

BAPTIST MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

LEADING THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

A PROJECT REPORT

SUBMITTED TO DR. LARRY SILVEY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE COURSE

ADMINISTRATIVE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP (RE512)

BY

DON BURKE

SEPTEMBER 20, 2001

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. Personal Background	1
B. What is Leadership?.....	2
C. Project Focus Group	3
D. Project Purpose.....	3
II. RELATING INDIVIDUALLY.....	4
A. The Need	5
B. The Obstacles	6
C. The Means	9
III. APPLICATION.....	12
A. Sensitivity.....	13
B. Availability.....	14
C. Communication	15
IV. CONCLUSION.....	15

INTRODUCTION

Personal Background

That I chose to pursue a career as a technician was a surprise to no one. Having a father who made a living as a diesel mechanic and a maternal grandfather who was a self-employed cash register mechanic, I became the heir to a nature that included a strong mechanical bent. In school I largely avoided the humanities when possible, and leaned heavily towards subjects relative to math and the exact sciences. Add to this a growing interest in electronics during my high school years and it was no surprise when I decided to pursue a career in working on computers and similar electronic devices.

My focus shifted only slightly after completing electronic school and my subsequent call to the ministry. Upon entering Bible college the subject of my studies naturally changed but the nature of my approach remained much the same. I opted for the more technical aspects of the Biblical Studies program instead of the people-emphasis of Pastoral Studies. The studies in Bible languages, Biblical exegesis, and other areas in this discipline were undertaken with the same analytical and technical approach that had been used in my earlier studies.

The move from academia to the labor force posed no serious threat to this technical nature. Working for a denominational publisher (Baptist Publish House) as Inventory Manager, and later adding responsibilities as Information Systems Manager, I found many aspects of technical thinking essential for my duties. However, as the job responsibilities shifted from managing inventory and equipment to managing people the assets of this technical disposition soon became liabilities. My experience in manipulating things (e.g., tools, equipment, computer

software) to wrench out the needed results and information in no way prepared me for the managing of people to establish and accomplished corporate goals.

What is Leadership?

Like me, many leaders find themselves in a position of leadership with little or no preparation for the people-related aspects of the job. "Many who are charged with the responsibility of leadership are not called or equipped for this task."¹ Leadership positions are conferred for a number of reasons: A reward for exceptional individual work, part of normal advancement in a job, or simply because a person is the only one available to fill a vacancy. However, these reasons and hundreds of others like them do not in themselves indicate that a person knows what to do as a leader, or even what leadership really means.

Maxwell summarizes leadership into a single word: Influence. "[L]eadership is influence. That's it. Nothing more, nothing less."² McLean and Weitzel define leadership as "[a] person involved in a process of influencing and developing a group of people...."³ Since influence is essential to effective leadership how does a leader achieve such influence?

After establishing the correlation between leadership and influence, Maxwell details a number of principles and characteristics of good leaders and their leadership. Included in that list is what he calls "The Law of Connectivity."⁴ In explaining this concept Maxwell states, "You can't move people to action unless you first move them with emotion. The heart comes before the head."⁵ Thus, effective influence requires that the leader establish a connection with

¹ Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999): 129.

² John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993): 1.

³ J. W. McLean and William Weitzel, *Leadership: Magic, Myth or Method* (n.p., n.d.), quoted in Macchia, 120.

⁴ John C. Maxwell, *The Twenty-One Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998): 99-108.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

the heart of each of those he is to lead. Relationship, a word etymologically rooted in the idea of connection,⁶ is the word more commonly used today to express this concept.

Ideally people should follow their leader regardless of the type of person he is or the nature of – or lack of – the relationship between them. In reality, however, this is seldom the case. A follower naturally has feelings spawned by the relationship with his leader, and the average person is often not willing or able to act independently of those feelings. Therefore, the effective leader must establish and maintain a relationship with those he leads, and especially with those he oversees directly.

