

Developing Leadership Teams

This teaching relates specifically to developing leadership teams, and assumes that the leaders have embraced the principles set out in "Servant Leadership".

Relevant points from "Servant Leadership"

Called to Serve

Leaders and leadership teams are called to serve the people of God, not to rule over them:

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all." (Mk 10:42-44 NIV)

Leading by Example

Kingdom leadership depends not upon authority and duty but on vision, inspiration, empowerment and love:

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but **being examples to the flock**. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." (1Pe 5:2-4 NIV)

"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." (1Co 11:1 NIV)

We see here that the character of a leader is crucial, not just the ability to perform a task. In the Kingdom, *example* is the most important quality. If the person does not live what they tell others to do, they are not suitable for leadership. Leaders must lead by example.

To Achieve a Goal

The leaders serve the members by helping them to achieve a goal they value.

However well our leaders may agree with the principles of servant leadership, the fact remains that leaders tend to be strong willed, determined, ambitious and sometimes ruthless. Because of this leadership teams only function properly when they recognise that there is some worthwhile goal that can only be achieved through common and organised effort.

Motivation through Envisioning

Leadership service includes clearly explaining the reason for the task being performed and envisioning the team/church members so that they willingly give sufficient priority to the required activities. Servant leadership does not include coercing members to do what they don't want to do.

Taking the Problem to Jesus

If people are not willing to participate in the way the leader wishes then the leader must go back to Jesus with the problem. Either the leader's goal or its timing is wrong, or they have failed to share the vision for the goal clearly enough, or else the person is inappropriate for the team.

I think we see this with the Transfiguration (Matt 17). Jesus had a problem getting through to His disciples. He was trying to get them to see that He truly was God's Son, and was pleased with Peter's response:

"Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. (Matt 16:15-17)

On that foundation, He then tried to tell them about the cross, but they would not listen:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." (Matt 16:21-23)

Jesus had a problem. His disciples would not accept what Jesus was saying. Even Peter who said he believed Jesus was God's Son was refusing to listen to what Jesus was trying to tell him. Jesus took that problem to the Father who said, "OK. I'll have a chat with them." This is what happened:

A bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. **Listen to him!**" (Matt 17:5)

That is our only resort if people do not get what we are trying to say. We make our appeal to them, and then must leave it to God to speak into their hearts. In the meantime we must continue to try and lead by example.

Forming a Leadership Team Within a Church

The fundamental question in forming a leadership team within a church is "Are we trying to raise servants to support the church activities, or leaders who are expected to hear and obey Jesus?"

If you are looking for servants to support the church activities you will look for

- People who agree with you
- Compliant people who tend not to argue
- People with appropriate skills
- People others will respect and obey

If you are looking for Kingdom leaders you will look for

- People with a passion for Christ
- People who hear God for themselves
- People who question what is being said and done
- People who take risks
- People who are not swayed by what others think of them
- People with a growing sense of their own calling
- People whose passion, focus and direction is compatible but different from ours

Gathering and promoting Kingdom leaders within a church is often a real challenge to the existing leadership – one which few leaders are prepared to embrace. As a consequence, church leadership teams tend to be management teams, serving the lead-leader and the church program.

Forming a Leadership Team across Churches

The fundamental question in forming a leadership team between churches is "What is this for?" Here are some reasons church leaders meet together:

- Jesus prayed for our unity in John 17
- There is some joint project they are involved in
- They want to learn from other churches
- Leadership is lonely and they want the companionship or support of other leaders
- They want to be part of something bigger (prestige)
- They want to influence other churches
- They want to build a "kingdom" of relating churches

Whatever the reason is, it must be rooted in the Kingdom with Jesus as the head. "It just seemed like a good thing to do" is not good enough. What is the point in a "talking shop" that achieves nothing?

Genuine cooperation between church leaders is often difficult to achieve. The problem is that they are all leaders and not used to being led. Worthwhile cooperation between leaders only occurs when they recognise that a goal they value can only be achieved together.

Getting a Team to Function

The task of leading a leadership team is fundamentally one of identifying a common goal and envisioning the team so that they willingly subjugate their own priorities for the sake of this greater goal.

