

Leading the Church in the 21st Century

Part Five

By Aubrey Malphurs

(*Number 6, June 17, 2002*) What's your definition of a leader? In the Leadership Connection, I'm currently working through my definition of a leader that will make up a new book entitled *Being Leaders: The Nature of Christian Leaders and Christian Leadership*. 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 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 influence. A Christian leader is a servant with the credibility and capability to influence...

Is influence important to leadership? The term influence is at the very heart of many leadership definitions. Hersey and Blanchard summarize a number of definitions and write, "A review of other writers reveals that most management writers agree that leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an individual or group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation." [Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, *Management of Organizational Behavior*, 6th ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993), 94.] The point here is that leaders are doers and what they do is influence. Leadership is all about influence - it's an exercise of influence. And it's concerned with how leaders affect followers. Thus, influence is the sine qui non of leadership, and without it, leadership won't happen.

What is influence? Influence involves moving people to change their thinking and ultimately their behavior more by persuasion (Acts 17: 1-4; 18:4; 2 Cor. 5:11, 10:5), encouragement (Judges 20:22; 2 Sam. 11:25), or godly example (Heb. 13:7), rather than by a rebuke (Gal. 1:6; 2:14), coercion, or exercise of authority or force (Matt. 18: 15-20). The idea is that people change because they want to, not because they have to. However,

influence doesn't exclude the latter (threat, coercion, force) because at times a leaders may have to use these means such as in a church discipline situation (Matt. 18: 15-20), hypocrisy of a leader (Gal. 2: 11-14), etc. But, generally speaking, the former is much more effective in contributing to positive, long-term change than the latter.

What is the key to influence? The key to influence is the leader's style of influence. It's important that leaders accurately perceive how they influence followers. The way to discover and know this is to understand the concept of leadership style and then to discover your style. The style approach to leadership emphasizes leaders' behavior and how it constantly affects people when leading a church or parachurch organization or a ministry within one or the other.

Leadership is composed essentially of two general kinds of behavior: Task and relationship. Task behavior focuses on the accomplishment of one or several goals. An example would be Paul's life mission, "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of grace." (Acts 20:24) Relational behavior focuses on how people relate with themselves and others. An example is Paul's comments on his ministry to the church at Thessalonica when he says that "...we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her children." (1 Thess. 2:7-12) In fact, the leadership metaphors and images of the New Testament fall in one of two categories - task or relationship. [David W. Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry: Biblical Images for Leaders and Followers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993.) One's style of leadership explains how leaders either use task or relational behaviors both together to influence followers to accomplish the ministry organization's God-given mission.

These two behaviors are separate and independent. Task behavior that emphasizes ministry accomplishments refers to such activities as discovering and articulating core values, determining a mission, designing a strategy, preaching and teaching the Bible, organizing the ministry, providing structure, defining role responsibilities and expectations, scheduling ministry activities, defining policy, assigning ministry load,

evaluating ministry performance, and others. Relational behavior that values the concerns and needs of people refers to such activities as building camaraderie, developing trust, motivating followers, developing teams, providing good ministry conditions, nurturing and supporting followers, building biblical community, promoting interpersonal relationships, counseling those needing direction, comforting the distressed, encouraging the discouraged, and many other biblical functions.

Effective leadership depends on how the leader balances task and relational behaviors with their people in their unique ministry context or culture. Different ministry contexts or cultures require different leadership styles. Every leader will have an inherent, primary leadership style, but will also need to adjust as much as their inherent style will allow to the context where they exercise leadership (whether over or within the church or parachurch organization). To grow and mature, some ministry situations require a task related style, others require a relational oriented style, while most require a combination of the two. Wise leaders and congregations will evaluate leaders and ministry contexts and attempt to align the best leaders for the particular ministry situation. I'll say more about this later.

What are leadership styles? There are four dominant, primary leadership styles that characterize all leaders: Directors, inspirational, diplomats, and analyticals. I've organized each around three areas: The styles vast ministry context or situation, its strengths, and its weaknesses. One style will be your primary leadership style and should accurately describe you and how you typically influence or affect people in certain contexts. Most likely, you will have a secondary and possibly a third leadership style that will add some factors that affect your primary style. If you would like to learn more about each style and get an idea of which is your style, I have developed and validated a tool to help leaders assess their leadership styles called the Leadership Style Inventory (LSI). This tool along with several others will appear in the book when it's completed toward the end of this year. However, I also have some general information on leadership styles that is on my web site under Resources. This information is downloadable and should help you discover and understand your style.

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