

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Why Is It Important?

Someone once said, “*Those closest to the leader will determine the success level of that leader,*” (Maxwell, 1995) and I would add, “and the organization.” Ultimately success hinges on the ability of the leader or leaders to develop a team that will work together to accomplish the mission of the organization.

Leadership development is indispensable for a successful church. We see numerous examples of leadership development throughout the Bible; from Nehemiah and his dream to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem to Jesus’ intentional team building with his core group, the twelve disciples.

Why is leadership development so important? Because working as a team is the key to multiplied effectiveness. Remember the old Chinese proverb, “Many hands make light work?” I find that to be true, don’t you? The yard work gets done much quicker when my daughters are helping. We have all benefited from the value of teamwork.

What is a team? Webster defines it as “a cooperative unit.” I expand the definition to include, “A team is a group of people with often different, yet complementary abilities and talents, who are committed to the same mission or vision.” Have you ever watched rowing? About the only time I do is during the Olympics. There’s a real beauty to the slender boats on the water, the perfect cadence of the athletes. It’s a sport that demands endurance, strength, and the drive to keep going even when your body screams to stop. But what’s really fascinating is the teamwork. The crew, made up of individuals willing to sacrifice personal goals for the team, will be on the medal stand together. Winning teammates successfully match their desire, talent and blade work with one another.

How to Raise the Importance?

So, how does the leader move his followers toward the importance of team development? I remember hearing a story about Walt Disney’s early days, before he created what today is the Disney Empire. Walt Disney would take his two daughters to a park on Sundays. The park had a carousel which the girls loved to ride. As he waited for the ride to be over, Walt says, he noticed two things: One, the horses looked beautiful at a distance, but up close they were covered with chipped paint. Secondly, the horses on

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the outside went up and down, but the inside ones did not. From this, he literally conceived Disneyland and what it would look like, summing it up in one sentence, “No chipped paint, all horses jump.” A leader like Walt Disney must have the ability to see the possibilities before they become obvious. This is a foundational component of leadership. Leadership development requires vision.

One day I finally realized that leadership development was not going to happen on its own and that it would only happen if it became a priority to me, the pastor, the point leader of the church. I would have to have a vision for it and be able to communicate that vision with others passionately and effectively.

This is why leadership development rarely happens in a church. The pastor and others in leadership positions are driven by immediate needs and never seem to have the time to put into it. There is always the next sermon to prepare, hospital visits to make, Bible studies to give, phone calls to return, counsel to give, conflicts to resolve, etc. Leadership in local churches may not have learned to effectively communicate the vision God has placed in their hearts with those they lead.

I am still in the process of learning how to best communicate the value of leadership development with others. I have found one of the best ways is to ask questions. A question I ask my leaders to wrestle with is simply “Is leadership development important?” If they have any background with the game of football, I use the following illustration. I ask them what the game might look like if just the coach or quarterback lined up against the other team’s eleven players. Not a pretty sight! The leader will never be able to succeed if he goes at it alone. This illustration leaves a clear picture in the minds of those I lead. From there, I tell them this is why I have decided that developing leaders must be a priority

How to Develop Leaders

How does it happen? How does a leader begin to develop other leaders in his or her organization? The first thing any good leader does is learn to detect leadership potential in others. Think about it. When was the first time someone noticed something in you that led them to believe you could be more than you were? How did they do this? How did they extend the invitation? Learn from others methods to assess potential leaders.

Second, it is important to invest in them! What do I mean by invest? Spend time with them. When someone invests in us, we start to develop. Investing includes things like taking time to teach them, nurture them, confront them, motivate them, and inspire them.

Every person needs a model. I think back to an early model of mine. I remember watching his unflappable nature, how he never seemed to get angry, especially in confrontations. That amazed me! It is something that has stuck with me for a long time. Even today, I think of those experiences and the value of maintaining my cool every time I get in a volatile situation.

Every person also needs a mentor, someone who will take the time to teach and explain. I remember one of my mentors teaching me the value of listening to people, really listening, and then responding. He also taught me the importance of honoring those who poured time, energy, and resources into our development.

Leadership development is a process. It must be tailored to meet the organization and its unique mission and goals to be successful. As the leader, I must plan for leadership development.

In my church, the first step of planning was to examine what was currently in place. That meant measuring what was happening. Here are some questions we asked:

Does the church currently have an organized plan for developing people?

What are the benefits the church would receive from having an effective leadership development program?

What are and have been the effects of not having one?

