

WHY SHOULD ANYONE BE LED BY YOU?

BY ALISTAIR MAGOWAN

As part of the Church of England's Reform and Renewal programme and its commitment to effective leadership, I am currently involved in a leadership training programme for bishops. Among the many aspects of leadership we are exploring is this vital question: why should anyone be led by you? Reflecting upon it, it seems clear to me that this question is not only important for us as bishops but for all of us who seek to be effective leaders.

PUTTING FIRST THINGS FIRST – WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Leadership is a term often used and as with so many others that are familiar or in frequent use there can be a tendency to take for granted that we all understand what it is we mean without in fact being really sure we do know what we mean. Defining our terms and focusing our thoughts is itself part of the leadership challenge. I write not as an expert but as one continually learning and benefitting from the insights of others.

Peter Drucker wrote 'Only three things happen naturally in organisations: friction, confusion and underperformance. Everything else requires leadership.'

Becoming and being an effective leader is fundamentally about inspiring and motivating people. It requires seeing what is possible and envisioning how a better future might look. Strategy can only take us so far, we need vision. In biblical terms it requires the faith to live in the now purposefully and in the light and faith of all that we are in Christ Jesus, seeing what is not yet but promised.

Professional dancers know that if they are to succeed they must learn how to hold their bodies and operate out of their core, that central line of strength that runs

through them from top to bottom. This is more than knowing and carrying out the steps of the dance. Leadership calls us to operate out of our core. It requires us to understand and hold firm to that core and in whatever steps, turns or moves we make not lose our balance or waver from it.

Inspirational leadership is not located in good management alone, nor is it simply the exercise of authority. Both of these elements are necessary and need to be interwoven if objectives are to be achieved and confidence maintained.

Very few, if any of us, are born natural leaders. Most of us need to work hard at being effective leaders. In summary leadership is about being energised, confident, securely centred and committed. People who do this become leaders who lead.

AVOIDING THE PITFALLS – WHAT KIND OF LEADERSHIP?

Leadership can often be a lonely place and that loneliness easily leads to self doubt. It is vital therefore not to allow ourselves to become immobilised by isolation. Ensuring that we have the necessary support, mentors and resources is essential.

While one of the great strengths of the Church of England has been its parochial system, one of its

systemic weaknesses has been the way we allow clergy and other leaders to become isolated, disillusioned and demotivated. Thankfully this is now much better recognised. CPAS' mentor schemes and resources are not just good ideas they address the warning signs and the temptations to settle for second best. When we move from a healthy to an unhealthy place in leadership there are always indicators.

These include:

- Becoming preoccupied with status and perks.
- Getting mired in the day-to-day with little attention to long term goals.
- Being unwilling to have the difficult conversations.
- Blaming others rather than accepting responsibility for our failures.
- Avoiding team work and taking all the credit.
- Failing to set goals.

Of course it doesn't have to be like this. St Paul writing in Philippians 4:19 in the context of working in and with a team wrote: 'And my God will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.'

MAKING A DIFFERENCE – TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Martin Luther said: 'You are not only responsible for what you say but also for what you do not say'. I recently heard Sir Martin Narey reflect on his leadership as Director General of the Prison Service. Among the many helpful insights he gave were these:

- Say thank you. Take the time to write a letter. Even better can be a hand written letter on occasions. Don't simply resort to a text or email.
- Acknowledge others. Make the effort to know who it is you are meeting. Focus your interest upon them and do your homework beforehand.
- Understand and liberate your staff and helpers. What is it you need to do as a leader to gain their confidence and their ascent? One of the biggest challenges leaders face is getting their teams to move from a passive compliance to a wholehearted engagement. All too easily the best can disappear under a blanket of apathy fuelled by fear or

negative peer pressure. There is the constant danger that the elephants in the room are not named or addressed.

- Inhabit the role. Being an actor can have connotations of being false, but it need not be so. It is a given that in the leadership role we are being observed and judged. Remember that how people experience you and how you experience yourself in the presence of others are all part of what is important in being good leaders.

STAYING FRESH

The challenge constantly is to remain resilient, stay fresh and keep focused on making a difference.

Transformational leaders value discipline and for us as Christian leaders that must include the spiritual disciplines of prayer and bible study. These need to be well grounded so that we continue to dynamically live in and through Christ.



The one we trust and follow is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Lord and Saviour, the great transformer, the pattern we follow and the source of our life and leadership.

When the core is right then our leadership is more likely to be marked by a willingness to embrace change, celebrate success, especially that of others, exude joy, acknowledge our failures, work fruitfully as a team, communicate effectively, keep perspective and operate healthily under pressure.



FOR REFLECTION

1. How do people experience you in your leadership role?
2. What saps your energy and how might you address the concerns?
3. What is your core and how does it enable your resilience?