

For the Common Good

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“The Common Good.” That’s a desirable, if sometimes amorphous, concept. The common good is something that should be good for everyone. But in our modern, polarized society, how can we achieve the common good? The answer is, it will require leadership – not from an elite few, but from all of us. That’s the concept of a new book by two authors who focus on redefining civic leadership. It’s today’s Kansas Profile.

David Chrislip and Ed O’Malley are co-authors of this new book titled *For the Common Good – Redefining Civic Leadership*. These two co-authors might be considered an odd couple. One is older, the other relatively young. One is a Democrat, the other a Republican. One grew up in a rural area, the other in the city. But both are definitely committed to the concept of civic leadership.

Ed O’Malley is President of the Kansas Leadership Center which was created by the Kansas Health Foundation to enhance civic leadership so as to benefit the health of all Kansans. Ed, a proud Kansan, had been a state legislator and assistant to a Kansas Governor.

His co-author is David Chrislip. David’s work took him from the National Outdoor Leadership School and Outward Bound to the American Leadership Forum to the National Civic League. David has already written two books: *Collaborative Leadership* and *The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook*.

When the Kansas Leadership Center was first created, David Chrislip served as its Director of Faculty Development for five years. He and Ed O’Malley wanted to chronicle and share the center’s work.

After much research and writing, they produced *For the Common Good – Redefining Civic Leadership* in summer 2013. It’s based on their belief that civic leadership can better respond to today’s civic challenges. They wrote, “Civic leadership can become more purposeful, provocative and engaging, and thus enhance our collective capacity to address the complex adaptive challenges we face.”

The book outlines leadership competencies and guiding principles such as the concept that leadership is an activity, not a position; that anyone can lead anytime, anywhere; that leading starts with one’s self and then moves on to engaging others; that clarity of purpose is essential; and that leadership is risky.

The book suggests four key leadership behaviors or competencies: Diagnose situation, manage self, intervene skillfully, and energize others. To explain those, the book tells the stories of five diverse individuals and the challenges they faced.

One was Doug Mays, former Speaker of the House of Representatives. Another was Lance Carrithers, pastor of Dodge City’s Methodist church in which he sought to include more of the Hispanic population. A third was David Toland, director of a health coalition called Thrive Allen County. Laura McConwell is the mayor of Mission, Kansas, which was dealing with challenges of financing upgrades to the city’s infrastructure. The final example was pediatric physician Denise Dowd who sought to deal with issues of wellness and prevention in an urban hospital setting.

Each one dealt with what appeared to be intractable issues. The book chronicles the lessons and applications of the leadership learning along their journeys.

While these examples are relevant to many states, all of these examples are drawn from Kansas. This is fitting because Ed O'Malley is a lifelong Kansan and David Chrislip grew up in rural Kansas, having come from Abbyville, population 127 people. Now, that's rural.

These authors call us to a high standard: To set aside complacency, to care deeply, to intervene personally and to engage others in working together toward the common good. For more information, go to kansasleadershipcenter.org/resources.

On March 11, 2014, the K-State Leadership Seminar will focus on the theme of Leadership for the Common Good. Ed O'Malley is the featured speaker. Every registered participant will receive a copy of the book. For information or to register, see www.k-state.edu/leadershipseminar.

The common good. In our modern times, finding the common good may be difficult, but this book describes processes and real world examples which can inform our journey. We commend David Chrislip and Ed O'Malley for making a difference by creating this book. Such examples of outstanding civic leadership may not be common, but they are definitely good.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.