How much time, energy, and money are we willing to invest to develop one?

After deciding to make leadership development an intentional goal for our organization, the next step was to begin identifying characteristics of people we wanted to develop. Jim Collins talks about the importance of having the right people “on the bus.” Here’s what he says:

First, you begin with ‘who,’ rather than ‘what,’ you can more easily adapt to a changing world. If people join the bus primarily because where it is going, what happens if you get ten miles down the road and you need to change direction? Second, if you have the right people on the bus, the problem of how to motivate them goes away. Third, if you have the wrong people it doesn’t matter...you still won’t have a great company. Great vision without great people is irrelevant. (Collins 2001)

In other words, the people you surround yourself with determine the success of the organization. Having the right people involved in leadership development and leadership positions will affect the direction of the organization and ability to create a culture of growth and development. Every organization has a unique culture. A leader must understand that culture before being able to effectively integrate leadership development into that culture.

Once you have created a plan of how you want to develop your leaders and what “success” looks like, you must start implementing the program. Start small, with one or two people. This will allow you to work out the bugs inconspicuously. There are different ways to begin the program but specific leadership training events and mentoring are the two I use most. The training events include:

- learning how to communicate effectively
- learning conflict resolution skills
- team building exercises
- relating to different personality styles
- time management
- the importance of a good attitude

Training events are no match for the importance of coaching or mentoring. All of the top professional and Olympic athletes recognize the importance of a personal coach to help them reach peak performance. The same holds true when it comes to training church leaders.

Jim Loehr reminds us that the development of others requires that we focus on their whole life, not just their “work” life. We must help each person understand that their growth and development must be experienced in every area of life. Look at what Loehr says:

Full engagement requires drawing on four separate but related sources of energy: Physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. If growth and development take place from the bottom up--from physical to emotional to mental to spiritual--change is powered from the top down. (Loehr 2003)

That means that the team cannot be fully committed or focused unless all four areas of their life are aligned to a purpose that really matters.

A mentor or coach provides other leaders with the one-on-one attention needed to help take them to the next level quickly. Many leaders have some natural tendencies: they train others how they were trained, they try to motivate others according to how they are motivated, and they tend to miss-direct their energies. It is important to have a plan all can follow so that the organization moves ahead on the same page.

At some point it will be important to promote leadership development. The best time to roll it out may be after refining it as you work with a few leaders. Have those that have been involved share publicly a success story. If others can share their excitement and tell of their experience and success, they can build momentum to the program and add others willing to grow. Be careful to point out that the goal is to do our best. Use your leaders to coach others and consider bringing in an outside person to help your leaders coach others more effectively.

Questions for Potential Leaders

When I arrived at my church, I went to the leaders and introduced the idea of leadership development. Here are some of the questions I asked in our meeting, followed by my answer to the original question (after they had a chance to respond):

Question #1 – “Is leadership development necessary in a church?”

Answer – Romans 12:8 says that if you are in a position of leadership that you ought to do your best to lead diligently. It is each person’s responsibility to faithfully steward this gift.

On a personal note, for years I thought shepherding and teaching were most important to the growth of the church. About ten years ago I began to realize I needed to grow my leadership and that leadership and leadership development were the keys to maximizing the influence of our organization.

Question #2 – “When did you realize the importance of leadership development and what did you do to grow in the area of leadership?”

Answer – Almost all had never intentionally attempted to develop their leadership.

I shared with them that the formal education I received did not address this need very well. Most of it had come informally from a model, a mentor, or from other leaders who poured their life into me and provided opportunities. I also surrounded myself with other leaders, not teachers, but leaders, those who were leading something. Finally, self development through reading all I could on the subject of leadership, attending workshops and training events on leadership and leadership development, and by leading and developing others myself—all these contributed to an informal process of my own leadership development.

Question #3 – “Why isn’t more leadership development happening in churches today?”

Answer – One, many do not see the need or importance. Two, the urgent demands cause leaders to be reactive instead proactive, consequently leadership development falls by the wayside.

Question #4 – “Can anyone lead? How do you identify those with leadership potential? Do we want to allow anyone to lead?”

Answer – No, they must have the right attitude, they must have energy, intelligence, people skills, character, influence, communication skills, etc.

These are the things I look for in potential leaders. As a pastor, I am constantly on the lookout for potential leaders. I believe the more leaders in an organization, the more successful it will be. But, above all, I value attitude. To me, attitude is more important than ability.

Question #5 – “How do you look for someone to mentor?”

