

Why Some Leaders Excel

Introduction. The American women's relay race team was favored to win the gold medal in the 4-by-100 relay race in the 2004 Summer Olympic Games in Athens, Greece. The team featured Marion Jones, a sprinter who had won four gold medals at the previous games in Sydney. Indeed, the American team was off to a strong start when Jones took the baton for the second leg of the race. She gained ground as she ran her 100 meters and approached Lauryn Williams, who would run the third leg.

Williams began running as Jones got close, but when she reached back to receive the baton, the women couldn't complete the handoff. Jones thrust the baton forward three times, but each time Williams failed to grab it. Finally, on the fourth try, the runners made the connection. But by that time, they had crossed out of the twenty-yard exchange zone and were disqualified. Everyone knew they were the fastest team on the track, but because they couldn't complete the handoff, they lost the race.

It is important for one generation to set the pace for others by living authentically, but at a certain point a handoff must be made to the next generation. That handoff isn't as easy as it looks.

It is not overstating the case to say that leadership makes or breaks a congregation. We're in the midst of considering men for deacons at this point in the year. We know the qualifications of elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9), and we know their tasks (1 Peter 5:2; Acts 6:1-4), but what is the measure of a great or effective leader?

The Bible gives us examples of a wide array of leaders, and when we begin looking closely at those who excelled in their leadership an unmistakable pattern appears — we see key traits that are always present when one is effective.

Why do some people excel at leadership? Why do some leaders seem to be more able to influence others for good and to accomplish good? The Bible shows very clearly why some leaders excel and I want to examine with you four of those reasons.

I. Wholeheartedness

- A. Hezekiah became king of Judah and demonstrated his great leadership among God's people by bringing about many needed reforms (2 Chronicles 31:20-21).
- B. We see nothing less in the example of Jesus. He was zealous for purity in the house of God (John 2:17), and for the utmost devotion in His servants (Mark 12:29-30).
- C. Do we find this spirit in the age in which we live? Are we often encouraged to deep consecration? Hardly.
 1. We hear people in the workplace telling us, "Take it easy," "Don't work too hard," or "Don't overdo it," and that is the way a lot of people live.
 2. The danger in this is that this philosophy can be and often is picked up by leaders in churches. When it is, mediocrity or failure is the result.
 3. Instead, we need to be encouraging one another to "give all you have got" and "do the best you can" (Philippians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:1).
- D. God is looking for and will be satisfied with nothing less than wholehearted commitment from you and me (Ecclesiastes 9:10; Luke 14:23; Colossians 3:23).

- E. A leader has to consider that he is not only building for the present but the future too. If his heart is lukewarm, what will the future hold for God's people?

II. Singlemindedness

- A. Jesus is a good example of singlemindedness (Mark 10:32-34; Luke 9:51), as well as Paul (Philippians 3:13-14). It is significant to note that he said, "I press," not "float," "glide," "slip," or "drift."
- B. The Bible gives at least three reasons for singlemindedness.
 - 1. Everything in the world is temporal and transient (2 Peter 3:10).
 - 2. Life is too short to be wasted (James 4:14).
 - 3. Our labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).
- C. A man can destroy his life in one of three ways:
 - 1. Give in to the lazy and slothful nature and do nothing.
 - 2. Give yourself to a goal, work hard, and discover you gave yourself to the wrong goal.
 - 3. Dabble in everything and never really do anything.
- D. A crown of life awaited Paul because he was singleminded in his devotion to the Lord and His cause (2 Timothy 4:6-8). A good leader shares the same laser-sharp focus (Joshua 1:7; 2 Timothy 2:4).

III. A Mind Set On Excellence

- A. We serve a God of excellence.
 - 1. His name is excellent (Psalm 8:1).
 - 2. His greatness is excellent (Psalm 150:2).
- B. We are appalled sometimes at the lack of excellence we see around us, but this was not the spirit of the Lord (Mark 7:37).
 - 1. The statement made of Jesus reminds us of Genesis 1:31. Mark reminds us of the Messianic significance by words that reflect Isaiah 35:5-6.
 - 2. His life is a testimony to the fact that anything worth doing is worth doing right. We need that mind in us (cp. Philippians 2:5).
- C. Everything we do is done in the name of the Lord and everything we do reflects on that name in one way or another (Colossians 3:17).
 - 1. People who are new to the gospel can appreciate authenticity — saints who are doing the best they can within the realm of worship.
 - 2. But believers who grow and mature will improve in their tasks because they understand that we serve a God of excellence.
 - 3. Everything we do, but especially surrounding our public worship and service, reflects on and must glorify the name of Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12).

IV. Initiative

- A. Initiative is "the action of taking the first step or move; taking responsibility for beginning or originating; the ability to think or act without being urged."
 - 1. It is obvious that initiative is a basic quality of leadership (Acts 15:22-23).
 - 2. Someone has to take the first step or nothing will get done (cp. Genesis 42:1-2).

- B. The scriptures have some good examples of people who took the initiative in accomplishing God's purposes.
 - 1. David (1 Samuel 17:32).
 - 2. Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8).
- C. A good leader will exercise initiative in several ways.
 - 1. Serving (Acts 28:2).
 - 2. Reconciliation (Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15).
 - 3. Seeking knowledge of scripture and cultural trends (Proverbs 20:5).
- D. A leader who excels is a leader who thinks in terms of what can be done rather than what can't. He thinks of obstacles as stepping stones rather than barriers.
 - 1. A survey of over 15,000 churches conducted just before COVID hit shows that between 2000 and 2020, median church service attendance dropped from 137 people to 65.
 - 2. This means the church and its leaders are going to face challenges that other generations never had to face. A leader who has initiative knows that you can't pull people uphill who don't want to go; you can only point up.

Conclusion. Too many believe that leadership is merely the management of conflict. It's not. Leadership produces results which positively impact a congregation, but leaders who excel are not men who were just born leaders. They are men who have taken their natural abilities and developed them as much as possible. We can have effective leaders today if we will develop these characteristics in our lives.