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POSTCARDS FROM CORINTH



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Where's Jethro?

Why leadership matters whether we want it to
or not

There have been many books written on spiritual leadership, each with a major omission: leadership. Most books offer an appropriate focus on the spiritual life and disciplines of a ministry leader. But some asked the question, “Are there other leadership qualities that need to be developed that don’t directly relate to topics like prayer or preaching?” The answer seemed to be a resounding “yes,” but with qualifications.

First, the “yes.” Let’s begin with a question we can answer personally. Is it possible for you to be a godly man or woman, full of prayer and faith, and be lousy in your personal finances? I think most of us would say “yes.” Then, here’s another question. Is it possible for you to be a godly man or woman and yet be miserable at public speaking? Again, most of us would say “yes,” as we have all had to endure poor public speaking on at least one Sunday morning. Let’s assume you happened to be lousy at both—broke and babbling. Do you think checking out books on basic skills of public speaking and financial management might be a good idea? Probably so.

There you have your answer. Leadership, like finances, requires a cluster of skills and abilities. Yet, like public speaking, it is an area that can be personally developed. And as a church will be blessed through a leader who exhibits excellence in personal finances (and potentially ruined by incompetence), so will a church whose leaders have developed some basic skills of leadership.

Now, the qualification: In response to prayer, faith, and faithfulness God can choose to bless a person or ministry in spite of incompetence in any area. He’s God and He can do that. He’s God and sometimes he does do that. But Christian maturity requires the development of stewardship and character, meaning that as we grow in maturity, we seek diligence in areas of weakness. As with children, we encourage them to develop in areas rather than bailing them out and enabling them to continue in incompetence. God can and does bail us out, but desires that we seek to grow in competence.

So God *can* compensate because He is God—caveat granted—but He is also our Father and desires us to develop in our weaknesses as well as partner with those who are gifted where we are not.

Here's a thought: What if every Christian in the world became better at finances and giving? Well, there might not be a world hunger problem; there's more than enough Christian wealth to eradicate it. What would happen if every Christian involved in ministry became a proficient leader? Leadership, and the development of leadership skills, is worthy of allocating precious discipleship time.

We are not interested in grooming Christian CEOs to take over Microsoft and other Fortune 500 companies, but it might be nice if those who gave leadership to our ministries knew how to plan, strategize and solve a problem when one falls across the road.

NEHEMIAH

Let's look at one biblical example that clarifies the distinction between spiritual and leadership. Take a moment to read through these passages from Nehemiah.

"I also said to him, 'If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?'" (Nehemiah 2:7-8).

"By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire" (Nehemiah 2:13).

"Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows" (Nehemiah 4:13).

"From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me" (Nehemiah 4:16-18).

"Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor" (Nehemiah 5:14).

Let's survey some of the decisions made by Nehemiah. Before arriving in Jerusa-

lem, Nehemiah sought the raw materials needed for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Upon arriving he does a night inspection of the damage. To upgrade the local work ethic, he has each person labor on a section of the Jerusalem wall that protects their home. When threats of violence come from without, he devises a plan by which Israel can remain battle-ready and yet not abandon the building project. When famine strikes and accusations are made of royal usury, he refuses to eat the food rightly allotted to his position.

Besides being a godly man of prayer and faith, Nehemiah is a wise leader: he plans, prepares, motivates, and innovates solutions in the midst of adversity. He might be excellent at running Microsoft. God chose a man of faith and prayer to steward this project, but he also had the leadership skills necessary to pull off this Herculean task. Now what if God still wanted to use Nehemiah to lead, but he lacked the necessary skills. Again, God could compensate through intervention, but in all probability God would place someone alongside him who had leadership skills to help him execute the plans. This appears to be a pattern in Scripture. Consider the example Moses and Jethro from Exodus 18:14-24:

When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?"

Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws."

Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said.

Legal problems in Israel have turned Moses into a workaholic, and Jethro shares with



him a simple principle of leadership he apparently never considered: delegation. Employing solid leadership principles can be the difference between leading a successful Bible study or a failing one. It can be the difference between the capacity to lead two people or the capacity to lead two hundred. And in the case of Moses, the difference between thriving in ministry or burning out. So where do we get a Jethro, someone to teach us basic principles of leadership so that we in turn can be a Jethro to our disciples?

JETHRO PRINCIPLES

Fortunately some motivated and wonderful Campus Crusade staff (perhaps named Jethro) read through the vast library of material on leadership, looking to glean principles common to leaders and useful for situations of leadership. Here is a distilled summary of that research.

