

**Doug Lemov, Erica Woolway, and Katie Yezzi, *Practice Perfect: 42 Rules for Getting Better at Getting Better* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 263 pp.**

Given the name of this journal, I was drawn to the title, *Perfect Practice*, written by three authors who are all experts in the field of teacher education—the educating and training of people to be effective public school teachers.

Doug Lemov is noteworthy for his bestseller, *Teach Like A Champion*.<sup>1</sup> In this volume the authors summarize their extensive experience by focusing on the importance of practice and its various components, instruction, modeling, and feedback. The book gives us 42 rules for improving practice and, therefore, the performance of those we teach. They show how these rules are applicable to a wide variety of professions and disciplines, from sports to business, medicine, and the military. I was intrigued to read this book with an eye toward the kind of skills training that we do—training in care-giving skills. We normally think of theological education as the teaching of concepts and ideas, but a good percentage of seminary work is focused on skills training, caring skills, communication skills, and administrative skills—and the effective teaching of skills like these involves a lot of practice.

This is not a profound book. The writing is more like common sense. It is not a theological book, or even a theoretical book—but it is an interesting book. As I read it, I found myself reflecting on how I teach listening skills in my courses in pastoral care and counseling. Of the 42 rules, here are a few highlights:

- Normalize error—so many of our theological students try so hard to be good that they are afraid to fail;
- Necessity of practice—many of our theological students think that if they are called to ministry, then they should be able to do ministry naturally;
- Make practice fun—many of our theological students are so serious that they cannot enjoy learning;
- “Praise or criticize the work, not the person”—so many of our theological students are hypersensitive to being liked; and finally,
- Apply First, then Reflect—in the realm of skills practice, endless theological reflection can be a barrier to effective practice. Some skills are better taught by doing first, then reflecting.

I normally do not recommend popular self-help books, but *Perfect Practice* is worth a read, especially if you work in the arena of skills education. We have much to learn from the discipline of teacher education.

**NOTE**

1. Doug Lemov, *Teach Like A Champion: 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College (K-12)* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

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