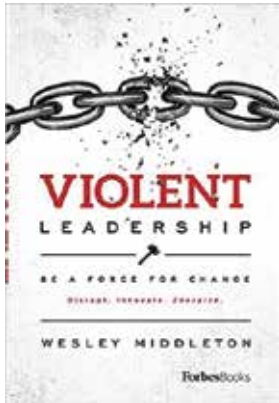


Positively non-violent



Violent Leadership: Be A Force For Change: Disrupt. Innovate. Energize.

Author: Wesley Middleton

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Violent Leadership: Be a Force for Change by Wesley Middleton is not the book its title might indicate. In Middleton's book, "violent" is a positive attribute. In fact, Middleton, the co-founder of a large Texas-based accounting and financial-services firm and a deeply religious man (his pastor provides the book's foreword), was inspired by the Bible to label his style of leadership "violent leadership."

As Middleton explains, Matthew 11:12 says, "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force." Middleton quotes different interpretations of the word "violent" in this passage. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, he writes, interprets "violent" as "those who strive to obtain its privileges with the utmost eagerness and effort." Strong's Concordance interprets "violent" as "a forceful, violent man; one who is eager in pursuit. And the HELPS Word studies interpret "violent" as "positive assertiveness."

The latter definition best encapsulates Middleton's meaning of "violent" as a positive attribute that combines passion and aggressiveness as well as fearlessness in taking risks. Middleton describes this fearlessness mindset, writing, "I'm going to do this. I'm going to be the guinea pig. I'm going to demonstrate how this works. If it fails, it fails. If it does not, it does not. We'll see."

For example, Middleton's firm realised that it was spending an inordinate amount of time monitoring people's days off and sick days. It decided to do something radical: allow people to take off whenever they wanted. The only stipulation was that they had to fulfill their billable hours obligations and, even more important, ensure that the clients remained happy. (In addition, as CPAs, taking time off during tax season was off limits.) "It was a scary leap to make," Middleton writes. "Once announced, I was concerned about whether anyone would show up the next day. Luckily they did."

Another element of violent leadership is what Middleton calls being a "thermostat." Middleton separates managers into two types: thermometers who simply record the temperature and thermostats who set the temperature – or "set the tone" in the office, a tone that is upbeat and energetic. "To have an energetic, positive and motivated team, managers have to be energetic, positive and motivated," he writes.

Middleton interprets 'violence' as 'positive assertiveness - a mix of passion, aggression, and fearlessness



Not all managers are comfortable walking around, shaking hands and encouraging their team – especially in a firm full of introverted CPAs, Middleton writes. He should know, for Middleton is one of those CPAs. However, he disciplines himself to get out of his office on a regular basis, to stop by the desks of his team and speak with each team member on a personal basis. "I am not faking it," he writes. "I am sincere, but it has been a learned process for me." He and the firm help other managers learn the same discipline – that is, to recognize that they cannot stay in their offices with their heads down, doing their work and pretending that no one else exists. As Middleton writes, the firm emphasizes to managers that "it is your job to get up and influence others, to encourage, energize, motivate and affect. That is your role, to be a thermostat."

Middleton uses many stories from his firm's experience to demonstrate the effectiveness of his version of violent leadership. He describes in one chapter, for example, how to assign roles for partners and owners based on strengths. In another chapter, he proposes a restructuring of firms from the traditional "finders, minders and grinders" to the more client-centric "advisers, solvers and servers" – the latter category including a client-experience officer who oversees the firm's client-relationship managers, a brand-experience officer and an employee-experience officer.

Middleton writes with both passion and humility about his firm and about his leadership style. Although cantered on professional services, the lessons of Violent Leadership would no doubt be applicable to any company seeking to create an innovative culture that is energetic and fearless. ■