

Leading the Church in the 21st Century

Part Seven

By Aubrey Malphurs

(Number 8, December 30, 2002) I'm concerned that in our discussions of leadership that, more often than not, we aren't talking about the same thing. In this issue of the *Leadership Connection*, I continue to work through my definition of a leader by focusing on the Christian leader's context. A Christian leader is a servant with the credibility and capability to influence followers in a particular context. (While reading this article, please note that I have created a special audit to help you discover your leader-organization fit.)

Leadership is situational

What works for leaders in one church setting or ministry organization doesn't necessarily apply to another. The same leader can be highly successful in one context, but fail miserably in another. This is why there are no common traits of a super leader. This also explains why the way a pastor does ministry in one church doesn't necessarily apply to another.

Context is critical

The reason is that a ministry's context affects the amount of influence that a leader will exercise in that ministry and ultimately the leader's effectiveness. Leaders can't expect to excel in all ministry situations. This was the case with the Savior (Mk. 6:1-6), Paul (2 Cor. 11), and Moses (Num.11) to mention a few. If it was true for them, it will be true for you.

Chuck Swindoll, the Chancellor of Dallas Seminary and pastor of Stone Briar Community Church in Frisco, Texas, discovered this truth early in his pastoral career. In an interview, he shared with me how his first and second pastorates didn't work out. He was the wrong pastor in the wrong place. However, when he became the pastor of the

First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton, California, he found the right ministry context for his leadership. He said, "I thought that I'd landed in heaven. That church was made for me."

So what should leaders do? The following are four steps that will increase your leadership effectiveness in your ministry context.

Step 1: Know Yourself as a Leader

People in general and leaders in particular aren't passive agents that are hopelessly subject to the whims of their surroundings. Therefore, you must begin by knowing and understanding yourself when it comes to leader-organization fit. As a leader, you bring yourself to the leadership context. What or who is it that you bring into that situation?

The answer is that you bring at least six components that are so important that you need to identify and understand them in particular. The first is your doctrinal beliefs about the Bible and theology. Another is your ministry core values. They are the beliefs that explain why you do what you do as a leader. A third is your leadership style or how you as a leader impact people. A fourth is your leadership capabilities. They are your God-given capabilities (such as spiritual gifts) and your developed capabilities (character and skills). A fifth is your theology and philosophy of ministry. Your theology of ministry is what you believe the Bible teaches about ministry, while your philosophy of ministry is your beliefs about how your church does ministry (worship style, etc.). The fifth is your ideal ministry circumstances—those factors where the leader performs best. The following are a few: The kind of organization, the size of the ministry, where it is in its life-cycle (growing, plateaued, or in decline), the age of the ministry, the average age of the people in the organization, its location, and other factors.

Step 2: Know Your Leadership Situation

This answers the important question: How can you best influence people to follow Christ in your ministry or ministry within the ministry?

There are several primary contextual components that will help you as a leader to gauge the amount of influence you'll be able to exert in a ministry such as a church. It's no surprise that most are the same as the components for leaders: One is the ministry's doctrinal beliefs as found in a doctrinal statement. Another is its core values that relate to what it does and doesn't value. A third is its leadership style. Churches, like pastors, have a particular leadership style that they respond to best. A fourth is its capabilities. These would be the dominant gifts, passions, and character of the ministry. A fifth is its theology and philosophy of ministry (worship style, etc.). A sixth is its ministry circumstances such as the kind of organization, the size of the ministry, the age of the ministry, and others.

There are at least three additional components. One is organizational trust. Leaders need to have a read on whether the ministry trusts its leadership. A second is the organization's power structure—who holds the power? And a third is its demographics that address general information about people.

Step 3: Compare Yourself as a Leader With the Ministry Situation

Once you've discovered yourself as a leader, and you've explored your ministry context, the third step is to compare the two. There are some situations where you'll be more effective than others. To be most effective, you must learn to recognize the ones that best fit your leadership identity. Consequently, the leader must ask: Is there a match? If not, then how close are we? Where do we align and where don't we align?

Step 4: Adjust Yourself As a Leader and Adjust the Ministry Situation

More often than not, leaders find themselves in situations where they don't fit the ministry context, ranging from just slightly poor to an extremely poor fit. When this happens, leaders have at least three options.

Option #1: Leaders Can Attempt to Adjust How They Lead

This affects their style of leadership. However, some will find it easier to adjust than others, depending on how God has gifted each and personal development. The greater the

discrepancy, the more difficult it will be for the leader to change and adjust to the situation.

Option #2: Leaders Can Attempt to Change Their Context

This option assumes that there is something wrong with the ministry situation. Consequently, the leadership would need to analyze what the problem is and then try to correct it. This is not an easy assignment and will take time if it happens at all.

Option #3: Leaders Can Leave the Ministry Situation

This might include moving to another setting within the current context or moving to a different ministry entirely. However, leaders, especially new leaders, must not conclude that they're not "cut out" for ministry and abandon it altogether. This should be the leader's last choice.

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