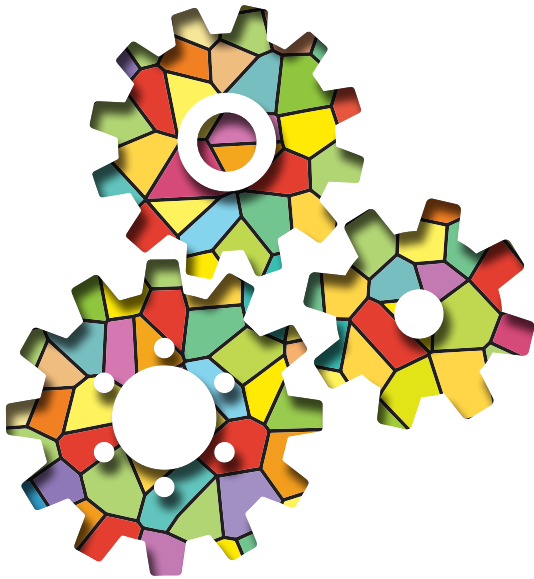

CHURCHWORK

How Leaders & Followers Work Together in the Church



RODNEY SHAW

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
LEADING FOLLOWERS	1
1. Follower-Centric Leadership	3
2. The Leader and Culture	11
3. The Atmosphere of Possibility	17
4. Because Their Feet Are Dirty: On Servitude	27
5. Whence Influence?	33
6. Working with Volunteers, Part 1	45
7. Working with Volunteers, Part 2	53
8. Dumping, Delegating, and Developing	61
9. I Once Was Blind, but Now I See: Cultivating Vision	71
10. Mission versus Vision and the Vision Spiral	79
FOLLOWING LEADERS	87
11. Followership Matters	89
12. The Dreadful Word	99
13. Toward an Understanding of Followership	105
14. The Power of Followership	113

15. Everything Rises and Falls on Followership	121
16. Follow with Purpose	127
17. Leading in the Wake	141
18. Don't Be That Guy!	149
19. Finding Purpose as a Follower-Leader	159
20. Answering the Call to Vocational Ministry	169
WORKING TOGETHER	179
21. Working Together	181
22. The Acts 6 Model of Ministry	193
23. Achieving the Vision Together	203
24. The Politics of Sharing	211
25. Serving Sideways	219
26. Who's on First?	223
27. The Missing Camel	233
28. Ten Principles of Managing Conflict	239
29. Compartments	251
30. Stay in Your Lane	259

Part 1

Leading Followers

The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.

*The last is to say thank you. In between the two,
the leader must become a servant and a debtor.*

That sums up the progress of an artful leader.

—MAX DE PREE

Followe-Centric Leadership

Churchwork: The Glorious Mess

Churchwork is different. Churchwork may be the only enterprise where the investors are the owners are the customers are the employees are the product. Unlike manufacturing, we do not load a machine with the same materials each day and get the same widgets out the back. While there is much to be said

for processes and systems, they do not guarantee disciples are made. Every human being is different, has different needs, and responds differently to our efforts. Human beings are as mysterious, wonderful, and frustrating as anything in creation.

In churchwork the product is never completed. The widget never falls out the back. Our products are in ongoing development. Success is not determined in a moment or by an event. We are on an ongoing journey of spiritual formation, and so are those we lead. We go from faith to faith, from glory to glory. We grow here a little, there a little. We understand line upon line, precept upon precept. Not only so, but lifelong progress can be lost in a moment. To complicate matters, there is a relentless, invisible enemy who has made it his business to undo our progress. While we cultivate, plant, and water, he sows weeds in our fields.

This all is skinned with the cultural trappings of ministry: technology, ministry methods, and worship styles, things about which people have strongly held opinions. *This is churchwork.* Perhaps the most sobering component of churchwork is the reality that the consequences of our work are eternal.

And yet, this is the challenge church leaders gladly and willingly embrace each day. Church leaders grab hold of followers with a tenacious love and boldly embrace the uncertainty, often with little more than a vision and faith in God. Among all the voices and distractions, church leaders declare *there is hope in God!* Church leaders connect people to purpose. Church leaders remind followers their work matters. Church leaders point to the future. Church leaders lend a helping hand. Church leaders pour out themselves each and every week in hopes people will be blessed and empowered to walk this journey of faith. Church

leaders keep on saying, “We can do this!” And they believe it. While the circumstances and challenges of churchwork may be unique, the results bring the deepest joy.

Church leaders invite people on a shared journey of discipleship, a journey that requires change, sacrifice, and hard work. It also is a journey filled with great joy and fulfillment. At times we labor to convince people the Christian journey is the best journey, even when they must deny themselves and take up crosses. Former first lady Rosalynn Carter is credited with saying, “A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don’t necessarily want to go, but ought to be.” Referring to Moses, one of my Bible college instructors, Kelsey Griffin, had his version of the idea: “Leaders take people where they don’t want to go and make them glad they went.”

The Ministry of Leadership

Leadership is ministry. By placing the word *ministry* alongside the word *leadership*, the meaning of leadership is fundamentally altered. If leadership is viewed as ministry (service), the focus shifts from the leader to those being led. Romans 12:6–8 lists leadership as a gift from God. Those who have such gifting have it as a trust from God for the benefit of others. This is demonstrated in Ephesians 4 where the purpose of the ministerial office gifts is declared to be “for the equipping of the saints” (verse 12). Those who possess the gift of leadership have been placed in the body of Christ to benefit others. It is a life of selfless service to others. Not only do leaders bear a disproportionate responsibility concerning the reception, communication, and fulfillment of the vision, leaders engaged in churchwork take on the yoke of servitude and live devoted to the advancement

of others. Leaders offer their gifting to the body of Christ in an effort to help others fulfill their gifting. Leadership, therefore, is a tremendous privilege that comes with tremendous responsibility and a commitment to servitude.

