

December 1, 2008

Author pens leadership guide for white men

By David Hayes

Chuck Shelton knows he's got a hard sell ahead of him with his new book. Just the title alone is enough to turn heads — "*Leadership 101 for White Men: How to Work Successfully with Black Colleagues and Customers.*"

"Most of the time, the first reaction in people is they're intrigued," said Shelton, a Sammamish Plateau resident since 1989. "Then, they look at me and ask, 'What could you possibly know about the subject?'"

"African-Americans see the title and generally laugh," he added. "Then, they quiz me to check my credentials."

It boils down to what Shelton has learned in the past 20 years as a corporate trainer, coach and consultant. Essentially, he's a leadership developer who has helped executives from some of the region's biggest corporations, from Microsoft and Key Bank to Safeco and Comcast.

In his research of the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, Shelton found that there are nearly six million white men in leadership jobs in the United States. White men used to be in charge in more than half the jobs. Now, that number is down to 38 percent. Shelton said he has seen estimates that by 2050, there will be no ethnic majority at all in the U.S. Add to those numbers the types of questions he's received from white executives over the years in the face of a growing ethnically diverse workforce, and Shelton knew he had an untapped market.

With the book in the works for 10 years, Shelton originally wanted to write about dealing with white leadership in the entire diverse workforce.

"But I had publishers who said that was too broad a topic," he said.

So, he narrowed it to one of the biggest ethnic groups, blacks.

"Some even complained that was too narrow," he said.

He drew upon his diverse educational environments — with degrees from progressive The Evergreen State College in Olympia and the conservative Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif.

"I received a diversity of opinion in my education," he said. "The bottom line is how you think about race makes a difference in the world. I like to say I've been building relationships with African Americans since I was 10. So, I bring a lifetime of experience to the lessons."

He's filled in the rest by researching questions actual leaders had asked, including providing corrective feedback, how concerns play out while hiring and promoting blacks and the affects of political correctness.

"So many leaders are especially tired of not being able to say what they want for fear of being politically incorrect," Shelton said.

Something as simple as being afraid of mispronouncing a name can actually fester and create an unhealthy workplace, if left unaddressed.

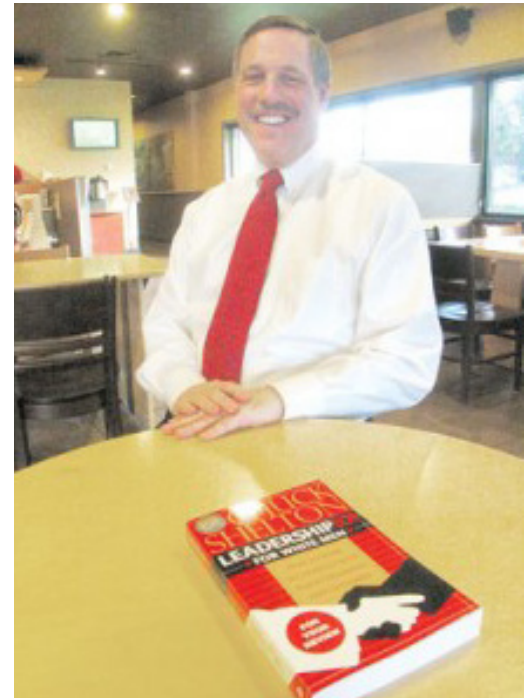
Originally, the book was scheduled for release in January, with publishers looking for books to tie in with Black History Month in February. But with the election of Barack Obama, "Leadership 101" becomes all the more topical, Shelton said.

He said that as far as he knows, his is the first book on white leadership on the market. Regardless, he hopes any white person can find it useful in being human and helping them become organized about how they think about race.

What to know

"*Leadership 101 for White Men: How to Work Successfully with Black Colleagues and Customers,*" by Chuck Shelton, is only available at his Web site — www.leadershipforwhitemen.com. It arrives at bookstores and online at www.amazon.com in January.

Reach Reporter David Hayes at 392-6434, ext. 237, or dhayes@isspress.com. Comment on this story at www.issaquahpress.com.



Corporate trainer, coach and consultant Chuck Shelton, of Sammamish, compiled the biggest obstacles white leaders have faced in his 20 years in his new book, 'Leadership 101 for White Men.' Photo by David Hayes.