Project Focus Group

There are a number of roles I currently hold which involve leadership. The most obvious and the highest priority is my own family, which I am commanded to “manage.”⁷ Job responsibilities at Baptist Publishing House (BPH) include oversight of seven other staff members who, along with myself, compose the Customer Service Division (CSD). Four of these staff members are directly answerable to me and they comprise our Customer Service Team (CST). Additionally, I have various church responsibilities that include teaching a Young Adult Sunday School class and oversight of the developing *Evangelism Explosion* program. While the materials covered in this study will foreseeably be applicable to all areas of leadership, this project will specifically focus on the four CST staff members at BPH.

Project Purpose

It is the purpose of this project to consider the plausibility of improving my leadership of the Customer Service Team by nurturing individual relationships with its members.

⁶ Robert. K. Barnhart, The Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology (NY: HarperCollins, 1995): 649.

RELATING INDIVIDUALLY

A motivation for following must precede a person's act of following. In few instances the subordinate may be motivated by a respect for the position the leader holds, regardless of the man himself. This view is expressed in a number of Biblical passages,⁸ but is sadly missing in the hearts of many followers today. However, the fact that his followers are commanded to follow him due to position alone does not excuse the leader from attempting to identify and incorporate a more productive means of motivating them.

Some situations (e.g., military, employment) allow the leaders some amount of leveraged motivation. This is where the leader "strong-arms" desired behavior from his subordinates by constant threats of negative repercussions (e.g., pulling KP, fewer working hours, loss of bonus or commission). Human nature usually resents this type of motivation, and the leader may find mutinous attitudes and actions among those he leads in this manner alone.

An alternate approach is available that when properly utilized can inspire followers with an internal desire for cooperation. That method is based upon building relationships. Eims considers these relationships to be an essential element in proper leadership. "Effective leadership occurs when those served feel loved, admired, appreciated, and accepted by the leader. When these relational dynamics are absent from the group, the leader and the leadership process suffers. Unless the leader takes time to invest in the people, there will be no true leadership."⁹

How the leader approaches the relationship is very important. In a sense, all relationships are evaluated on a one-on-one basis. Even the soldier's concept of his commander is based upon

⁷ Holy Bible, New American Standard (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1977): I Tim. 3:4.

⁸ See Rom. 13; Tit. 3:1; Eph. 5:22; 6:1, 5.

⁹ Macchia, 121.

how the commander makes him feel individually, even though the commander only addresses him as part of the larger squad. It is therefore essential that a leader make contact with his followers individually. "A key to connecting with others is recognizing that even in a group, you have to relate to people as individuals."¹⁰

The Need

Accepting Maxwell's premises that leadership and influence are inseparable, and that influence is most effective when exercised through a relationship (connection) with one's followers, the next task is to identify what will best establish and maintain that relationship with each follower? Obviously what makes a good relationship with one person may be an indifferent or negative element in the relationship with others. Thus a large degree of variance must be allowed when establishing relationships with one's followers.

The idea of relating to different people in different ways is disturbing for some leaders. It seems "unfair." Yet, treating everyone identically can not be considered as "fair" either. For example, the idea of spending lunch hunched over a chessboard across from one's boss might be a pleasure to some. However, other employees would not enjoy chess itself, and many would not feel at ease with such prolonged one-on-one attention with their boss.

Siting 1 Thessalonians 5:14 Eims concludes, "The scriptures clearly teach that we must deal with people according to their individual characteristics."¹¹ Certainly Christ's example in His dealing with the twelve disciples show that He didn't treat all followers identically. "The leadership of our Lord focused on individuals."¹²

¹⁰ Maxwell, Twenty-One, 103.

¹¹ Leroy Eims, Be the Leader You Were Meant to Be (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1975): 43.

¹² Kenneth O. Gangel, Team Leadership in Christian Ministry (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997): 72.

The Christian psychologist Kevin Leman also addresses this issue, but from a specific leadership role: Fathering daughters. “For men with multiple daughters, one of the most valuable slogans to learn is, ‘Love them differently.’ Become a student of your daughter, find out her individual bent, and raise her accordingly.”¹³ Certainly this need for adapting is equally applicable in all types of leadership.

