

DISCIPLESHIP METHODS: COMMITMENT AND LOYALTY AS FIRST PRINCIPLES OF
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The study of leadership is a multidisciplinary field covering topics of style, traits, structure, behavior, and function. Whether concerned with the leader's values, character, or skill, leadership development should be a priority to organizations that expect to expand or survive in a 21st Century global marketplace. The making of a leader begins with the choice of a leader, and leadership is about relationship. Effectiveness in leadership must be measured in terms of the quality of the relationship. What are the unique characteristics of the *discipleship* methods used by Jesus Christ in establishing a worldwide organization – the church? Jesus's leadership development focused on commitment and loyalty rather than scholarship as minimum requirements for leadership. Lack of commitment is now a social illness that has implication for how relationships and thus leadership develops.

Leadership development programs have become important elements of corporate life, but a meta-analysis by Collins and Holton of eighty-three leadership development programs from 1982 to 2001 revealed “Overall, the effectiveness of managerial leadership development programs varied widely; some programs were tremendously effective, and others failed miserably”.¹ Acknowledged limitations of the study included a focus only on the business environment, small sample sizes, study design, and importantly, the relatively few empirical studies at that time available on new intervention methods. The report acknowledges that the lack of studies on leadership interventions is in itself an indication of the difficulty of understanding what it takes to make a leader.

Collins and Holton note that organizations have difficulty in reporting the results of a leadership program because the requirements for leadership are complex and overlapping. The report observes,

that a full range of leadership development experiences includes mentoring, job assignments, feedback systems, on-the-job experiences, developmental relationships, exposure to senior executives, leader-follower relationships, and formal training. While the variety of tasks and challenges encountered on the job are a major source of learning, the reality is that all jobs are not developmentally equal (McCauley & Brutus, 1998), nor can they be expressed in an objective manner, which makes evaluation more difficult.²

The obvious challenge presented by understanding the complexities of leadership is that a week, month, or even year of leadership training is not sufficient to prepare a leader for any eventuality presented in the leadership role. Task and knowledge based expertise can be easily measured, behaviors and personalities examined, and core principles evaluated, but these inputs and outputs of a leadership program do not clearly define a leader. The effectiveness of leadership should be measured by the most critical element – the strength of relationships as they apply to the leader. These include leader-leader relationships, leader-follower relationships, and leader – organizational relationships.

It is repetitious to mention the debate that has become the founding concern in all leadership studies. Are leaders born or made? Davis writes, “While there may be differing views on what makes a leader, there appears to be consensus in all schools of leadership about this one fact: Leadership is about relationship. Leadership does not exist without someone to lead and someone to follow.”³ Relationship development is fundamental to the understanding of leadership development.

¹ Doris B. Collins & Ellwood F. Holton III. “The Effectiveness of Managerial Leadership Development Programs: A Meta-analysis of Studies from 1982 to 2001”. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 15(2), (2004), p. 232.

² Ibid.

³ Hartwell Davis. “The Called, Chosen, and Faithful Leader”. *Education Resources Information Center*, ED506263. (2009)., p. 3

Interestingly both leaders and followers often share common characteristics in terms of expertise, personality, and skill. *What makes a leader does not a leader make.* No one knew this better than Jesus Christ who developed the most rigid and restrictive leadership program which he has since used to create a worldwide organization – the church. Jesus’ leadership program began with a calling, then one was chosen for discipleship, and then leadership could only be exercised in the realm of faithfulness. In terms of process, the Bible states, “For many are called, but few are chosen”⁴ and the end evaluation reads, “and they that are with him are called, chosen, and faithful”⁵.

Who can be a leader?

It is not difficult to discover leadership potential. We may not want to give any credibility to a gang leader’s ability, but it is there. If we were looking for examples of powerful leadership our sensitivities may reject Adolph Hitler, Osama bin Laden, or Mao Tse Tung, but they were leaders of influence among millions of followers. It is preferable to use examples of leaders like Steve Jobs of Apple, Bill Gates of Microsoft, or Jack Welch of General Electric, leaders in the world of business. Historical events have produced a long list of notables such as Lincoln, Patton, Churchill, Gandhi, Mandela, as leaders in world affairs. Every organization in order to exist must have a leadership structure.

But leadership is not limited to great men and to those that arise to positions of power, prestige, and notoriety. Leadership always begins with being called and chosen for the role and for the position of leadership. Leadership roles exist at multiple levels throughout organizations creating levels of leadership, levels of influence, and levels of power. Leaders are chosen from above or from below, by leaders or by followers. The criteria for the choice are usually established by the ones who are choosing a leader. It must be assumed that there are minimum requirements for leadership common to the definition of “leader”, rather than associated with level of leadership or power structure. With Jesus Christ the minimum for the lowest rung of leadership was the same for the highest level – and this was demonstrated in *the call to discipleship* that became a part of the “call to service” required of all that lead in the kingdom of God.

