



LEADERSHIP DEFINED: PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Stephen A. Macchia

Published in BuildingChurchLeaders.com (Christianity Today, Inc.), September 2004

Jesus personified leadership. He directed thinking, guided people, aimed them toward truth, and showed the way to love, forgiveness, and eternal life. The best place to start in defining leadership is with Jesus.

J.W. McLean and William Weitzel in their book, *Leadership: Magic, Myth or Method*, define leadership as:

1. A person
2. Involved in a process
3. Of influencing and developing a group of people
4. In order to accomplish a purpose
5. By means of supernatural power.

This definition has become my favorite because of its simplicity and because in it I see the example of Christ at work. Leadership always begins with a person. Howard Hendricks said at a leadership conference, "A leader is a person with a magnet in his heart and a compass in his head." Many of us have the skills to lead, but when one is called on to marshal those abilities in a leadership setting, it is imperative that we respond affirmatively to God's call. The more leaders understand themselves, the better off the group and the mission being served.

Next, a leader is involved in a process of growth and development. Leadership is distinct from management. We manage things, we lead people. Leading people is a process accomplished over a stretch of time, through the seasons of life, in the good times and the hard times. In many respects, the process takes a lifetime. There are very few 'finished products' in the work of leadership. It proceeds along a journey of development with many turns, ruts, detours, and climbs along the way.

Third, there is no leadership without a group of people to influence and develop, and the size of the group is immaterial. Effective leadership occurs when those served feel loved, admired, appreciated, and accepted by the leader. When these relational dynamics are absent from the group, the leader and the leadership process suffer. Unless the leader takes time to invest in the people, there will be no true leadership. Leadership is a gift that's earned over time, granted out of trustworthy acclaim by the people being served.

Building trust became job number one the first couple of years at Essex Alliance Church in Essex Junction, Vermont.

"I did not announce what my vision was for the church," said Senior Pastor Scott Slocum. "I first set about developing the trust of the elders by being open and transparent with them. My goal was to make them my friends and colleagues. I believe you have to consciously ask the leaders of the church to trust you and then ask

the Lord to give you such good ministry judgment that they can trust you. I exercised bad judgment in one situation, and when I told the elders that, they responded that compared to the number of times I had shown good judgment, this was easily forgiven."

Some of the elders found the new openness uncomfortable and were unwilling to change. But Pastor Slocum found a core group of people who were authentic and relevant.

"When I came I found people who did not want to do church as usual. They did not know what they really wanted, but they knew what they didn't want doing church as usual. Thus there was an immediate match. I came looking for people ready to follow me as a leader with new ideas and they needed a leader," says Slocum. While developing trust and collegiality among the leaders was one focus of Pastor Slocum's approach, the other was to help the congregation develop the freedom to be open with each other about what God wanted for them in their church and community. God's purposes for them needed to be discovered, and Scott's role in this process was key.

Fourth, there are always purposes for leadership. The purposes can be stated or implied. When I lead my children to faith or in spiritual growth, the purposes unfold according to the needs and seasons of their lives. When I lead a ministry team, then I must also clearly state the purposes from the outset. Understanding and 'unpacking the purposes of a group require astute insight that stems from research, mission definition, goals, plans, implementation, monitoring, and evaluating our effectiveness. In addition to group purposes, we also forge out individual purposes that are 'defined by relationship and need.

Fifth, and most important for Christian leaders, is the fact that the leadership process is supernaturally empowered. We cannot perform our leadership responsibilities in our own strength, power, or wisdom. Leadership means that we know how to follow the Leader and rely fully on his power to guide and direct our every step. Our most significant resource for becoming an effective church leader is the Holy Spirit's influence on our daily life and service. Servant leadership is impossible without a life in full submission to the love and lordship of Christ. It's folly to proceed without the leadership of our Heavenly Father guiding and upholding and gifting us for service.