Is it right to ask a leader to be so flexible? Is it not too much for the leader to know each of his followers and treat him according to his individual traits? Engstrom finds no fault with expecting such flexibility. “[S]ome situations demand one style of leaders, while others demand a different one. . . . Since organizations have difficulty continually changing their leaders, it follows that those leaders will need *different styles at different times*. The appropriate style depends a great deal on the *task of the organization*, the *phase of life of the organization*, and the *needs of the moment*.”¹⁴ Maxwell agrees that relating is the responsibility of the leader. “[S]uccessful leaders who obey the Law of Connection are always initiators. They take the first step with others and then make the effort to continue building relationships. . . . A leader has to do it, no matter how many obstacles there might be.”¹⁵

The Obstacles

There are a number of obstacles to establishing and maintaining such relationships. The wise leader will note these potential difficulties and endeavor to avoid them.

Insensitivity. Sadly, many leaders see their followers as no more unique than a drawer full of wrenches. Many of those that endeavor to interject a more “human” element in dealing with followers simply do so out of a programmed mode – because someone said that it is the way

¹³ Kevin Leman, What a Difference a Daddy Makes (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000): 134.

¹⁴ Ted W. Engstrom, The Making of a Christian Leader (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976): 78.

¹⁵ Maxwell, Twenty-One, 104.

to get more done. Few leaders exercise the sensitivity to search out and know the hearts of those they lead. Eims finds the absence of such sensitivity unacceptable. “[A] necessary attitude of the leader toward others ...[is] a sensitive spirit.”¹⁶

It is amazing what people readily but unwittingly tell about themselves. Some leaders have simply become dull to what is easy to see. We walk into a subordinate's office and maybe notice the beautiful picture on her wall, but fail to even ask ourselves why she chose that particular picture. We notice the clutter in another's office and stand in amazement when he can instantly find any item in it that he desires, but then fail to wonder why he chooses the clutter instead of a clean desk. Being sensitive to our followers, their environment, and the implications that are discernable from them is essential to understanding them.

Perceived Distance. The follower's perception of distance from the leader is often another major obstacle. It is easy for a leader to give such an appearance, even without realizing he is doing so. "The effective leader is generally a person with a high level of personal accomplishment. He has learned ways to get things done, to achieve goals, to obtain results, and to maintain tight rein on his own time. Consequently, he frequently appears to subordinates and colleagues as a cold and calculating person who is quite unapproachable. Such an image immediately puts him at a disadvantage in developing satisfying relationships through interpersonal communications."¹⁷ The effective leader will be sensitive to this tendency and make sure there is no reason for his followers to question his availability.

Hocking lists six other factors that are often problems for leaders in building relationships with his followers.¹⁸ These will provide the remaining points in this section.

¹⁶ Eims, 43.

¹⁷ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Competent to Lead* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974): 103.

¹⁸ David Hocking, *The Seven Laws of Christian Leadership* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991): 283-292.

Busy. Leaders often find themselves in positions of leadership because they were good at getting their work done in spite of various distractions. Now as a leader there is more work to be done, tighter deadlines to be managed, and a host of other things that constantly demand attention. It is easy in such situations to get buried in the workload, oblivious to any need to build a relationship with subordinates. In fact, leaders can easily find themselves categorizing followers as one of the distractions they learned must be ignored in order to get the job done.

Too Many Demands on Himself. Leaders have a greater propensity to be perfectionist, often expecting a level of “rightness” that others may not easily achieve. Instead of giving time for others to learn the leader may add the full burden of these tasks to his already full workload.

Impatience. The leader, having forgotten the efforts he took to master a given task years ago, may fail to see that others need the time and the guidance to learn that task. The leader must also realize that many who serve under him will likely not be able to grasp things as fast as he does, so additional patience will be necessary in these cases.