QUALITIES OF A LEADER

If you were to interview a thousand of the world's best leaders, you would note that the following four personal character traits would surface again and again. The four traits follow the acronym DICE, which fails as a mnemonic device, as dice has nothing what so ever to do with leadership.

Dynamic determination

This is the determination to get a job done, no matter what it takes. Determination is seen in one's passion: the heart-felt belief that what you are pursuing is worth expending your best hours, talents and resources to achieve. Passion comes from the heart and will ultimately be more determinative in the ability to lead than position or personality. For example, each year millions of people start diets and fail. Yet, there are always some who can break the pull of gravity and arrive at their destination. They have what others don't—an uncommon drive. Successful leaders have this uncommon drive.

Intellectual flexibility

Leaders possess the intellectual tools to conceptualize, assimilate and synthesize ideas and information. This skill is more than basic IQ. It is a learned process of relating the parts to the whole, learning to see the big picture. Leaders use information to spot trends and correlations, which gives them insight into where and how to lead. Great leaders aren't always brilliant, but they are bright.

Character

Character is the earned right to be trusted, believed and followed. Ben Franklin defined character as "the ability to carry out a worthy decision long after the emotion of making that decision has passed." Character, for the believer, is always related to Christ-likeness. But as recent scandals will attest, moral character and integrity are qualities leaders must demonstrate or it can spell ruin, or worse, impeachment.



Emotional well-being

Emotional well-being includes a strong, healthy, secure self-concept. If leaders do not have a strong sense of self-worth, they will be threatened by the ideas and suggestions of those around them, and they will be driven by their own neediness and insecurity rather than the necessity to make wise decisions. Some of the most powerful people in the world have failed in their leadership because of insecurity and unstable emotional states.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

Successful leadership hinges on quality interpersonal relationships. Here are several indicators of healthy relational dynamics between leaders and those they lead:

- Involves others appropriately.
- Treats others with respect.
- Allows others to make decisions.
- Creates an atmosphere of trust.
- Gets others to own the work.
- Relates well with peers, supervisors and with those they supervise.

ROLES OF A LEADER

Leaders perform a zillion different functions, which is why they usually have assistants. But distill these functions, and you would find four distinct roles that must be performed proficiently to lead well.

Direction Setter

The leader must perform the role of setting direction, in essence saying, "This is where we are headed." A leader functions as the rudder of the ship. If you are under good leadership, you have a clear sense of where you are headed, what you are seeking to accomplish, and why.



• **SPOKESPERSON** •

A leader must also communicate the company vision to those outside the organization. Picture a presidential press conference. If a brilliant president speaks unintelligibly to the world, we will lose confidence in our leader. Leaders can exercise this role through a variety of mediums—in person, on film, or in print, but they must articulate direction.

• **COACH** •

A coach builds a team. A coach maximizes the potential of each player and molds these individuals into a team so they will maximize their chances of winning. Great leaders bring together the gifts and talents of various individuals to accomplish more than any individual could achieve.

• **CHANGE AGENT** •

A leader pursues useful and adaptive change in light of the future. A leader is always a change agent. Leaders shape the future, while others manage the present. To them, the gap between the way things are and the way things ought to be calls for action.

The failure in any one of these areas can lead to the performing a fifth role: that of Slurpie maker at the local 7-Eleven.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A LEADER

Under each of the roles that leaders must function are responsibilities that enable them to execute these roles. There are four major responsibilities that, if done well, will enable the leader to be a wise direction setter, effective coach, compelling spokesperson, and efficient change agent.

• **VISION CASTING** •

How do I effectively motivate a team of people to go in the direction that I have set? It's fairly easy if you are a born vision caster, though most people are not. Vision casting paints a picture of a future reality so desirable that those you lead are compelled to want to go there. Some of the most memorable speeches of political and social leaders are those where vision casting was accomplished with excellence, and everyone felt stirred to head for the stated destination.

• **STRATEGY FORMULATION** •

"How can we do this?" Strategy formulation is the ability to transform dreams into a plan of action. Feasibility is a major motivator in leading people. They have to feel that they are heading to a destination, and it's possible to get

there. Strategy formulation charts the best course to get to the vision.

• **ALIGNING** •

Aligning is people working together, sharing a vision, owning the responsibility, and cooperating in order to fulfill the vision. Aligning is another way of saying that you have the ability to get people on board with you. What brings people on board can be a variety of things already mentioned, but often there is a relational trust component that relates to character. The leader captures their imagination (vision), mind (strategy), and hearts.



