

Lea • der • ship

Lea • der • ship: A process in which one person attempts to influence another to accomplish some goal or goals. (*Organizational Behavior and Performance*, A.D. Szilagyi and M.J. Wallace, 1990.)

Everybody and their dog wants to be a leader. Evangelical Christendom is rife with leadership books, seminars, camps and urgent calls for young men and women to be leaders. The carrot is dangled in front of our collective noses as if it should be our ultimate goal and the highest aspiration. The assumptions?

- 1) Every group needs a leader.
- 2) Everyone should aspire to be a leader.
- 3) Everyone has the potential to be a leader.
- 4) Leadership skills are universal and can be learned and applied to any situation.
- 5) Christianity needs more and better leaders.
- 6) God has a position of leadership prepared for every Christian.
- 7) When we fill our leadership position, we and those we lead will be happy.

But wait...does the Bible really command us all to be leaders? Aside from the obvious question (*if all of us are leaders, who will follow?*) there are other questions we ought to ask, such as: *Is there a set of one-size-fits-all leadership traits? Can they be applied in any leadership situation? Does every group need a leader? Does God have a leadership spot reserved for each of us?*

To be sure, the New Testament teaches the importance of good leadership. But what did James mean when he wrote, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1)? What did Paul mean when he wrote: "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?" (1 Corinthians 12:29). What did Jesus mean when he told his disciples (some of whom were clam-

oring for leadership positions in what they thought would be an earthly kingdom), "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matthew 23:8-11).

If this doesn't sound exactly like today's Christendom, it's because Christianity is dominated by big, hierarchical organizations with a big demand for institutional leaders to further the expansive (and sometimes politically charged) goals as these institutions compete with each other for membership and/or contributions. Sadly, the motivation of leaders who are thus recruited may be less servanthood and more ambition, personal advancement and the opportunity to climb their respective institutional ladders.

But, as Jesus says, "...you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest of you should be like the youngest and the one who rules like the one who serves" (Luke 22:26). The early church generally followed these words. Prior to Christianity's political acceptance in the 4th century, indications are that, while the church was big on division of labor (1 Corinthians 12:18), it was short on hierarchy. We can't find an organizational chart for the early church. It's not clear who the head apostle was—or even if there was one. We don't know much about how the regions of the early church were governed. Rather, congregations and regions seemed

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PHOTO BY CRAIG JEWELL

to be autonomous, with an emphasis on small groups, house churches and family relationships.

How did the church get away from this and into the competitive hierarchies we see today? In recent decades, even secular scholars who study the subject have learned that effective leadership (for any organization, with the possible exception of military and police organizations) is less authoritarian and more like the servanthood that Jesus describes. They have discovered that effective leadership is not merely a set of personal traits, but a *process* (as in the above definition) and a *complex relationship* between a leader, a group and a situation. Leadership author and scholar James McGregor Burns, for example, demonstrates that effective transformational leaders do not squelch conflict within the group, but skillfully convert it into behavior that will contribute to the group's shared goals and purposes.

You certainly won't learn how to do that in a two-day seminar—and we are concerned that such popular events, self-help books, tapes and courses offer a dangerously oversimplified and shallow view of leadership—producing thousands of eager young zealots who may do more harm than good.

With that in mind, we offer sage views on Christian leadership from two experienced pastors. Together, they illustrate genuine Christ-centered leadership. □

—the Editors

Where Pastors Go to be Refreshed

(and why it isn't working)



BY GLEN MOYER

Ask any pastor why he/she entered the ministry. Invariably, their eyes light up and a smile breaks across their face. I've asked hundreds, and they say things like:

"I wanted to preach the Word of God full-time so I could help others love God and their neighbor more."

"I wanted to introduce as many people as possible to Jesus while equipping as many people as possible to introduce as many people as possible to Jesus."

"I left the secular work force so I could devote myself completely to helping fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus."

Myself? I entered the ministry over 20 years ago because God's love so dramatically changed me that I wanted to spend the rest of my life helping others discover that same life-changing love.

Now, ask those very same pastors what they spend most of their time doing. Invariably, tired lines replace the smile as they say:

"Putting out fires in our congregation. No sooner do I get one extinguished when another one erupts."

"Busy work—meetings, paperwork, event planning, problem-solving, you name it. I am always scrambling to find enough time to get my sermon ready by Sunday morning."