Insecurity. A vast number of things can contribute to the insecurity of a leader: The talents and abilities of others; threats or cold shoulders from certain followers; and even his own desire to move to greener pastures. To deal with such insecurity one needs to simply “[d]etermine if your fears are real or not. If they are not, dispel them and trust your people.”¹⁹

Overly Sensitive to What Others Think. It is tempting for a leader to avoid making a decision when he is afraid of what others might think about him. But such cowardice causes one's followers to lose respect for him which, in turn, undermines his influence over them.

Fear of Close Relationships. A fearful leader may prefer to “. . . hold his people at a distance, never sharing or being open with them. Though his feelings may not be hurt because

¹⁹John C. Maxwell, Be a People Person (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1994): 150.

he won't allow anyone to get close to him, he will be hurt in other ways because no one will ever help him."²⁰ Not only does the leader suffer, so does his ministry and those people that he is to be leading.

As this extensive list proves, there are a number of obstacles that might hinder a leader from building relationships with his followers. But the effective leader must avoid and overcome the temptations to give up the effort.

The Means

How does a leader build relationships with his followers? Maxwell provides a list of nine steps entitled "How to Connect with People."²¹ The first seven will simply be mentioned along with collaborating quotes. The last two will be discussed in greater depth.

Connect with yourself. "Persons really in touch with themselves make the best leaders."²²

Share with openness and sincerity. "[M]aturity requires the Christian leader to be an open person who can share his feelings and struggles, his joys and his hurts in an honest way with other people."²³

Live your message. "Remember: We are teaching one thing or another all of the time, because we are constantly radiating what we are."²⁴

Give totally to the people and the message. "Spiritual leadership consists of a servant attitude patterned after the ministry-to-others demonstration of Jesus Himself."²⁵

²⁰ Ibid., 150.

²¹ John C. Maxwell, Leadership 2000 (n.p., n.d.): 43. Note that the steps were slightly rearranged for the purposes of this report.

²² Engstrom, 90.

²³ Kenneth O. Gangel, Feeding and Leading (Victor Books: Wheaton, 1989): 34.

²⁴ Stephen R. Covey, Principle-Centered Leadership (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1991): 126.

²⁵ Gangel, Feeding, 36.

Believe totally in the people and the message. “[A]cting on the assumption [that] others want and mean to do their best, as they see it, you can exert a powerful influence and bring out the best in them.”²⁶

Share how the message has touched you.

Offer direction and hope. “The vision is meant to be shared. That can only happen when it is clear and when it is available.”²⁷ “While getting to know your people, share your dream. It helps them to know you and where you’re going. There’s no act that will better show them your heart and your motivation.”²⁸

Know Your Audience. “[A] leader must be sensitive to the needs of the people and compassionate in his dealing with them. One thing he must do above all else: get to know them as individuals.”²⁹ “If all we know about the people we work with is wrapped up in the tasks they perform . . . , we do a disservice . . . to them as individuals.”³⁰

One means of getting to know one's followers is “walking slowly through the crowd.”³¹ As leaders we must stop the busy-ness for awhile, tune up our sensitivity, and slowly walk among our subordinates and through their areas. This includes their offices or other areas where they are allowed to put their own “thumbprint.” What do you find in these areas, and what does it say about the person and what motivates him? Are there family pictures? Are there signs of a particular interest or hobby? All of these are fodder for future casual discussions in which the leader has the opportunity to show a genuine interest in the things that are important to his follower.

²⁶ Covey, 122-123.

²⁷ George Barna, The Power of Vision (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992): 142.

²⁸ John C. Maxwell, Developing the Leaders Around You (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995): 93.

²⁹ Eims, 43.

³⁰ Macchia, 125.

³¹ Maxwell, Twenty-One, 107.

Evangelism Explosion teaches a similar approach of noticing and taking genuine interest in a person's life and interests during the introductory portion of an evangelistic visit. "We need to earn the right to ask personal questions. We can do this by becoming a friend, by getting to know the people, by listening to what they have to say, by showing interest, by hearing them when they talk."³² It is true that, unlike the evangelists, leaders may hold a position that will allow them to leverage cooperation, but leveraged cooperation is not the most effective in the long run. It takes an investment into a relationship before the leader earns willing cooperation.

