

Values in the Key of Life: Making Harmony in the Human Community

By Kent L. Koppelman

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Reviewed by

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Values in the Key of Life: Making Harmony in the Human Community by Kent L. Koppelman explores values and possible motivations behind those values. Generously splashed with witticisms and quotations, the book is an interesting combination of stories, logic, and opinion. Professor Koppelman is a master storyteller when illustrating a point and a skillful weaver in inviting the reader to participate in self-exploration and healthy dialogue.

The book is separated into seven chapters entitled “In the Key of A: Altruism,” “In the Key of B: Benevolence,” “In the Key of C: Collaboration,” “In the Key of D: Diversity,” “In the Key of E: Empathy,” “In the Key of F: Forgiveness,” and “In the Key of G: Grace.” In each chapter, Koppelman guides the reader through a series of observations, questions, conclusions, and thoughts. He tells interesting and elaborate stories as the basis for value analysis and, on more than one occasion, covers multiple issues with one narration. The process serves not only as a catalyst for self-assessment, but also provides an opportunity for group discussions and debates centered around ethics, multiculturalism, education, social norms, sexual orientation, and societal expectations. The questions raised would provide numerous bases for discussions with summer orientation programs, or with presentations on ethics, communication skills, volunteerism, education, and community-building.

No topic escapes the wide range of issues the author presents through his stories and analogies, including religion, families, poverty, ethnicity, stereotypes, homophobia, the deserving/undeserving poor, individuality, becoming an educated person, justice, sympathy, empathy, wealth, and death. These issues are carefully woven into the A through G chapter titles.

The book is an easy read; yet, it is a slow one if the reader stops to ponder some of the issues at hand. The material would be more meaningful to a group which has had some basic exposure to the need for appreciation of others and an understanding of altruistic motivations, and it would be well-suited to a beginning college-aged audience. The most obvious criticism of the book is the occasional lapse, intentional or otherwise, by the author of logical analysis in favor of a moral opinion. Perhaps this is to prompt

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debate; perhaps it is a soapbox. Nonetheless, some may consider this to be a liberty beyond the author's role in a work of this type.

Koppelman has done an excellent job. The book is highly recommended for a personal library, primarily as a self-exploration guide and secondarily as a handy manual of ethical, cultural, and social dilemmas to present in group discussions. The wide range of quotations and the interesting stories are of themselves worthy of the investment in the book.