

5 Strategic Servant Leadership

Critical Elements in Effectively Modeling a Serving Attitude

By Ronald F. Smedley

Jesus wanted his disciples to lead differently from the world. He wanted them to know a much better way. So he taught them a new leadership principle when he said, “You know that in this world kings are tyrants and officials lord it over the people beneath them. But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life a ransom for many” (Mark 10: 42-45, NLT).

As we read this it becomes clear that leadership for Christ-followers involves a commitment to serve. A leader shouldn't force compliance from staff members, demanding he or she be served. Rather, the leader seeks to serve them, helping them succeed. Those within the leader's sphere of influence will decide how they'll submit to the leader's style of leadership. One style demands service, while the other inspires and enables it.

Effectively modeling strategic servant leadership requires the Christian leader to address the following:

■ **Ambition...to glorify God.** When our ambition is to effectively serve our Lord, we must keep these two verses in mind: “To aspire to leadership is an honorable ambition” (1 Timothy 3:1), and “Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not” (Jeremiah 45:5).

Jesus taught that ambition focused on self is wrong, but ambition centered on God's glory and the welfare of others is a tremendous force for good. True

leadership means giving oneself in service to others, not by coaxing, manipulating or forcing them to follow.

■ **Role...to do everything possible to help one's people succeed.** This role is demonstrated by a servant's heart and good character, and channeled through effective methods, procedures

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and systems. By doing such, a leader can maximize the capability and growth of his or her people's talents and abilities. You can determine whether this is happening by asking them.

■ **System...to develop effective methods coupled with good character.** Is it good character or effective methods that make the greatest difference? Actually, one without the other is ineffective in the development of people. Either one, by itself, will fail.

Character is the foundation for effective leadership. It must be developed before good method and procedures can follow. The attributes of sound character, such as integrity, honesty, empathy, awareness, stewardship, loving dis-

cipline, justice, courage and serving, when practiced, will bring about trust between leaders and followers. If a leader is unable to develop a relationship of trust with his people, he or she will fail.

But at the same time, character without sound methods brings about a growing dissatisfaction and declining motivation among those being led. An effective leader needs good character *and* sound methods with good systems to develop a growing team!

■ **Method...to be a responsible leader that develops responsible employees.** It's been wisely said that if you want *responsible* people, you must be *responsible* yourself. There are two aspects of responsible leadership, facilitating and implementing the vision or strategic direction of the organization.

Facilitating the vision and direction places the leader at the top of a “right-side up” pyramid, sharing and clarifying all aspects of the organization's vision with its people. Why is this important? Because people continually cry out for both *clarity* and *focus* within their jobs and organization. They want to know the mission and understand the values of the organization. They want accurate job descriptions with training in all aspects of the job, and they want to be thoroughly informed about its policies.

In turn, implementing the vision and direction places the organization's people at the top of an upside-down pyramid. They now have the responsibility to implement the vision and values through their work and activities. The role of the leader now becomes serving

and assisting people so they can effectively carry out their responsibilities.

■ **Attitude...to think like Christ.**

Communication is much more than simply giving out information. Your attitude is vitally important in effective communication. When our desire is to think like Christ in each situation, we'll find increasingly that his heart and mind are being formed in us. There should be no greater aspiration for a leader. A synergism of all these areas of strategic servant leadership should become the model in all our interactions

with staff. Successful leaders seek to do everything possible for their followers to succeed. Until this happens, a leader will be guided solely by personal or organizational ambition, rather than by humility.

Are we not stewards of the people God entrusts to us to lead? Leaders will be held responsible, I believe, for maximizing the growth, usefulness and effectiveness of their people, both spiritually *and* corporately.

Ultimately, as leaders, we'll stand before our Lord one day when he asks,

“What did you do for my people? Did you serve them well?”

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