The "slow walk" should not be limited to physical areas. The leader should take a "mental walk" through recent casual conversations noting the things that his people showed an interest in. These can be even more insightful than the personal objects mentioned earlier.

The mental slow walk may also be taken into areas of recent conflict. What has caused irritations and aggravations for this follower and, more importantly, why was this a problem? To be able to identify such underlying concerns will tell you volumes about the follower and what is important to him.

Macchia mentions another approach that he used to know his followers better and build relationships with them. He scheduled a monthly luncheon for his staff. He states, "So much can be accomplished relationally in building a team through such informal gathers."³³

Communicate on Their Level. "Communication could be defined as mutual understanding. The main problem in communication is the 'translation' problem: translating what we mean into what we say and translating what we say into what we mean."³⁴ This offers a particular challenge to the leader. The responsibilities of leadership often require a greater expertise of the knowledge and language within one's fields. Reporting to superiors may

³² D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion*, 4th ed. (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996): 56.

³³ Macchia, 115-116.

demand a more exacting level of proficiency and exactness in vocabulary and style. In the efforts to meet these demands leaders sometimes forget their own people do not understand such matters. In using such strict exactness they may appear to be condescending.

The leader must remember that successful communication is the ability to transfer his thoughts into the mind of another. He must determine what words and expression will best convey those thoughts to an individual follower. In some instances those words may not actually be the most exact way of expressing the thought. However, if the follower has no grasp of those technically correct expressions it is counter-productive to insist on using them. The speaker must therefore select words and expressions with which the hearer is familiar, even if it occasionally means breaking away from that which is technically correct.

How does one know what words his followers understand and the connotations they place with different expressions? Once again, relationship is the key. Specifically, it requires taking the time to converse with them and listen to them conversing with others.

APPLICATION

To this point this study has established that I am by nature a very technically minded person, and that this characteristic affords few natural relational skills. This study has shown, and personal experience has confirmed, that the absence of these skills in a leader hinders his ability to effectively influence those he oversees. From this study I better understand the need to nurture personal connections with my staff. I have also noted some of obstacles that have adversely affected the ability to build relationships and have also noted some specific activities that could be beneficial in nurturing such relationships. The following are specific tasks that may be pursued to help grow these connections.

³⁴ Covey, 138.

Sensitivity

The task of being sensitive is not a difficult one for me in itself. The problem has been that I have been blind to the need to direct that sensitivity towards my staff in order to better relate to them. As I discover what is important to them I can use those things as a means of showing my genuine interest in the things that interest them. This interest can be a major step in nurturing a personal relationship with each of them.

In an effort to being this process I took a few minutes after the staff had gone home to "slowly walk through" their work areas. In particular I looked for those things that would be insightful into the person's interests, with a view towards identifying topics which could be used to show my interest in the things that interest them.

Radonna. The décor of Radonna's office is fairly simple, and few "personal" touches have been added. There are a couple pictures – a niece and a nephew – which are displayed in a prominent location. These two children are an obviously a point of interest that is ideal for striking up a conversation with Radonna.

Sandy. Like Radonna, Sandy has pictures prominently displayed in her office, with very few other personal items. There are approximately a dozen framed pictures of both family and friend. As with Radonna, these could provide much fodder for occasional questions to show my interest in those things that are apparently important to Sandy.

Janie. There appears to be an emphasis on functionality in Janie's office area arrangement. This may indicate a personal determination to "get the job done." (Certainly experience confirms that observation.) There are a couple of small picture frames containing some family pictures, but these are tucked away as if to not interfere with the work that needs to be done. It seems that family may be a point of contact with Janie, but there may be a better

option. With such a personal drive to get the job done, the best topic for discovering Janie's heart is possibly her job itself.

Michael. A look around Michael's work area shows an intense interest certain aspects of computers. Since this is an area in which I am also interested it has been and will continue to be a common ground for casual conversation to build a relationship with Michael.