Those inclined to lead should periodically reflect on their motives. What motivates you toward leadership? Are you gifted as a leader? In practical terms, what can you accomplish as a leader that you cannot accomplish otherwise? Can you lead without filling a position? Is the growth and well-being of others at the heart of your aspirations? It is easy to view leadership as a means to success and lose sight of the true responsibilities of Christian leadership.

It is good to aspire to leadership. “If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work” (I Timothy 3:1). However, what follows this are the stringent, proportionate requirements and responsibilities for those who do so (verses 2–13). The writer of Hebrews made an applicable statement with reference to the Old Testament priesthood: “No man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God” (Hebrews 5:4). And while most are not bishops, the point remains: leadership carries enormous responsibilities. This is why the New Testament cautions against entering leadership hastily.

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. (James 3:1, NIV)

Do not lay hands on anyone [in ordination] hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.
(I Timothy 5:22)

A spiritual leader should not be “a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.” (I Timothy 3:6)

Leaders will give an account to God for those they lead: “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account.” (Hebrews 13:17, NIV)

Instead of aspiring to positions of leadership, Christians should aspire to faithfulness wherever they are and with whatever responsibilities they have. Faithfulness is the primary aim of a Christian. As we prove to be faithful, God will entrust us with other opportunities. If God chooses a leadership role for us, we will be ready if we have been faithful; and if we are in a leadership role, faithfulness is the key to successfully fulfilling our calling. We ultimately will be judged by our faithfulness.

Most people want to make a meaningful contribution in life and to the institutions they love. Even so, leadership should be viewed as a trust from God, a responsibility to which one is yoked. And while leading can be rewarding, it is not a way to affirm oneself or a way to

keep score or to demonstrate one’s success. Leadership is not a destination; it is a responsibility. Jesus’ teaching on stewardship indicates we will be judged according to the opportunities God has given to us. “For everyone to whom much is given, from him

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much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48). The weight of leadership is enormous. It is not a responsibility to be taken casually.

Aspiring to leadership as a means to self-promotion is contrary to the *ministry of leadership*. Christ’s disciples seem to have been preoccupied with the question of which of them would be the leader. It appears that on several occasions “a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest” (Luke 9:46; cf. Matthew 18:1; Mark 9:34; Luke 22:24). Several years later John wrote a letter that contains an interesting statement about one of the trouble causers in the church, Diotrephes. This man had the same problem as the disciples. John described him as one “who loves to be first” (III John 9, NIV). When leadership ceases to be ministry (service) and becomes a pathway to success, it ceases to be biblical leadership.

Follower-Centric Leadership

Leadership matters because followers matter. Leadership is about followers. Period. And while vision is important, a leader’s vision is secondary to the wellness and progress of his followers. Followers do not exist because leaders need help fulfilling their vision. Leaders exist because followers need guidance as they fulfill their God-ordained destiny. Followers are the priority in churchwork, leaders support followers, and vision is merely a utility that helps both move forward. Followers are not a resource to support a vision; vision is a resource that supports followers.

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Leadership can easily drift toward a vision-centric model where followers are viewed as a resource to fulfill the vision. Vision-centric leadership subordinates followers to vision. In such a model, followers are valued to the extent they further the vision. Churchwork is a people business; therefore, the vision—whatever it is we hope to achieve on an organizational level—is in service to one's followers in helping them fulfill their God-given purpose.

In churchwork leaders are confronted with the reality of the follower. Although leaders are guarantors of the church's purpose, this purpose inevitably involves the growth, development, and well-being of followers. The purpose of churchwork is to make disciples. Accordingly, the fulfillment of a Christian leader's responsibilities is only achieved through successfully enlisting and developing followers. Christian leadership is an effort in recruitment and development, not merely organizational architecture or organizational success. In churchwork there is no such thing as organizational progress at the expense of or absent from individual progress. Individual followers are the constituent parts that collectively comprise organizational success. This is follower-centric leadership.

This does not mean that Christian leaders do not have work to accomplish or that organizational structure, strategic planning, and institutional progress are unimportant. These things are vitally important; however, all these things should be for the benefit of followers and should not merely constitute organizational overhead to be maintained by the followers. In churchwork followers come before organizational vision. Followers are the reason there are leaders. Followers are the reason there is vision. Consequently, both leaders and vision are in service to followers, not vice versa. Organization has no inherent

value outside of its utility to support followers. This is follower-centric leadership.

In Whose Image?

The deepest joy for a leader is watching followers grow into their God-ordained potential. This individual growth is one of the primary indicators of organizational success. Systems and structure can take on a life all their own, but the ultimate gauge of their value is their impact on the lives of individuals. Paul demonstrated this care for the Galatians when he wrote, “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (4:19). His labor and the structure of the churches he planted were ultimately for the welfare of the individual believer.

And while leaders often mentor people who emulate the leader’s ways, mannerisms, and ways of doing things, a leader’s task is not to reproduce himself in others. Follower-centric leadership is more concerned about Christ being formed in a follower and cultivating the follower’s God-given gifts. The success of our followers is the ultimate gauge of our own success as leaders, and their success is measured by their conformance to the image of Christ and the extent to which they fulfill their God-ordained purpose. This is follower-centric leadership.

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