

Leadership for Christians

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WHAT A LEADER IS

Most everyone has a certain idea or impression of what a leader is. When groups have been asked to define it they have given various explanations, including: “taking responsibility,” “getting results,” or one word descriptions such as: “commitment,” “perseverance,” “charisma,” or “integrity.”

Some who consider themselves experts on the subject suggest:

1. James C Hunter: “We define leadership...as a skill of influencing people to work enthusiastically toward goals identified as being for the common good.”
2. Andy Stanley: “Leaders provide a mental picture of a preferred future and then ask people to follow them there.”
3. Kenneth O Gangel: “I consider leadership to be the exercise of one’s special gifts under the Call of God to serve a certain group of people in achieving the goals God has given them toward the end of glorifying Christ.”

In John Maxwell’s interesting and useful book, “The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership” he states: “Leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less...titles don’t have much value when it comes to leading. True leadership cannot be awarded, appointed, or assigned. It comes only from influence, and that can’t be mandated. It must be earned.”

I don’t recall the originator of the statement, but its truthfulness is undeniable: “Some leaders demand respect, while others command respect.” There’s a huge difference between the two. One is an order; the other is the respect and honor that we give voluntarily to someone we trust and believe in. A leader with this advantage has the ability to exert influence that is wholesome and effective toward a positive result.

Christian leaders who look to Christ for their authority, strength, and example deserve double honor. It also behooves these leaders to “toe the line.” By that I mean, to be people of true faith, with high morals and genuine love for people. A leader is a man or woman who doesn’t speak out of both sides of their mouth. As the Native American Indians used to say, “He doesn’t speak with forked tongue.”

How does a leader become a leader; become like the person I’ve described above? As I recently told you from the pulpit last Sunday, he listens and learns, he follows and then boldly leads. There are differing leadership styles, but the substance of leadership is to be had in being engrafted into Christ. He is the vine, we are the branches. Without Him we can do nothing good. With Him and in Him we can do all things, through Him who gives us strength.

Ask yourself why you have come to participate in this study topic? Isn’t it because at one or more levels you desire to grow as a leader? It may be professionally, or personally, or politically, or for the congregation’s sake, or your family’s sake. We wear many hats as Christian leaders, don’t we? As Pastors, fathers, sons, husbands, wives, children, citizens, you name it – we aspire to greater and more effective roles in the context of, and in the dynamic of leadership.

In God’s Word you will find plenty of examples of leaders. Some were good and resulted in blessings for people and glory to God. Some were poor and self-oriented and self-absorbed. They sewed their own best interests and did not edify those they held sway over, and neither did they glorify their Creator.

We desire to be God-pleasing and more effective leaders don't we? So then let's go to the source of all knowledge and goodness and seek answers to our questions there. Please join me as we pray.

Dear Father in heaven,

We ask your rich blessings on our efforts in these classes as we seek to gain effective ways to grow ourselves as Christian leaders in our congregation, in our communities, at work, in the home, and every where we roam. Help us to be committed to studying "the one thing needful," your divine Word, which alone can impart these blessings to us. Help us to listen and learn, to follow and to grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

LEVELS OF INFLUENCE

We will be using, as a loose structure for our topic of "Leadership For Christians," the 5 Levels of Influence suggested in the book of Chris Brady and Orrin Woodward entitled, "Launching a Leadership Revolution." In a quote Ari D. Kaplan made we find application to what we're trying in part to accomplish, "a true leader inspires others to lead themselves." It is our goal to grow leaders who in turn will inspire others to lead as well.

Jim Collins, author of "Good to Great" offers the following 5 Levels of Leadership:

1. Capable Individual
2. Contributing Team Member
3. Competent Orchestrator
4. Effective Leader
5. Executive

In keeping with this general progression in building leaders and leadership, the authors of our text offer the framework of the following hierarchy:

1. Learning
2. Performing
3. Leading
4. Developing Leaders
5. Developing Developers of Leaders

This framework is viewable in graphic form on page 119 in Chapter 6. It appears like a staircase that is viewed from the side. **The first level of influence is – Learning.** A person starts out on this journey of leadership like a child running out on the football field for their very first game. While they are full of enthusiasm and hungry to perform, they are greatly lacking in skill level. It is time to learn. Leaders who fall in love with learning never stop learning or improving their skill sets. Learning is truly foundational. Jesus once asked, "Is a student greater than his teacher?" Is a servant greater than his master? To assume so is naïve and clearly sets the cart before the horse. If you have that attitude it will certainly limit your growth as a leader.

We must start out with a "learner's permit" before we are allowed to operate a motor vehicle on our streets and highways, correct? We must make learning a top priority. It doesn't have to be formal or "credentialed." Learning can occur in many ways and leaders soon realize "they are only as good as what they learn and apply." One great opportunity each year in our Northern Wisconsin District in the "Church Leaders Workshop" held at Fox Valley Lutheran in Appleton. Many speakers present a wide variety of topics helpful to laymen and women who want to grow as leaders in their congregation, on their

boards and committees and as organists and musicians. These occur normally in February or March each year. Try it, you'll like it.