As I expand the "slow walk" beyond just the physical areas, I note that I have more in common with Michael than with the rest of my staff, which has some liabilities from a relational viewpoint. The biggest difficulty is that both of us are in some fashion technical people, and this makes it doubly hard to establish a personal relationship.

On the other hand, with a little sensitivity, the commonalties can be a means for special insight into him. Michael's current responsibilities are tasks that I used to do. This means that by recalling the way I felt about these responsibilities I possibly have some insight into what Michael feels about them. Occasionally sharing what I used to feel could foster openness in our relationship as well as offer him the opportunity to share some of his own feelings.

These are a few insights that occurred to me after taking just a few minutes to walk slowly through the world of my staff.

Availability

Another necessity ingredient in getting to know my staff individually is time. In the past I have been more than willing to discuss anything they wanted to take the initiative to bring up. Occasionally I might strike up a conversation with one of them while passing through the hall, provided that I felt there were no pressing projects.

I now see that such an infrequent, low-priority, low-initiative approach is not helpful in establishing relationships and may, in fact, be detrimental to it. It seems better to make a high

priority of these informal times of getting to know and share with my staff. Although informal chats may not be scheduled into a given time slot, allowance for such times must be factored into my workload. Experimenting will be necessary to determine the specific amount of time and the frequency that best meets the need to nurture these relationships.

The specific job demands for some of my staff make informal conversation difficult, especially in a group setting. For example, the responsibilities of three of the CST members prevent them from being a part of the morning devotional time. These few minutes together each day provide employees a chance to spend a little time with each other in an informal group setting. One option that would allow CST members such informal group time is a monthly CST lunch. While not as effective as the daily time together, this could provide a needed measure of personal time to build relationships as a group.

Communication

During the course of this study it has become apparent that my communication with my staff is due for an overhaul. Occasionally there have been times that I've used expressions and terminology that some may not have been familiar with. However, the bigger problem has been my cold, technical approach. For example, some correspondence (e.g., memos, emails) was written as if for a research paper or a technical report, with overtones which lacked a sense of warmth or relationship. Efforts will be made to convey a warmer, less sterile tone in these correspondences.

CONCLUSION

Research for this project is complete. Reporting on the findings and concepting their implementation is nearly over. The time to actually work on the relationships is now at hand.

In reflecting over this study it appears the whole message can be summed up in the word "love." To love another person is to do for him what I would want done if I were in his place. If the roles were reversed I would want a leader who had time for me and wanted to get to know and understand me – in short, to build a relationship with me. If I truly love my staff members I will make every reasonable effort to relate to them in that way.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barna, George. The Power of Vision. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992.
- Barnhart, Robert. K. The Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology. NY: HarperCollins, 1995.
- Covey, Stephen R. Principle-Centered Leadership. NY: Simon & Schuster, 1991.
- Eims, Leroy. Be the Leader You Were Meant to Be. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1975.
- Engstrom, Ted W. The Making of a Christian Leader. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- Gangel, Kenneth O. Team Leadership in Christian Ministry. Chicago: Moody Press, 1997.
- _____. Feeding and Leading. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989.
- _____. Competent to Lead. Chicago: Moody Press, 1974.
- Hocking, David. The Seven Laws of Christian Leadership. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991.
- Holy Bible, New American Standard. La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1977.
- J. W. McLean and William Weitzel. Leadership: Magic, Myth or Method. n.p., n.d. Quoted in Stephen A. Macchia, Becoming a Healthy Church, 120, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999.
- Kennedy, D. James. Evangelism Explosion. 4th ed. Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996.
- Leman, Kevin. What a Difference a Daddy Makes. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000.
- Macchia, Stephen A. Becoming a Healthy Church. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999.
- Maxwell, John C. Be a People Person. Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1994.
- _____. Developing the Leader Within You. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993.
- _____. Developing the Leaders Around You. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995.
- _____. Leadership 2000. n.p., n.d.

_____. The Twenty-One Irrefutable Laws of Leadership. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998.