First principles – commitment

While leadership programs are for leaders in training or leaders who serve, a discussion of how leaders are chosen is appropriate in whether leadership development programs are effective. The difficulty in determining overall effectiveness in a leadership program is that it is hard to judge how far “the needle should move” in terms of measuring gains from a week, month, or even a year-long program. However, the intrinsic value of the program might be measured in the amount of time given to building the most important element of leadership –

⁴ Matthew 22:14

⁵ Revelation 17:14

relationship – into the most important form of relationship – *one with commitment*. If leaders have increased their commitment to the organization and to one another the program certainly has achieved one aspect of effectiveness.

In modern society commitment is at an all-time low as evidenced by the rate of divorce in marriage, instability in other relationships, the incessant desire to “chase the dollar”, or a culture of self-gratification. Colson and Larson noted a consensus among recent presidential candidates when asked about changes in young people going to college. They write, “All the candidates said that young adults today are far less willing to commit to anything”.⁶

Lack of commitment on the job was revealed in a 2008 study where “more than half of people ages 20 to 24 had been with their current employer for less than a year”.⁷ It is also reflected in the drop off in church attendance. Even more shocking are statistics revealed in an evangelism course by Wheeler from Liberty University who states, “The US population has increased by 11.4% in the last 10 years while the combined church membership has declined 9.5%”.⁸ Wheeler notes, “Over half of all churches in the U.S. do not add 1 new church member by conversion. Most add growth by transfers in from other churches.”⁹ Growth by transfer reflects a growing lack of commitment to local churches and is a sign of a new social illness that can be found in marriage, religion, and business.

Tenuous relationships have become the norm and predicated on self-interest measured in terms of “satisfaction”. Commitment and loyalty are becoming increasingly difficult to find as a part of relationship building, having been replaced by post-nuptial agreements in marriage or temporary hiring practices in business. The message is clear – *this relationship depends on many factors, the least of which is commitment*.

The necessity of commitment in a relationship represents a core value in the leadership development program established by Jesus Christ and which is known as *discipleship*. The meaning of commitment as exemplified in discipleship is found in understanding a relationship where nurturing exist, where dependency is established, and where there are no divided loyalties. These have implications for creating strong leadership relationships as they are important elements of *commitment*.

The calling and vision of leadership

Davis posits that leadership is a result of a “calling”.¹⁰ The metaphor implies the development of a relationship between one which is called and that which calls. Davis writes,

⁶ Chuck Colson and Catherine Larson. "The Lost Art of Commitment." *Christianity Today* 54, no. 8 (2010): 49-49

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Davis Wheeler. “Introduction to Servant Evangelism”, Liberty University. Course taken January, 2010.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 6

There are two types of calling in the making of leaders. One is a special calling to a first in line leader. This first calling either comes from God or the calling comes from purpose, as related to human events. This is where the initial vision is received, the first inspiration, the beginning of a line of leadership. Examples of the first calling include Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, Mohammad, Ford, Edison, and the list goes on.¹¹

The second type of calling is exemplified by leaders such as Lincoln, Churchill, and Mandela who receive their vision from the event that marks their life and transforms their leadership into that which defines them. Often times this second calling does not signify the beginning of an organization or nation, but may signify the beginning of a vision intended for mankind. Lincoln's vision of freedom from slavery, Churchill's vision for world peace, and Mandela's vision of the eradication of apartheid are not without significance.

The importance of vision as "the calling" is that it defines the purpose of the leader, the purpose of the call, and the purpose of the organization being led. The call creates a relationship, a bond, between the call and the one called. All other relationships are judged in relationship to the share of vision for which they become responsible. The vision of Jesus Christ was a worldwide church that would exist for eternity, that would represent the kingdom of God in the earth until the end of human history, and that would have a primary mission that was summarized in what has become known as *The Great Commission*, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you".¹²

It does not matter whether a leader is a *first in line* leader with a vision for a product, service, or organization, or one that receives a vision from human events, leaders must develop followers based on the vision that the leaders possess. In order for leadership to be developed in an organization, all leadership must become subject to the vision of the one that makes the call. The vision must then be considered the *root cause* of all leadership functions throughout an organization. Otherwise what exist is competing visions representing a "house divided" that cannot stand.¹³

Leadership development for the church is a process that operates in the framework of discipleship mandated by the final words of Jesus Christ before ascending into heaven. Huizing observes "Discipleship, then, appears to be the primary initiative not only in increasing the number of followers of Jesus but also in the development of Christ-following leaders".¹⁴ The relationship between a leader candidate and the vision must first be determined before entering a school of leadership. If leadership initiatives seem to yield weak results, it requires an

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Matthew 28:19-20.

¹³ Matthew 12:25

¹⁴ Russell L. Huizing, "Leaders from disciples: the church's contribution to leadership development," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35, no. 4 (2011).

examination of vision alignment, including the commitment elicited from what are core principles associated with the vision.

