

Leadership is Service – www.stevecorn.com

Leadership can be confusing. Unfortunately, the world has taught that leaders are commanders who get people to do what they want. The world says that it's about power, position, and control. Jesus, on the other hand, used a different model.

"Indeed, the one who was from the beginning with God and who was god revealed himself as a small, helpless child; as a refugee in Egypt; as an obedient adolescent and inconspicuous adult: as a penitent disciple of the Baptizer; as a preacher from Galilee, followed by some simple fishermen; as a man who ate with sinners and talked with strangers; as an outcast, a criminal, a threat to his people. He moved from power to powerlessness, from greatness to smallness, from success to failure, from strength to weakness, from glory to ignominy. The whole life of Jesus of Nazareth was a life in which all upward mobility was resisted...The divine way is indeed the downward way." (Henri Nouwen, *The Selfless Way of Christ: Downward Mobility and the Spiritual Life*, 2007, Orbis Books)

A small group leader guides the attitudes and perceptions of the group and is its primary influencer. Group members take their cues from the leader, and so it's important that he or she demonstrate the humble attitude of Jesus in this position.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." (Philippians 2:3-7)

All too often Christians attempt to climb the ladder as the world has trained them, gaining one position after another until they control a group, a church, or even a denomination. Conversely, Jesus actually stepped out of his position and gave up His power in order to show what true leadership is – it is service. He didn't "grasp" his power or position, but "made Himself nothing." I had a friend who said, "The greatest leader the world has ever known [Jesus] was also the greatest follower God has ever known. He was a servant to both – by serving his Father; he was called to serve the world."

In his book, *Be Last: Descending to Greatness*, Jeremy Kingsley makes the same case. After pointing out the humility found throughout the life of Jesus, (in His manger birth, in his adult life with drunks and prostitutes, in his triumphant entry on a donkey) he says, "He broke up a conversation among his disciples about who was the greatest, and he dropped a huge bombshell: the last shall be

first. The humble person is the greatest. Jesus had actually been showing us [how to be great] the whole time, from his birth all the way to this point.” As Jesus answered their question about greatness, he washed their feet. Now that’s service. That’s leadership.

Jesus taught the disciples the same principles that modern leadership experts are just now "discovering." Influenced by Robert Greenleaf in 1970, a “Servant Leadership” movement is growing in the secular leadership world today. Stephen Covey and Ken Blanchard are among its proponents. Why? Because it works. In spite of an opposing foundation of leadership theories, these scholars/students are arriving back at the same conclusions/principles that Jesus taught 2000 years ago. God's way. . . his design for leadership. . . servanthood works. While other authoritarian-type models work temporarily, the servant leadership model is the only one that is successful over the long haul. I find it interesting that through the study of leadership, Jesus’ 2000 year old teachings are being proven “right” by modern studies and methods.

Like Jesus, a good small group leader is first interested in serving his brothers/sisters. Out of his desire to serve, he is motivated to lead. He is a man/woman of character who has leadership skills, relationships with his followers, and a vision from God for the group (Andrew Seidel, *Charting a Bold Course*, 2003, Moody Publishers). He serves them and satisfies their deepest needs and greatest longings by leading them into deeper relationships with God.

To just be practical, let's recognize that a small group leader/servant's roles may include:

- Setting the tone and attitudes for the group
- Praying for each member
- Discovering specific needs of members and caring for them
- Confronting bad behaviors/Mediating bad relationships
- Teaching/facilitating discussion
- Setting up tables and chairs
- Making phone calls/sending cards/communicating with members
- Cooking food or simply being a good host – cleaning up after a meeting
- Ultimately, it is about expressing the love of Christ to group members

These are not the jobs that most Christians think of when they imagine themselves as a small group leader, but they are the kinds of things that Jesus modeled. A leader who follows Jesus' example puts others first and strives to "be last" whenever possible so that others can be honored (check out John 13). After serving his disciples, Jesus encouraged them to do the same. By seeking the ultimate best for his followers, a leader serves. That's really the whole thing: Jesus was a leader. Jesus served. Leaders serve. . . .Leaders serve.

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