A good starting point is simply to encourage leaders to share their experience with one another with the accepted aim of influencing one another to shape the direction of the church and its mission. The aim is not uniformity, but stronger and more effective diversity. Where there is a commitment to sharing, listening and learning, teams can work very well and become very open to the Holy Spirit's leading.

Identify Jesus' Gifts of People

For a leadership team to function effectively there needs to be a recognition and celebration of the different qualities and characters that each member brings. We must be clear that our unity is not in uniformity but in Christ. We are not all hands or feet, we are all different members of Christ's Body. So it is valuable to look at the various lists of gifts mentioned in the New Testament and to try and identify each other's gifting (Rom 12, 1 Cor 12, Eph 4). These lists are clearly illustrative rather than exhaustive. People may have gifts that are not listed in these passages or which are better described in some other way. The point is that they should be recognised, celebrated, encouraged and valued.

Held Together by Love

The first and greatest commandment Jesus gave us is to love one another. According to Paul in Ephesians 4:16, the purpose of Jesus' gifts of leadership are to enable the "the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, to grow and build itself up in love, as each part does its work."

Love is nowhere more important than in a leadership team. If the leadership team cannot give an example of love then we might as well give up and go home! Do you think that Jesus is impressed by "We led very well in all sorts of ways; but we never managed to love one another"?

Love requires openness and honesty. Leaders can find this difficult if they are used to trying to project an impressive image. We see this problem recurring throughout the New Testament. Only if we walk in the light with each other can we truly have fellowship in love (1 Jn 1:7).

Genuine Friendship

The call to love one another cannot be sanitised by saying it is a call to acting in loving ways. We are called to deep unity in love, to brotherly love, to carrying one another's burdens. Look at the way Paul describes this love in 1 Cor 13:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

That is not just intended for couples getting married! It is supposed to describe leadership teams as well. This requires genuine friendship and not just working relationships. It is totally unrealistic to suppose that such love can exist where the only interaction is in dealing with church administration. Leadership teams are an "artificial family" in the sense that the people are brought together for leadership reasons rather than natural friendship. But that does not excuse the team from friendship. If the team truly believes that their first calling is to lead by example in love for one another, before they can lead in any other meaningful way, then forming trusting and accepting friendships will be an early priority.

Sharing openly about ourselves and listening carefully to what other say to us within the leadership team is how love is established.

Jars of Clay

Perhaps one of the more perplexing ways of God is that He purposely hides His presence in unimpressive people:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. (2 Cor 4:7-10)

Here Paul seems to be thinking about his vulnerability to oppressive troubles such as the many unjust accusations he faced and the physical beatings and difficult circumstances he endured. This seems incompatible with the Gospel of the Kingdom announcing Jesus as the present ruling King who had defeated and humiliated Satan. It is as if our experience betrays the emptiness of our Gospel message. But that is how God intends it to be! The Gospel is powerful because God is behind it, not because Christians have trouble-free lives.

Later in this letter Paul tells us about another way he was unimpressive:

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Cor 12:7-9)

This trouble that tormented Paul was to keep him from becoming conceited, so I guess it was something that humiliated him; "my power is made perfect in weakness". Perhaps it was an obsessive temptation or weakness that he succumbed to. Whatever it was, God in His wisdom allowed it to continue, even though humanly speaking it weakened Paul's witness. Paul was ashamed of it but God saw it as a protection from conceit.

We have to accept, and celebrate, that God is pleased to hide His treasure in jars of clay. We do not need to pretend to God or anyone else that we are better than we are. We are objects of His grace as well as His love. Although we strive to become more Christ-like, God is perfectly content to work through our flawed characters. We must therefore also accept each other as we are, because Christ has accepted us as we are (Eph 4:32).

Listening to One Another

Numbers 22:21-34 tells us the amusing story of Balaam and his talking donkey. It is very instructive for leaders:

"Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite officials."

Balaam (like many leaders) had got his mission fixed in his head and he was not going to be distracted:

"But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat it to get it back on the road."

Balaam was so sure of where he was going, that he forgot to listen or look out for God's direction. Although his donkey could see the angel, Balaam could not! Balaam (like many leaders) assumed that anything or anyone who hindered his progress was wrong, and needed correcting.