"Most of the time I feel guilty about all the things I'm not getting done. I go, go, go, but I never seem to accomplish anything that lasts."

Several years ago I would have answered, "Keeping the church afloat. I'm always thinking, planning and enacting programs and events that will keep people coming back week after week." And if I was being completely honest I'd add, "...so we can pay all the bills."

Few pastors actually get to do what they feel called to do. They end up spending most of their time doing what they least like to do. There is a gloomy disconnect between the passion of a pastor and the vocation of a pastor.

How tragic. Further, many clergy are the hardest working, least paid professionals in their community, who constantly sacrifice family and personal time to do all those things that they weren't called to do. Naturally, all of this leads to frustration and exhaustion. No wonder stress, burn out and drop out rates with clergy are among the highest of all professions.

How do pastors rediscover their first love? Where do they go to renew their calling? How do they recharge their batteries so they can keep on going, and going, and going....

Pastor's Conferences

More than anything else, they attend pastor's conferences. These events promise to reinvigorate pastors by placing in their hands the latest and greatest programs and tools available so they can become more effective and successful in ministry. That is an irresistible carrot for pastors because more than a bigger salary or a good night's sleep, pastors desperately want to glorify God by being effective and successful at what they do for God.

For years and years I assumed that pastor's conferences could and would deliver on their promise of renewal. I can't tell you how many of these events I've attended. They had names like: Growing a Healthy



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Church, Disciple-Making Church, The New Church Revolution, Purpose Driven Church, Natural Church Growth, How To Pastor a Growing Congregation, Growing Bigger By Growing Smaller, Preaching That Works, The Equipping Church, Leading Like Jesus, Habits of Highly Effective Pastors—and the list just keeps on going, and going, and going....

These events typically feature a pastor who has done something remarkable—like grow his church from 50 to 5,000, or written a book that has sold millions of copies. He recounts awe-inspiring stories of the tremendous things God has done for him. I'd listen and imagine what it must be like to be part of such an amazing act of God. The speaker would conclude by telling us that if we applied his principles of ministry surely God would do the same for us as he had done for him.

I'd leave revived and armed with a bag full of the speaker's books and tapes and a field manual detailing how to duplicate his remarkable success in my church.

"God," I'd pray, "just adding 100 new people to my church would be enough to make me happy—you don't have to knock yourself out for me like you did for that dude."

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A few months later those books and tapes would be collecting dust on my shelf...next to other dusty books and tapes which I had purchased at previous pastor's conferences. My church would pretty much be where it was before the conference, and my frustration and exhaustion levels were again rising. Soon I would be looking for a new pastor's conference I could attend to try to get renewed.

Why Do We Keep Falling for Glitzy New Programs?

Every pastor in America knows what I'm talking about—including the speakers at these latest and greatest conferences—because behind the hype most of them are just as frustrated and exhausted.

The reason for this debacle is obvious, but like the emperor's new clothes, we pastors can't see it.

Think about it. If a primary source of pastoral frustration and exhaustion is the disconnect between our calling and our vocation, then why would we expect to be renewed by attending a conference that is designed to increase our vocational work load while drawing us yet further from our calling?

(Let me insert that I'm speaking in general terms. There were some very good concepts and spiritual nuggets that I gleaned from these events, but they were like panning an ounce of gold from a ton of ore.)

What's even more insidious is that most of these glitzy new programs have the shelf-life of a loaf of bread. Just about the time I would get a program up and running it was already stale and no longer attracting the crowds. I'd have to be off to another confer-

ence to find a new program—a fresh loaf of bread—for my hungry congregation so they'd keep coming back to church.

Is that crazy or what?

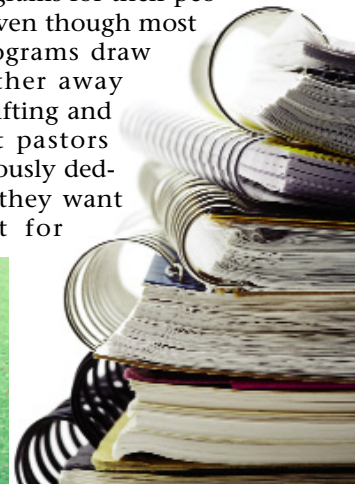
Doing Things for God...or Knowing God?

As I examined my irrational behavior more closely I discovered there were also two deep-seated institutional problems that contributed to my exhaustion and frustration. Every pastor needs to pause and consider the impact of these upon his life.