Discipleship – a test of commitment

The Greek word *mathetas* which is translated *disciple* is frequently used in the New Testament for followers of John the Baptist and followers of Jesus Christ. The meaning of the noun, disciple, is “one who is a pupil; a learner”. The root word *manthano* means “to learn” but conceptually it has been used for one who is an understudy or apprentice. Herrick expounds on the term noting that culturally, the term goes beyond that of being a mere student. Herrick writes, “The Sophists also used the term to refer to an ‘institutional pupil’”.¹⁵ However the mere meaning of the word “disciple” as a pupil does injustice to a concept that would now simply refer to one that goes to school. Discipleship in the Biblical context and as required by Jesus took precedence over all natural relationships requiring that one become fully committed both physically and spiritually to one teacher and one vision. The commitment brought with it the assumption of total dependence for all of one’s needs. Harder posits that the Christian education as represented by Jesus’ discipleship had three concepts, “Christian nurture, Christian instruction, and Christian experience”.¹⁶

Commitment is part of the process of receiving nurture from relationships, typically from familial relationships. It is the normal source of dependency and in most cultures genders the strongest of emotional ties. Family relationships are the most common source of values, emotional support, and for the young, material support. Interestingly, more than any other relationship, Jesus focused on natural family relationships as the greatest barrier to becoming one of his disciples.

Jesus used difficult language stating, “If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”¹⁷ The Greek word *miseo*, translated “hate”, has been deemed “love less” by most scholars. In a context where love and marriage refers to becoming “one flesh”, Jesus uses terminology that indicates a separation from the natural family, being bound together instead in relationship to Jesus and the new family of disciples. When Jesus is confronted with the presence of his natural family, he quickly rejected all natural relationships. The Bible declares,

But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my

¹⁵ Greg Herrick. Understanding The Meaning of the Term Disciple”. From *Bible.org*, Series Page, Section 3B, In Greek Culture.

¹⁶ Leland Harder, "The concept of discipleship in Christian education," *Religious Education* 58, no. 4 (1963).

¹⁷ Luke 14:26, KJV.

mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.¹⁸

The significance of the change in relationship is the importance of the changing source of nurture from which a disciple must become totally dependent. What must be given up not only included family relationships, but a disciple must give up dependence on all worldly goods, looking to Jesus as the new source of nurture and fulfillment of all needs. Jesus states,

There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or land for my sake, and the gospels, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.¹⁹

In the process of discipleship Jesus reiterated such dependency when he instructed his disciples. The Bible records,

And he called *unto him* the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; And commanded them that they should take nothing for *their* journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in *their* purse: But *be* shod with sandals; and not put on two coats.²⁰

The requirements of discipleship were metaphorical in that such phrases as “take up your cross”, “hate not his father”, or “forsaking his own life” is metaphorical. Jesus did not intend for a disciple to divorce or leave his wife or abandon his children as the price of service. These would have been contrary to scripture and the Bible is replete with family instruction for Christians and Christian leaders, including the qualifications for elders and deacons.²¹ Jesus did not intend for such relationships to be sacrificed on the altar of neglect, but it was in recognizing that worldly relationships have a way of controlling the heart, that a change was required.

In order for leaders to grow in relationship they must find within an organization a source of nurturing and the expectation that dependency needs will be shared. Commitment is a matter of heart, not contract, and it is in this context that leadership should be exercised. An organization should be viewed as family where values of closeness, sharing, emotional ties, and support are a part of the cultural experience. Leaders in such organizations take on the roles of caretakers, providers, and protectors. It is no wonder that Paul could write, “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel”.²²

¹⁸ Matthew 12:48-50, KJV.

¹⁹ Mark 10:29-30.

²⁰ Mark 6:7-9

²¹ I Timothy 3

²² I Corinthians 4:15, KJV.

Discipleship – a test of loyalty

The test of discipleship meant that a leader must not have divided loyalties. The admonition listing the several things that were to be “hated” can be considered as a reasonable test against ethical dilemmas that will be faced in the life of a leader. Family, wealth, and self can create loyalties that can cloud judgment. The issue is who shall be served and if this includes favoritism, nepotism, or self-interest the decision making of a leader suffers.

This explains such scriptures where the natural family is seen as spiritual hindrances to a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus says,

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.²³

In the kingdom of God, family tradition and religious ties are among the strongest challenges for the truth seeker and the most common argument for rejecting more truth. Who has not heard, “my mother was Catholic and I will die a Catholic” or “my family is Baptist and no one can tell me differently”? These are natural statements of family loyalty but in the kingdom of God, family loyalty must always be second to the will of God. It is only by placing God first can a person “walk in the light”²⁴ either validating or finding what is true.

Just as Christians must often choose between family loyalties and serving God in a different way, leaders must often make decisions that are in the best interest of an organization but that are not in the interest of the organizational family. Leaders must ask the question, “whose needs are being met?”. The answer will be in where a leader’s loyalties lie.

Summary

Jesus’ discipleship method was designed to measure first principles for leadership, commitment and loyalty. Modern leadership programs do not have in place the strong restrictive measures exhibited in Biblical discipleship and developing tests for commitment and loyalty in our modern global society where mobility abounds would represent a challenge. First principles of commitment and loyalty should become constructs of any leadership development program.

²³ Matthew 10:34-39, KJV.

²⁴ I John 1:7, KJV.