



Why is Leadership vital?

The term leadership could be used to refer to everything that leaders do, including preaching, pastoral work, evangelism, administration etc. Our definition of leadership is narrower, referring to the process of seeking out God's vision and purpose for a church, or for individuals; sharing that vision, and enabling and encouraging a church to own and reach that vision for themselves. George Barna has been writing on leadership for many years. He writes on the importance of leadership

"After fifteen years of diligent digging into the world around me, I have reached several conclusions about the future of the Christian church in America. The central conclusion is that the American church is dying due to a lack of strong leadership. In this time of unprecedented opportunity and plentiful resources, the church is actually losing influence. The primary reason is the lack of leadership. Nothing is more important than leadership.

Most recently, I have discovered that the current exodus from the church is partially attributable to the flight of the laity who possess the leadership abilities, gifts and experience. These individuals, whom the church so desperately needs, are leaving the Church because they can no longer stomach being part of an alleged movement that lacks strong visionary leadership.

These are people of capacity, people who can make things happen. I have watched with sorrow as they have tried to penetrate the culture of the Church and offer the benefit of their gifts. They have been unable to contribute because their churches are neither led by leaders nor by those who understand leadership.

I have studied modern history to comprehend the dynamics of revolutions, people movements, societal systems and national fortunes. The result is the conviction that there have not been - and are not likely to be - any significant and successful movements, revolutions or other systems in which strong visionary leaders were not at the forefront of those groups, leading the way for change in thought and word and deed. "

Christian Schwarz, in his book "Natural Church Development", based on a study of more than 1000 churches in 32 countries concluded that empowering leadership was one of eight quality characteristics common to healthy churches.

"Leaders of growing churches concentrate on empowering other Christians for ministry. They do not use lay workers as helpers in attaining their own goals and fulfilling their own visions. Rather, they invert the pyramid of authority so that the leader assists Christians to attain the spiritual potential God has for them. These pastors equip, support, motivate and mentor individuals, enabling them to become all that God wants them to be."

Leadership is vital for healthy churches. Leadership is vital for the church to influence the society in which we live. Leadership is vital to encourage church growth. Leadership is vital to enable Christians to grow in ministry. Leadership is vital!

Defining Leadership

For this pack, we define Christian leadership as the discerning and sharing of God's vision for His church, and equipping and enabling the church to reach that vision. This does not mean that preaching, pastoral work, evangelism and administration, are not important. The church needs great communicators to preach God's word. We need pastors with a real heart for those around them and evangelists who can relate to others and bring them to faith in Christ. Many leaders would readily admit that administrators have a vital role within the church, ensuring that good stewardship is exercised, and increasing the impact of the church's mission. As well as all of these, the church certainly needs leaders who can help the church move forwards.

Put another way, our definition of leadership concerns that which is mostly concerned with building the church of tomorrow, rather than maintaining the church of today. This assumes that tomorrow's church will be in some way different from today's church. Where this difference is in line with some kind of intended change, it is likely that some kind of leadership will have been exercised.



Leadership Character

Here we explore seven characteristics of Christian leaders :

- ◆ **Humility in the use of authority and power entrusted to them**
- ◆ **Trustworthiness and integrity**
- ◆ **Willingness to lead out of leadership *gifting* rather than from leadership *position***
- ◆ **A desire to encourage growth and development in others.**
- ◆ **A style of leadership that seeks to love and serve others and God.**
- ◆ **Future vision is earthed in an understanding of God's calling**
- ◆ **An active prayer life.**

Whilst Christian leaders are not the sole practitioners of the first four, and the fifth can be partially found in non-Christian leaders, the final two are likely to be the sole preserve of the Christian leader. It is the combination of the seven, that give a style of leadership that is distinctly Christian. This leadership is in no sense "weak", since the self-awareness and self-giving love required to display these characteristics can only be found in the most mature of personalities. Let's consider each in turn.

Humility in the use of authority and power entrusted to them

Secular leaders often seek to develop their status, power and influence. Position, and the power and status that goes with it is vital - the chairman's large car, privileged parking space, top-floor office with expensive furniture and so on. Such position, power and status is the very opposite of the humility that Jesus modeled. Christian leaders are not immune from such temptation. We need to be able to identify the initial signs of power and status causing improper feelings and actions. This is particularly important in a culture where the pastor or minister may dress differently from everyone else, sit in an honoured position at the front, and occupy a distinct office.

Trustworthiness and integrity

The traditional model of the stipendiary minister as ministry provider yields an organisation able to operate on a low level of trust. People may come to the church, but their involvement with it is limited to carrying out simple tasks. Even 'successful' churches, with many people engaged in ministry, can operate with relatively low levels of trust if they have not allowed people to take responsibility and accountability for the life of the church.