First, most churches are deeply entrenched, program-based systems. Despite the catchy slogan which says that "Christianity is a relationship not a religion," the fact is, mainstream Christianity is more a religion than it is a relationship. It's about doing things for God, not *knowing* God. Even the way we get to know God is by doing things.

I can remember attending a conference where the featured mega-church pastor beautifully explained how we can't get to know God simply by doing things. He then spent the next day and a half outlining his seven-step process that we need to do so we can get to know God.

If pastors are going to succeed in this program-based, religious system called "church," they must offer a steady stream of new and exciting programs for their people to do—even though most of these programs draw pastors further away from their gifting and calling. But pastors are tremendously dedicated, and they want what's best for



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their church, so off to the latest and greatest conferences they go so as to be on the cutting edge of church evolution.

As I explained above, most of these events don't renew a pastor—at best they temporarily mask their symptoms like a narcotic. In reality, they exacerbate the pastor's problems—because with every failed program comes a growing sense of despair and disillusionment with the system in general and with themselves in particular (not to mention the negative impact upon their congregation).

Leaders or Shepherds?

The second deep-seated institutional problem that fuels pastoral frustration and exhaustion was revealed to me by Christian pollster George Barna. He said a primary reason why so many (including himself) are leaving mainstream Christianity is because leaders are not leading the churches—thus many (probably most) churches are dysfunctional.

What?

Isn't that what pastors do... lead?

Barna asserts that pastors are gifted and called by God to be pastors (shepherds). Leaders are gifted and called by God to be leaders. But rarely are pastors also leaders. There's a conundrum.

Mainstream Christianity has ordained pastors to also be the leaders of the church. So once again pastors are forced by the system to function outside of their gifting and calling.

Not surprisingly, when gifted leaders attempt to lead, the *de facto* leaders (pastors) feel threatened. Instead of welcoming the freedom and relief these leaders offer, Barna says pastors tend to become territorial out of their insecurities. They use their ordained institutional authority to neutralize the real leaders so as to maintain their life-draining power.

How do they treat this problem? They attend pastor's leadership conferences that attempt to give

them leadership gifts—gifts that are *bestowed by God*, not the hottest mega-church pastor.

Put all these pieces together and is it any wonder why so many pastors are perpetually frustrated and exhausted? Yet, like the emperor's new clothes, these tremendously dedicated servants press on, oblivious to the fact that it is the religious system to which they are enslaved that is slowly sucking the life and passion out of them.

Lord, have mercy.

Leaving Busy Work Behind

Some years ago I reached my breaking point. I was sitting at a pastor's conference when my eyes were opened and I realized I was as naked as "the emperor." The calling and passion which had drawn me into the ministry had been sucked out of me. I was depleted and spiritually bankrupt. I had been so busy doing church stuff for God that I didn't really know him anymore, and I sensed that if I kept going at this pace I might never know him again in this life.

I tried to stay through the rest of the conference but they kept feeding me more busy work—work that I absolutely dreaded doing. My "to do" plate was overflowing before I came and now they were trying to serve me another huge portion of "to do." I left.

It was a horrible, yet wonderful, day—a day when everything started changing for me.

I stopped attending most pastor's conferences. I also removed tons of materials I had purchased at past conferences from my personal library. I called some of my pastor buddies and invited them to take any of the books, tapes and manuals they wanted—there were hundreds of them.

"Holy cow," they gasped when they saw the enormous pile of materials, "are you leaving the ministry?"

"No, I'm actually trying to get back to the ministry," I smiled. "I think this stuff is keeping me from it. I ac-

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tually feel bad pawning it off on you guys."

They were elated to take that straw off my hands. However, I know for a fact that just about all of it ended up collecting dust on their shelves and that three of those four guys have since left the ministry.

Perhaps pastor's conferences have gotten better over the years since I quit going, but judging by the pastoral carnage I see along the roadside of churches, I'd guess not.

But the problem is so much bigger than pastor's conferences. *Mainstream Christianity is systemically sick, and pastors experience the side effects of this illness the most.* My heart breaks for them.

As for me, I've been one of the revolutionaries Barna talks about for some time now. *I left mainstream Christianity just before frustration and exhaustion forced me to leave.*

And although I no longer attend pastor's conferences, or perhaps because of not attending them, I'm thrilled to tell you that my answer to why I entered the ministry and what I spend most of my time doing are now one and the same. □

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