• **MOTIVATING** •

Motivating is about tapping into people's core values so that they want to work together to fulfill the mission. A leader finds ways to connect the vision to what personally motivates the individuals involved. John Kotter in *A Force for Change* writes:

"Being able to generate highly energized behavior is as centrally important here as are direction setting and alignment. In a sense, direction setting identifies an appropriate path for movement, effective alignment gets people moving down that path, and a successful motivational effort assures that those people will have the energy to overcome obstacles in their way."

THANKS FOR THE BRAIN DUMP

Jethro just pulled up his dump truck onto your front lawn and unloaded the secrets of successful leadership. So what do you do with this mound of dirt?

Well, this is about discipleship, so you could just take this sheet, copy it, and move the mound onto your disciple's lawn. But if you would like to more thoughtfully process this and disseminate it, here's what I would suggest.

First, you must internalize these concepts. It's actually an easy process. Go through the list and think of a leader who demonstrates the role or responsibility well or horribly and write a name next to it. Then try to diagram the different roles and responsibilities out on a piece of paper in some coherent sort of way, even if it is simply listing the information. What you are trying to do is create new file folders in your head for processing the topic of leadership.

Once you have done this, you will begin to notice when public leaders are either doing these things well, or failing miserably. You begin to make connections between book knowledge and reality. If you want to speed up the process, read a biography or watch a movie on a great leader and look for these skills. For example, you might get a documentary on Martin Luther King, Jr. and note the vision he paints in his speeches



as well as his strategies for bringing about social justice. If you're a student, think about your teachers: how well do they set direction? Do they align and motivate you to learn? Do they paint a picture of why it would be desirable to learn the information? A great teacher is a great leader. Making these connections is the process of learning.

Next, you will begin to notice you are performing these roles or responsibilities. You will begin to wonder how well you have aligned people, and if you have clearly set direction. You are now personalizing the information, and you will never look at how you lead the same way for you now have file folders and mile markers by which to assess your effectiveness.

DISCIPLESHIP

Now you can think about how to help your disciple lead. In basic follow up, this shouldn't be a concern. But as your disciples take on ministry responsibilities and leadership, it will then be incumbent upon you to become Jethro to them, passing on leadership wisdom that will enable them to be more effective.

To help your disciples process these things, bring them through the same process you just went through. Expose them to the new material and ideas—grow their brain and help them to create new file folders. Then help them to make connections between the material and the real world. Perhaps as a small group you could watch a biography or movie about a person who led well and discuss these leadership concepts. The movie *Coach Carter* is a perfect film to dissect leadership skills. Ask them questions to help them digest the material: "Can you think of a leader who was a good spokesperson?" Ask questions that personalize the information: "What role would you gravitate toward, and which one would you need to work on?"

Having done that, all that remains is to reinforce the ideas periodically by providing feedback using the common terminology that you taught them: "How well have you aligned people to this? What could you do to align them?"

That's all you need to do. You are not running a leadership school, but simply recognizing the value of teaching your disciples some basic leadership skills, just like you might impart skills on time management. Expose them to the concepts, help them make connections to leaders in the real world, and begin to make personal connections.

SOMETHING YOU ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT REALIZING IT

By simply exposing your disciples to these principles of leadership you will be shaping their unconscious value system. For example, why do people not plan or prepare for a meeting they are to lead? A value of informality or spontaneity, or a value of simply wanting the Spirit to lead. There's nothing wrong with any of these values, it is how much we value them and the lack of other values that is the problem. For example,

professionalism, competence, preparedness, diligence, and articulation are also values. They are values that are more aligned with leadership, and interestingly they are also values that the Scriptures highlight in relation to how we are to teach the God's Word.

When we focus on leadership, and excellence in leadership, we are raising the value of the latter list of diligence, competence, etc. Our disciples begin to see the importance of competence as opposed to spontaneity, which is important because God's Word does not exhort us to be spontaneous in our leadership and teaching, but serious, diligent, and prepared. When you emphasize principles of competent leadership, you will rearrange your disciple's values and that over time will alter the competence.

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WHAT ABOUT THE SPIRITUAL?

Couldn't this go too far overboard to the point where I'm asking my disciples how well their Bible study is aligned, rather than how much they are praying for them? Sure, so don't do that. You know the primacy of the spiritual and that these are simply useful tools, like becoming a better public speaker, or manager of finances. You know that these are no substitute for the power of the Spirit. It is hard to imagine that you would communicate them in a way that would eclipse the centrality of soul and Spirit in the work of the ministry.

But biblically, I think we can see that Jethro's role, a role model leadership development, can greatly aid the work of the ministry.