

Leading the Church in the 21st Century

Part Four

By Aubrey Malphurs

(Number 5, February 15, 2002) In the *Leadership Connection*, I'm currently wrestling with the definition of a leader. When we use the term leader, what or who are we talking about? My definition is the following: Christian leaders are servants who use their credibility and capabilities to influence followers in a particular context to pursue God's direction for their lives.

In this issue of the *Leadership Connection*, I want to explore the Christian leader's capabilities. It's imperative that you as leaders know who you are (your divine design) and what your leadership abilities are. Otherwise you may waste your time and that of others in attempting to be and do something that God never intended you to be or do.

I define capabilities as the leader's special abilities for ministry. They're your strengths or special tools that you bring to the leadership task-the tools you use to adjust and fine-tune the leadership engine. And it's these capabilities that distinguish between average and exceptional leaders.

We may view capabilities in three ways: God-given capabilities, developed capabilities, and a combination of the two. God-given capabilities are the special, life-long abilities, aptitudes, or talents that God bestows at birth or at the time of one's conversion. They are abilities such as one's natural and spiritual gifts, passions, and temperament. You would be wise to take a natural or spiritual gifts inventory so that you know your individual gift sets. You should discover your passion or passions-what you feel strongly and care deeply about. Finally, you would benefit from knowing and understanding your temperament. I provide some tools to help you discover these God-given capabilities in

my book *Maximizing Your Effectiveness* (Baker Book House). However, there are several good tools in the marketplace that will help you discern your Capabilities.

Developed capabilities are the abilities that God doesn't necessarily give at birth or conversion. Instead, they're the various abilities that leaders can cultivate over time with God's help. Developed capabilities consist of such things as your character, knowledge, skills, and emotions.

First, leaders can and must develop their character. This involves the leader's soul-work (being). Few discerning Christian people will follow a leader with character incongruities. Thus Paul encouraged his protégé (Timothy) "to train yourself to be godly." The leader's character question is who must I be? What are the character qualities that I need to be a godly leader in my particular ministry context? I believe that Paul spells out the character qualifications for pastors and possibly other highly visible leaders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. Once you identify these, then you need to inventory where you are and begin cultivating the character qualities that are low or missing.

Second, leaders must also develop their knowledge. This concerns the leader's headwork (knowing). The leader's knowledge is the relevant information that he or she needs to lead and minister competently. The knowledge questions is what do I need to know to lead effectively for Christ in my particular ministry context? Here are some possible answers: We need to know God, ourselves, people, the Bible, theology, the spiritual life, how to pray, how to communicate, how to think and act strategically, and many other things.

Third, leaders need to develop their skills. This focuses on their handwork (doing). The leaders' skills depict their ability to apply their knowledge to their leadership situation. I divide the leader's skills into relational and task skills. Relational skills are based on Jesus' Great Commandment (Matt. 22:36-37): Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Key relational skills are: Listening, conflict resolution, decision-making, risk taking, problem solving, confrontation, encouraging, trust building, team

building, consensus building, recruiting, hiring and firing, and others. Task skills are based on the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20): Make and mature believers nationally and internationally. Some important skills are: speaking, values recognition, missioning, envisioning, strategizing, reflecting, prioritizing, planning, evaluating, plus others. The important leadership question is what skills do you need to lead well in your unique ministry context?

Fourth, leaders need to develop in the area of their emotions. This affects the leader's heart-work (feeling). Except for recent works on EI (emotional intelligence), non-Christians and Christians have not placed much importance on the leader's emotions that are so critical to healthy, spiritual leadership. And many men avoid the topic entirely. However, the leader's mood has a huge impact on his or her followers. It's contagious and quickly sweeps through the ministry. An optimistic, happy, authentic leader impacts the ministry positively. A pessimistic, harsh, or anxious leader impacts the ministry negatively. As leaders, we need to identify our emotions as they occur and deal with them biblically before such emotions as anger or fear get out of control. The important leadership question is what are the emotional requirements for leading in my ministry situation?

Finally, leaders' God-given capabilities and developed capabilities combine to make up their total package. In leadership research the combination of these capabilities are also called traits, capacities, abilities, characteristics, etc. Christians and non-Christians have attempted to discover what are the capabilities or traits of the ideal or universal leader-the one who can lead well in any and all situations. Examples are the "great man" theory that was dominant in leadership circles in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the "trait theory" of the early twentieth century. Emerging and practicing Christian leaders have spent much money on popular books that present the qualities of the so-called ideal, universal leader. Their hope is that they're that leader or that they can cultivate those traits and become that leader. I contend that there is no such leader.

The former president and now chancellor of Dallas Seminary is Chuck Swindoll. Many view him as a super leader-one who could walk into any church and lead it to new heights of Godly success. What most don't realize is that he didn't do very well in his first few pastorates. It wasn't until he became the pastor of the Fullerton Evangelical Free Church in California that he blossomed into the leader he is today. He once told me, "When I went to the church in Fullerton, I thought that I had landed in heaven."

I'm convinced that certain capabilities or traits may increase the likelihood that you will be effective as God's leader, but they don't guarantee effectiveness. The relative effectiveness of your different capabilities is dependent on the nature of your leadership situation. The key is matching well your capabilities with the ministry context. I'll say more about this and how to accomplish it when we get to the leader's context for ministry.

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