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# Local author challenges leaders to be different ? to be better ? in new book

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?How do I lead?? is a question that every leader might ask. From store managers to heads of state across the world, that question will ring out from the backs of their minds, and doesn't always get the same answer.

Shelburne author and resident Alethia O'Hara-Stephenson wants to challenge the conventional mindset of leaders everywhere. She wants to redefine what it means to lead and break through established standards with her new book, The Distinctive Leader.

?This is not another leadership book that you read and set down somewhere and forget about,? she said. ?This book is a transformational manifesto. It looks at leaders, beyond the titles and positions. It challenges them to look at their legacy, what they are leaving behind. It challenges them to redefine it, and to shine a light on the world so that others can find hope and purpose.?

O'Hara-Stephenson said that a leader is not the position or the titles. A leader is the person who dedicates their time to service. It's someone who takes pride in the work they do for others and on behalf of others. To her, leadership ? when everything else is stripped away ? is public service.

She said this is an important question the book will pose to readers.

?What is your legacy leaving behind?? she said. ?Forget about your title or position. How are you serving others, and how are you making their lives a little bit better? It's as simple as that.?

Some of the topics the book addresses are how to bring out confidence in a leader and what might take away from that confidence. Even in today's world, inequality at every level persists, whether that be gender equity, pay equity, or cultural norms; all of these factors can empower or push down people trying to shine.

O'Hara-Stephenson said she wants to reimagine that and draws on her own life experiences.

?Just looking at chapter one, it's very heavy, talking about the perceptions of being a black woman and some of the barriers that we face,? she said. ?The most common notion is around the angry black woman stereotype. The book uncovers other stigmas as well, such as wearing my natural hair. Historically, a black woman's hair has been deemed unprofessional. But I ask ?Based on what standard?', This is the hair I was born with.?

The book will address entrenched norms from a perspective that starts conversations around them, allowing leaders to reflect on what they see as normalcy, and encourage them to be proactive and challenge set standards. It will also empower those who are trapped on the other side of those standards, encouraging them to push through.

O'Hara-Stephenson wants people to be genuine with themselves and with each other, as the first step in leading is having confidence in yourself. She said that the book can be picked up by anyone at any level and will give them helpful insights at the end of every chapter.

?After each chapter, you'll see some reflective questions waiting for you,? she said. ?This is to help readers stop, think, and digest the information they've just taken in. We're going to talk about imposter syndrome, burnout, and how people can identify the symptoms and put steps in place to overcome them.?

It is O'Hara-Stephenson's hope that readers will find useful nuggets in the book that help uplift or expand their horizons on what

being a leader means to them, and empower people to be themselves and to love themselves.

She said that even people at the top don't have all the answers, and that leadership is just another step in personal growth.

?Distinctive leadership was never about position,? she said. ?It's your purpose, your growth, and your impact. This book is all about unlocking your excellence, helping you shine brighter.?

The Distinctive Leader is available now at BookLore in Orangeville and Amazon.ca.