

TORONTO UNITED CHURCH COUNCIL

Connecting Resources with Ministry

Church Development Discussion Papers

TITLE: Leadership and Management: Neither is Optional

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In a leadership exercise that has become popular at expensive training centers, persons are given the task of persuading others to drink green buttermilk! The exercise works like this: People sit at tables of five. One person at the table is given the role of "change agent" to persuade the others to drink glasses of green buttermilk. Two persons at the table are given the role of supporters, who are to be at least somewhat open to change. Two persons are given the role of resisters, who are to be opposed to change. The general success record of the change agents is not impressive. The debate generally continues for some time, but few agents are able to get everyone at the table to try the green buttermilk! Part of the problem, no doubt, is that even those who are assigned the supportive roles are probably not anxious to drink the peculiar looking liquid.

The purpose of the exercise is to show how difficult it is to gain active cooperation in change. Getting people to permit others to drink green buttermilk isn't particularly difficult, but getting them to try it themselves is another matter entirely!

Does that seem too unrealistic of an analogy for change in the church? Consider what is involved in gaining not only congregational approval but also active involvement in:

- the utilization of contemporary music in worship.
- the acceptance of drama or video as an alternative to the sermon for some worship services.
- the acceptance and practice of much more informal dress on Sunday morning, in an effort to help the unchurched feel more comfortable with attending worship.
- the provision of pastoral care to persons in hospitals and nursing homes coming not from the pastor but from trained caregivers, shepherds, or deacons.
- the utilization of mission groups or task groups which have the approval to initiate new programs without bringing them back for board or congregational approval.
- the involvement of the congregation in true hospitality which embraces the stranger and integrates new people into the life of the church.
- the active participation of people in sharing their faith with others and inviting others to church.

- the initiation of new approaches to fundraising including an emphasis on planned giving and more opportunities for designated giving.
- the relocation of a declining congregation to an area where it has the potential to grow.

Not all these changes would be beneficial in every congregation, and how difficult a given change is to implement depends on many factors. For pastors and leaders in some churches, getting people to drink green buttermilk would be easy in comparison to accomplishing two or three of these changes.

Leadership or Management?

Management has to do with the efficient use of time, money, and materials and with the effective organizing and supervision of people to achieve the goals of an organization. Leadership is more actively involved in setting the goals for the organization and seeks to motivate people to deal creatively with the fast-paced change with which the organization is involved. Managers tend not to be strategic in their thinking but are more concerned with tasks and responsibilities. Leaders see the interrelationship among the various parts of the organization and look for strategies to help the organization succeed.

A pastor or other staff member who sees himself or herself functioning primarily as a manager will work cooperatively with the various boards and committees to help them implement their programs. Such a person will spend the expected time interacting with other staff members and will make the needed calls on prospective members, persons who are hospitalized, and so forth.

A pastor or other staff member who sees himself or herself functioning primarily as a leader will take a harder look at the future of the congregation and will identify changes which need to be made in order to move the church into that future. A skilled leader – a servant leader – will involve others in that process. Then the staff member functioning as leader will help people create a new vision for the future and will work, in part, as a cheerleader to encourage people to implement the needed changes.

While many of us in the church have emphasized the importance of vision to move a congregation into the future, we need to remember that executing the needed changes is always more difficult than arriving at the initial vision. It's one thing to approve other people drinking green buttermilk; it's another entirely to pour it into one's own glass and drink! Many secular organizations have grown weary of people who generate terrific visions but lack the follow-through needed for change to actually happen. The truth of the matter is that successful organizations need people who are effective as both leaders and managers.

Healthy organizations need leaders to create a sense of vision and to motivate people to make the necessary changes for a positive future. Healthy organizations also need managers to organize and plan so that visions become reality. No organization can effectively move into the future without both leadership and management.

Leadership in the Body of Christ

Leadership and management skills aren't always combined in equal measure in the same person, but the concept of the body of Christ functioning as a whole gives us opportunities to help one another.

- If your gifts are concentrated more in management, be alert for persons who can help with vision and motivation for change.
- If your gifts are more concentrated in leadership, be alert for persons who have high quality follow-up skills and organizational skills.
- If your gifts are concentrated more in teaching than in leadership or management, you can utilize those gifts well to move the congregation into the future by working cooperatively with persons who have gifts in management and in leadership.

Two hundred fifteen pastors of Anabaptist congregations [including Mennonites, Brethren and others] were asked to choose one of the following to describe their most comfortable style: being a manager, being a leader, or being equally balanced between the manager and the leader roles. Here are the results: 57% preferred functioning as a manager; 24% as a leader; and 19% felt balanced between the two styles. One person in the study wrote, "The emphasis on servant leadership in our tradition is wonderful. Unfortunately, many of us emphasize the servant role and forget the leadership role. Certainly many are more comfortable as managers than as leaders. When the pastor prefers a managerial style, it is important to cultivate and involve those with the gift of leadership in the congregation.

Leadership characteristics

Our [the authors'] Anabaptist tradition emphasizes the concept of servant leadership. Styles of leadership that are manipulative, abrasive, or autocratic are not likely to be successful in our tradition. In fact, they are generally not effective in the long-term even in the secular world. Paul wrote these words to the Philippians: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (2:3-4). Think about the extent to which you have or could develop the following leadership characteristics and about others in your congregation who may have them. Effective leaders:

- know they must be able to persuade others to work with them in order to succeed.
- do not think of themselves as having charisma and have little use for the term. The effective leader is not concerned with being loved or admired. The effective leader does the right thing and helps others do the right thing. Results – not popularity – defines leadership.
- are visible and set examples of what they need and expect from others. Leaders are not caught in contradictions between what they say and what they do.
- are not focused on honours, titles, rank, or money. Leadership is responsibility.
- constantly seek to understand and adhere to the mission and goals of the organization, changing them if necessary but not violating them.

- constantly seek to answer the question: “What can and should I do to make a difference?” And the difference they want to make has nothing to do with their own preferences but with the good of the organization. They want to be remembered for making a difference in the organization, not for selfishly pursuing their own agenda.
- do not look for carbon copies of themselves and are very appreciative of diversity. They try to instill an appreciation of diversity in others.
- are not afraid of working with strong people. They seek out the very best people for every position and defer to the opinions of those who are more knowledgeable or experienced than themselves.
- delegate many things and trust others to complete tasks, but they are also doers. They have a clear sense of what they need to do themselves and of what will make a difference in the organization.

Steve Clapp and Kristen Leverton Helbert have published several books and other resources on the themes of church development and church growth.

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