

HOW DO I BECOME A BETTER LEADER

BY NICK CUTHBERT

Most leaders could improve their leadership. That may sound obvious, but it is very easy to see the leadership calling as somehow static. I've been called, that's it. But the New Testament offers us a different pattern. 'Lead with diligence' says Paul in Romans 12:8. How might we do that?

ACCEPT THE CALL TO BE A LEADER

It is amazing how many people never develop leadership because they are in denial that they are leaders, or run away from responsibility, perhaps through false modesty, fear or disobedience. Leadership is exercised at many levels, and although we might start with something small, most of us are capable of far more than we know. Accept you are a leader. Now grow as a leader.

DISCOVER YOUR SIGNIFICANCE IN GOD

It is all too easy to keep looking for significance in what Jeremiah called 'broken cisterns that cannot hold water' (Jeremiah 2:13). Leaders slip into this tendency unless they take steps to deal with it. We not only find ourselves driven, relying on the role we have to give us significance, but also find we are driving others. Christopher Banks calls it the 'the orphan spirit... the spirit of drivenness – an attempt to prove our acceptability through achievement and activity. It leads to an unending cycle of grief...' Our first priority is to regularly re-engage with the love of God. The more we learn to live and work from this place of security, the more capacity we will have to grow in our leadership.

BELIEVE YOU CAN BE A BETTER LEADER

It doesn't matter whether you consider that leaders are born or made, every leader can develop. We can develop the talents and gift we have, we can increase our knowledge and understanding, we can work on new skills. There comes a point where increased effort produces little change in effectiveness, but increased ability significantly impacts effectiveness. So read leadership books, listen to leadership talks, watch leadership videos, but always commit to applying at least one new thing to your situation.

Come to terms with who you are and how you are wired
Every leader is different in their style of operation, gift



mix and personality. Face up to who you are and don't try to be someone else. The expectation of the all-singing, all-dancing leader is still around. If you buy into that, you are unlikely to grow. The greatest growth comes when you are stretched in your areas of strength and when you learn through your areas of weakness. Rejoice with what God has given you and make the most of those things. And draw other into leadership who bring what you don't have.

GROW IN GODLY CHARACTER

People do not follow, at least not for long, a role or position, but they do follow a person they can admire. In extensive surveys it has been shown that the overwhelming characteristic that people look for in a leader is integrity. Integrity speaks about harmony between what we say and who we are.



EXERCISE YOUR WILL IN MAKING DECISIONS

It is much easier for God to guide someone who is moving forwards. Few decisions are final, but dithering creates uncertainty in those you are leading. Of course we should be collaborative, but making decisions is required of leaders. If you practice being decisive in lots of small things, it is easier in the big decisions. So, set out to make decisions and be prepared to take risks. Remember that failure is a stepping stone to success. Avoid people-pleasing, as this will lead to overcaution. Courage is a primary requisite for good leadership.

FOCUS ON OTHERS

Leadership is about influence – influencing people for change. A leader is a servant and our call is to help others become all God intended for them. The more we concentrate on the growth and release of others, the better leader we have become. Their success is our success. It is not about numbers or size but it is about depth and change. As educationalist Michael Fallon writes 'Every leader must work on improving his or her moral purpose' which he in part defines as 'making a difference in the lives of students'. In other words, it isn't about being a great teacher, it is about producing great pupils. Don't try to be a better leader. Aim to lead better! It is about them not you. Give yourself to those you serve.

And last but not least..

GET A MENTOR

The best leaders grow slowly by implementing new practices as and when they can. But if we are honest, most of us are either just too busy or lack discipline to do this. That is where a mentor can be such a help, providing external perspective, encouragement, challenge and accountability. Meeting with someone further down the road than us on a regular basis where we can talk openly about the joys and struggles of leadership is lifeline for many.

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FOR REFLECTION

- Do you see yourself as a leader? If not, why not?
- Identify one area of 'character growth' to address. How will you do that?
- What leadership decision do you need to face? Who will you ask to help you face it?
- Do you have a mentor? If yes, how can you best use them to help you grow as a leader? If not, how might you find one?