God wants us to operate at a high level of trust - in him, and within the church. God is trustworthy. *'God has said "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid" (Hebrews 13:6)* Our experience of placing our trust in God should increase our capability to trust, and encourage us to build trust within Christian fellowships. However, not only is God himself trustworthy, he chooses to place his trust in us. Tom Marshall writes *'God's trust is real trust. It is a choice He has made, and it is a vulnerability He has accepted.'*

Trustworthy people must live consistent lifestyles. Peter Drucker describes the *"mirror test"*, where leaders make sure that the person they see in the mirror in the morning is the kind of person they want to be, respect and believe in. If there is a lack of consistency between our public and private lives, then sooner or later we will be unable to manage the divide. We read of far too many Christian leaders who have fallen as the truth of their private lives emerges. Many people want to put their leaders on a pedestal and many others enjoy trying to knock them off! Our only remedy is to let the Spirit lead and direct our lives in full measure, to give over to him control of our time, our money and our desires.

Willingness to lead out of leadership gifting and ability rather than from their leadership position

Many leaders covet the power that their position gives them. The enjoyment of wielding influence and making decisions that shapes the lives of others can become an intoxicating drug. This can lead to an improper degree of control, of concentrating authority in the office of leader.

Christian leaders need to develop the necessary personal strength to lead out of their leadership gifting. Since it is may be unlikely that the leader will be the only person in the organisation to have been given the gift of leadership,

Leadership Character (continued)

we need to accept that those gifted with leadership don't have a monopoly on leadership within the organisation. This is particularly likely when we consider that leadership is only one of many attributes considered in selection of candidates for church leadership. As a result, leaders need to actively seek others to adopt leadership roles whenever it is appropriate for them to do so.

A desire to encourage growth and development in others.

Great leaders seek to train their successors, and to do so in such a way that they are able to perform their job even better than they themselves were able to do it. This requires leaders to be able to identify the potential in others, to train and develop the potential of each individual.

One of the hallmarks of such leaders is that they have the maturity to handle diversity and strength in others. Those whom they lead are not people who are weaker carbon copies, but have different and complementary gifts, and are freed to achieve their full potential. David Ogilvy, an Advertising Agency boss said *"If you always hire people who are smaller than you are we shall become a company of dwarfs. If on the other hand, you always hire people who are bigger than you are, we shall become a company of giants."*

A style of leadership that seeks to love and serve others and God.

Servant leadership is at the heart of Christian leadership. Servant leadership is different from servanthood. All Christians are called to be servants, one to another, to follow Jesus' example in washing his disciples' feet, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Along with that call to servanthood is the need we each have to allow ourselves to receive from Jesus, just as he washed his disciples feet.

Servant leadership goes further to consider the motivation behind our actions as leaders. If personal desire was the sole decision criteria, Jesus would have chosen not to go through the pain and suffering on the cross. In the garden at Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, *'Father if you are willing take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours, be done.'* (Luke 22:42) The weight of the burden of taking not only our guilt but also our sins themselves, had become too heavy. Even at this point, Jesus could have got up and walked away. Servant leadership will lead us too, to make sacrifices, to put the needs of others above the direction we may prefer for ourselves.

Future vision is earthed in an understanding of God's calling

One of the fundamental tasks of leadership is to ensure that an organisation shares a common vision for its future. However, truly shared vision is vastly different from a leader's personal vision which is then communicated to the organisation. A leader with a charismatic personality may be able to persuade others to follow this vision, but the risk is that the leader is left heading boldly into the future on their own, whilst others simply stand and stare! Thus shared vision becomes the sum of individual visions, expressed in a common way, rather than the lowest common denominator, or only that which all in an organisation have in common. (which may be very little indeed!) A vision which is genuinely shared will weave together common passion, energy and spiritual direction to provide a very significant force within the church.

An active prayer life.

A large part of the instruction that Jesus gave to his disciples was on prayer. They would be grateful for this teaching in the days following the Ascension as Peter and the others struggled to make sense of their situation. Yet, on the day of Pentecost, Peter was ready and able to speak out according to the words the Spirit gave him. The leadership that he provided to the church on that day provides an example of true Spirit led leadership, that can only originate in prayer.

Without praying, we cannot know God's call and direction, and we are left to our human judgement. Without prayer, any future vision put before the church will be solely human desires. If Jesus needed to spend quality time with his Father each day, then so do we.

The Christian Model

In Jesus, we see each of these seven characteristics displayed to perfection. Trying to isolate Jesus' leadership style from the rest of his ministry is a difficult and perhaps pointless task, for true leadership cannot be easily separated from either the leader's personality and character, or from the totality of activities in which he or she engages.

ACTION POINTER : Re-read the Gospels to find the many pointers to these seven characteristics.