Rosedale Bible College alumnus Jon Byler is the International Coordinator of Global LEAD Alliance, an organization that is committed to “equipping Christ-like leaders in the church and other spheres of society” (GlobalDisciples.net). Recently, Global Disciples published his book, The Art of Christian Leadership: Developing Skills to Lead God’s People.

When asked why he wrote this book, Byler said there is a crying need for “leaders that lead like Christ.”

**The puzzle of leadership and church growth**

Byler’s passion for training leaders is fueled by his work with churches in Thika, Kenya. Originally called as a pastor to a new church in the Thika area in 1991, he stayed in Kenya for 13 years. The denomination in which he served, the African Christian Church of East Africa, changed its name to Christian Church International in 2003, a year before he returned to the States.

During his time in Africa, Byler pastored a local church, oversaw about 15 area churches, and became increasingly involved in leadership training. “Because I saw some of the churches growing and some of the churches not growing in the same area and denomination, I knew something was going on that I didn’t quite understand,” he said.

His first inclination was to think, “These guys [the church leaders] need Bible study and knowledge.” Several did go to Bible school for training. In some cases, he said, “that helped them, and in others, it didn’t.” He recognized “there was something more than [the need for] Bible school going on.”

He began to think about character as a factor, which “added another piece to the puzzle” of why some churches grew and others didn’t. But that didn’t answer his question satisfactorily, because some of the leaders he observed had strong character “and still their churches weren’t growing.”

Byler also examined the issue of environment. Some of the pastors were in difficult situations. Perhaps the poverty and lack of education among potential church members hindered church growth. He had to discard this theory, he said, when a friend of his with “no theological training” planted a church that thrived in a remote area.

As Byler focused on training leaders in Kenya, he continued to wrestle with the issue of what makes a leader effective. In his book, he said, “I taught at a Bible school, started a Theological Education by Extension program in Ethiopia...
the church, held leaders’ seminars, and prayed with the pastors I was overseeing.”

He discovered that although seminars were good, they were “not really producing the life transformation we were looking for.”

He began to wonder: Could it be “a sovereign decision by an Almighty God” that “some people can be leaders and others never make it in leadership”? Could he really do nothing about it?

**Fitting the pieces of the puzzle together**

At the time he was asking himself these questions, he began working with Centre for Christian Discipleship. In his studies about leadership, he encountered John Maxwell’s teachings. “He taught me that ‘everything rises and falls on leadership’ and that leaders are not born, they are made,” said Byler.

He cites Maxwell’s practical resources and ideas for developing leadership abilities as foundational to his own teaching. Ultimately, he concluded that in addition to knowledge and strong character, pastors need to possess leadership skills to lead effectively. He describes these three components (knowledge, character, and leadership skills) as the three legs of a stool, each “necessary for the leader to stand.”

While he acknowledges the importance of sound knowledge, he said God has called him to concentrate on just two of the three legs. “We started the Leadership Training Institute,” he said, “in which we focused primarily on character development and strengthening of leadership skills.”

Leaders participated in a full day of training every month for a year. “That program really filled a niche in Kenya,” said Byler, adding that hundreds of leaders have benefitted from it. The Institute now offers three years of training and has spawned several other training programs in Kenya and Uganda.

Most of the content of *The Art of Christian Leadership* flows out of the training Byler and his colleagues did with the Institute. He said that although the book addresses pastoral leadership, the scope is much broader than that. Anyone who holds a leadership position in the church “and doesn’t have a clue where to start or what to do” will find this book helpful.

“I’ve become a big believer in application and actually putting it into practice,” he said, explaining why each chapter of his book is accompanied by a detailed Action Assignment. These assignments allow readers to take time to reflect on what’s been taught.

“My goal is not information but transformation. I try to provide the framework for [readers] to do it if they’re willing to take a little time and answer the questions.”

The book is divided into two parts: “Leading Yourself” and “Leading

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**Jon’s thoughts on Rosedale Bible College:**

My year at Rosedale was a very formative year for me. It helped solidify my faith, called me to full commitment to follow Christ and gave me a much greater appreciation for my Anabaptist heritage. While at Rosedale I formed friendships that continue to be a blessing to me today. The faculty was outstanding and committed to far more than academic excellence. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to study at RBC.
Others.” The Action Assignment at the end of the first chapter, “The Leader Understands Leadership,” begins with this activity:

In this chapter, you learned that “leadership is influence.” Think of the group that you lead. Whom would you approach to start something in your group? (List two or three people and your reason for considering them.)…Before this lesson, did you recognize that these people were leaders in your group? How can you improve your relationship with them?

Other chapters in the first section touch on the leader’s potential, and his or her vision, goals, time and priorities. The second part of the book focuses on working with others, covering: people skills; choosing other leaders; personality; teamwork; spiritual gifts; church discipline; church administration; finances; and boards.

Everything rises and falls on leadership

In his book, Byler agrees with Maxwell and said that leaders are significant because “everything rises and falls on leadership.” He also states that “only one thing hinders the growth of your organization…leadership!”

Pressed for explanation, Byler said he “can’t imagine a good leader and a church not growing.” Not all growth is necessarily measured by numbers, but the church is a living organism and should be growing, he said. “There are places where it’s very difficult” and in an environment of opposition “we may not see huge numbers of people.” Other places may bear a lot of hurts and wounds from the past, making growth difficult.

“Only effective leaders are going to work at that” and make progress, he said. Referring to followers hurt by leaders in the past and their resistance to new leaders, he adds, “That’s a reality we have to deal with a lot of our Mennonite churches.”

“Someone is going to have to lead the church to find healing, forgiveness and release. Even though it’s very difficult, I’d still stand by the statement that everything rises or falls on leadership.”

Going global with leadership training

For the last year and a half he was in Kenya, Byler pastored the mother church of the Christian Church International in Thika, a church of 800 members. Around that time he and his wife, Loice, a Kenyan, sensed God calling them to a new ministry here in the United States.

Since 2004, Byler has worked with Global Disciples in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. As international coordinator of Global LEAD (Leadership Equipping and Development) Alliance, he helps churches in different parts of the world set up the kind of leadership training he did in Kenya.

“We provide training to people who want to do their own training on site,” he explained. After four days of instruction, the participants are released to start their own training. “We help them to get it launched, and we will walk with them and mentor them.”

The Alliance is an informal network of people and groups who are doing this kind of leadership training and have agreed to share resources. The international director, Dr. Leaderwell Pohsngap, lives in Northeast India, and the Alliance works primarily in Africa and India.

Byler has also written The Heart of Christian Leadership, which explores character development and can be used as a companion book with The Art of Christian Leadership. You can find out more about Byler and his books at www.LeadersServe.com, and about Global LEAD Alliance at www.GlobalLEADAlliance.net.