God was patient and merciful towards Balaam and gave him multiple chances to recognise that God was trying to speak to him:

"Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path through the vineyards, with walls on both sides.

When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat the donkey again. Then the angel of the Lord moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place

where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff."

But Balaam pushed on ahead with his own plans, ignoring the unusual behaviour of his faithful donkey. Because Balaam would not listen to the "promptings of the Spirit" God spoke loud and clear through the donkey:

"Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"

But because it was only his donkey who spoke, and not some equally great "man of God", Balaam dismissed the donkey's talk as stupid:

"Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."

We all need to be prepared to listen to donkeys! Even though someone may seem insignificant to us, God may be trying to speak to us through them! We must always be listening out for God, no matter who or how He may choose to speak:

"The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said."

Fortunately for Balaam, God was persistent enough to overcome Balaam's stupidity:

"Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown."

What kind of a leader do you want to be? A dangerous and stupid leader like Balaam who would not listen when God spoke through his donkey? Or will you be someone who really listens to others, no matter who they are? Are you ready to hear God speak through children? unbelievers? sinners? people you disagree with? people you don't much like? people you think have bad theology or are living a bad example?

It is not about whether *they* are worthy enough to speak to you, but whether *you* are you humble enough to let God speak to you any way He chooses? Do you care enough about God's Kingdom to keep listening for His still small voice even after you have set out on your journey? Leaders must learn to listen!

Planning a Leadership Team Meeting

Leadership team meetings, like all meetings, must be worthwhile. People have to make time for them and travel to the meeting place – both of which might be very inconvenient. And yet there is a plague of worthless meetings in the global church! It is called meetingitis and it is more painful than appendicitis. One person defined leader's meetings as a room full of people waiting to go home! I once stopped a Sunday church service because it was a waste of time – and I wish I had done it more often.

If you are not looking forward to meeting, then probably no one else is either, so do something about it. Either find a meaningful purpose or stop the meetings.

So how do you plan a meaningful leaders meeting? Well let's list some meaningful purposes:

- Exploring and agreeing the purpose of the team
- Agreeing the parameters of the team:
 - Meaningful relationships
 - Honesty, acceptance, listening, learning
 - Stop "red-herrings" before they escape
 - Listening to and obeying Jesus
 - Developing and promoting diversity
 - Releasing ministry
- Learning from existing ministry and improving it
- Stopping or changing ineffective ministry
- Developing new areas of ministry

- Supporting each other where help is needed
- Sharing God stories and motivating each other to keep pursuing God
- Exploring areas of teaching that could really help the church
- Discuss popular beliefs or teaching that is considered unhelpful to the church
- Sharing what Jesus is saying to each member of the team
- Planning to plant churches and release leadership ministry

There should be enough there to help you plan for some really worthwhile meetings. But unless you plan the meetings they may still be frustrating and fruitless!

Here are some tips to reduce the chances of a frustrating and fruitless meeting:

- Make sure everyone knows the date, time and place well ahead of the meeting day.
- Make sure everyone knows the purpose of the meeting well ahead of the meeting day.
- Start on time.
- Appoint a good chairman – not necessarily the lead-leader.
- Don't waste time on formalities, such as reading and approving reports and minutes. They should be distributed and read beforehand, and only "matters arising" brought up in the meeting.
- Avoid doing any business in the meeting that can be done just as well with fewer people outside the meeting.
- Stop "red herrings" getting away. Don't let side-issues distract the conversation from the main point being considered. This is firstly the responsibility of the chairman, but everyone should share this responsibility.
- Make sure that decisions are made clearly, recorded accurately and responsibility for action delegated effectively. Decisions that are made and not acted on are a prime cause of frustration and wasted time.
- If there is going to be a social part to the meeting, have it at the end and allow people to leave if they need to.

Some things to think about

What kind of people would you like to have in your ideal leadership team?

Who do you know that you would like to share leadership with?

What would you like to do in your first five ideal leadership team meetings?

In pairs, find out the significant ways in which the other person has grown as a disciple of Jesus.

Explore with them how you can benefit from their experience.

What steps can you take to improve your leadership-team meeting experience?