Leaders can learn from anyone. Opportunities abound around us. Keep your ears and eyes open for sources. It's like Dale Carnegie wrote, "Everyone is your superior in some way." He meant that we could gain education, information, insight and wisdom from many people if we are willing to work at it. Of course, Scripture is the source and norm of all teaching. Biblical principles and God's will guide what we will accept as valid and true.

Another gem is that **LEADERS CAN LEARN BEST FROM THOSE WHO HAVE RESULTS.** Doesn't it make a lot of sense to learn about becoming a carpenter from an experienced and successful carpenter? As the saying goes, "Success begins with information from the correct source."

LEADERS LEARN ABOUT PEOPLE

I'm convinced that one of the greatest blessings of our worker training college is a well-rounded, liberal arts education. In this way we learn many facets and nuances of people. Leaders need to be well versed in the art of human relations in order to be effective. It has been said that people don't care how much a leader knows until they know how much he cares. That reminds me of a great Bible passage, "Cast all your anxiety on Him, for He cares for you." Jesus went out of His way constantly to "get His hands dirty" and talk to people. But a leader needs to specifically learn about the people he is serving. When we take the time to do this we cause people to gain confidence in us because we're searching to help and we're not just spewing forth pabulum and the "party line" so to speak.

LEADERS LEARN ABOUT BASICS

Do you know that every person who aspires to own a McDonald's restaurant franchise has to go through a sort of "McDonald's University" before being permitted to represent McD's as an owner? It means they have to learn and do everything that everyone of their employees has to do, including sweeping floors, frying French fries, and cleaning the rest rooms. This way they gain a real "hands on" kind of empathy and understanding.

LEADERSHIP LEARNS ABOUT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Even in our own families and homes we have certain expectations and goals. Believing in them and standing for them is just as important as articulating them to our spouses and children. Don't be afraid to "stick by your guns" and insist on curfews, or attending to and sharing certain chores around the house. God put you in charge as a Mom or a Dad to lead and exert influences with your children, so do it. In our house it is expected that you will attend church regularly. We pray before meals. We don't condone sinful lifestyles and we don't sit by and clam up if we sense potential danger in our families' personal relationships with friends. They may be miffed about it for a while, but they'll get over it before they get married won't they?

LEADERS LEARN ABOUT MEASURING PERFORMANCE

If you are a Sunday School teacher you expect your students to be in church, to attend classes regularly, to do their memory work to the best of their god-given ability. Expect spiritual growth and maturing. Don't legitimize laziness or rebelliousness. We took a big step toward ensuring faithfulness this past year by asking parents to sit in, on a rotating basis, in their children's classrooms. It helped a great deal to cut out some of the discipline problems that we had had.

LEADERS LEARN ABOUT HISTORIES

The philosopher George Santayana said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Good leaders take an interest in the history of their organization. What worked in the past? How was it done? Is there something or some approach we should avoid? In Ecclesiastes, wise old Solomon wrote, “there’s nothing new under the sun.” In other words, what has been will be again. Some things are worth repeating, while others should be avoided like the plague.

A friend of mine keeps meticulous records of everything she and her husband spend their hard-earned money on each year. Not only does this help when preparing her taxes in April, but it also serves as a method to adjust or change, or increase how they spend in the future.

Members of church boards and committees can improve their service by being mindful of pitfalls that can be avoided if we remember that all attempts failed in the past to get the message across a specific way. A church is not a business and it should not be run like a business. We’re not selling a product; we are part of the body of Christ that is serving to help others see themselves the same way. Remember, history is best understood as His-story. Everything fits into the plans God has for us. It all serves a purpose, and we gain when we go back to learn from the past.

Our authors bring up a good thought when they say: **LEADERS LEARN FROM AUDIO RECORDINGS AND VIDEOS**. It is a universal rule that people who want to lead are busy people. Sometimes so busy that it’s very difficult to carve out time to sit down and read a book or even attend a class like this one. That’s why it is so helpful that with today’s technology that a person can pop in a tape or CD or DVD and listen and learn even while we walk, or drive, or eat our dinner in front of the TV. These can be extremely clear forms of communications. Leaders pursue every avenue of learning available to them in their quest for effectiveness.

LEADERS LEARN FROM ASSOCIATION WITH OTHER SUCCESSFUL LEADERS

“Birds of a feather flock together,” goes the old saying. “Tell me who you hang around and I’ll tell you all about you,” says another. “We are a product of the books we read, the things we listen to, and the people we associate with,” says another. These are all very true. From a more negative angle there’s one more that makes us think long and hard about whom we associate with, “you can’t hang around with turkeys at night if you want to soar with the eagles in the morning!”

Proverbs 2:10f. KJV – “Where wisdom entereth into their heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh forward things; Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness...”

Did you know that each one of us influences at least ten thousand other people during our lifetime? So the question isn’t whether you will influence someone, but how you will use your influence. If you learn from every Godly source available, from coaches and mentors, from associates and family members, and from the results of your own actions, you will prepare yourself for future opportunities and you will begin to know how to lead in a way that lifts people up and promotes a cause.

So “search the Scriptures” for they, most of all, are able to make you wise for salvation. Then, apply that wisdom to your task and you will surely see blessings abound! Come to a Bible Class or enroll in Bible Information Class as a solid review of the teachings of Scripture. You will be enriched and you can’t help but grow your faith and increase your capacity to serve.