Answer – I look for three things: character, attitude, and capacity.

How do I discover this? I want them around me so I can see if they have the character, attitude, and capacity; things like people skills and the intelligence needed. Next, I give them something to do. This initial test gives me a pretty good sense if I can continue pouring time and energy in this person as a leader.

In looking for leaders, beware of character flaws. Some examples of what to look for include truth telling, energy, bias for action, etc.

Who has influence over others? Who impacts the room? Leaders persuade and influence others. I try to assess their bandwidth, the wider the better. What do I mean by bandwidth? Bandwidth is the ability to influence and lead different groups of people. Some people have people skills along a certain bandwidth only (i.e., people of the same age, same economic level, same culture, etc.).

Question #6 – “Where and how do you mentor?”

Answer – My practice is most often informal. I try to use time wisely, such as in the car while taking them with me on a visit.

Mentoring is not only about time, but energy. We usually undervalue the importance of our physical, emotional, and relational health. Each person has a well of emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual energy. I ask, “How deep is that well? What is keeping you from where you want to be, from your desired destination?” We often minimize the importance of renewal.

Great leadership mobilizes, focuses, and renews energy. Renewal is so important! We must manage energy not time. Growth in your life will follow whatever you give your energy to. Time is a tool. Where do you invest your time? Energy? In the past, you worked until dark, then you read by candlelight, or spent time with the family. Today, you have email, faxes, Blackberry’s, that keep us working. We give life to whatever we give our energy to. Are you taking care of you? Physically? Emotionally? Mentally? Spiritually? What are you watering. I can’t give what I don’t have. (Groppel 1999)

Question #7 – “Have you ever made a mistake in choosing a potential leader to develop and how did you handle it?”

Answer – Two things I have learned is you have to “right size” the challenges you give others by giving escalating responsibilities. You have to evaluate capacity. Secondly, you have to be willing to make the tough call. I had someone once ask me, “Tell me one thing I did wrong.” They didn’t understand they did not have the capacity to go where we needed to go. This is gut check time. You will either pay the price now or later. Again this highlights the importance of having the right people on the bus.

Question #8 – “What if leadership is not my gift?”

Answer - Do all you can to intentionally grow your leadership ability, read all you can about leadership, surround yourself with other leaders, steward the gifts you have, practice leading and developing.

The reality is that if you lead, certain leadership functions must happen: problem solving, vision casting, being a change agent, team building and development, inspiration and motivation, strategic planning. The question is, “Will those things happen better if there is a team in place to assist you?”

Question #9 – “On a scale of one to ten, where are you in your leadership?”

Answer – No matter the answer (since no one is at a ten) to this last question, I follow, “What are you doing to close the gap? What are you doing to develop it?”

Then, we ask each person selected to answer the following self assessment questions. We chose questions in areas of primary importance to us.

Thankfulness. How often do you express thankfulness to God and others? How?

Gentleness. Are you prone to angry bursts? Are you open to criticism, or do you get defensive when you are corrected or rebuked? Do you have a teachable spirit?

Spiritual intimacy. Is it your routine to spend time alone with God in prayer and study? Do you hunger to be more Christ-like and take your spiritual growth seriously?

Boldness. Are you able to take risks for God? To move outside of your comfort zone?

Compassion. Do you look for opportunities to help the less fortunate?

Trust. Is your life one of simple reliance on God? Or, do you worry and fret about the future?

Perseverance. Do you hang in there when things get tough? Or, do you give up easily?

Forgiveness. Is there someone in the church who has hurt you in the past? Do you still hold resentment, bitterness, or a grudge? Have you fully forgiven them?

Giving. Are you faithful in your giving of tithes and offerings to the local church? Do you show your trust in God to provide by giving Him the first fruits of your labor?

Balance. Do you control the amount of time at work or pleasure? Do you allow it to take away from time with your family?

Taking every opportunity to remind people of the goal, to teach and cast vision, to maintain values as a high priority are all key components of leadership development. This teaching needs to happen both formally and

informally, taking advantage of teachable moments whenever they arise. Noel Tichy says, “The winning leaders I have met all view teaching as one of their major jobs, and they spend a lot of time doing it.” (Tichy 1997)

Leaders that excel in leadership development have what Tichy calls “a teachable point of view.” Having a teachable point of view means having a clear idea and being able to communicate those ideas, values, and mission unmistakably to others. It is not enough to know what you would like to see happen: a leader must be able to make it clear, to teach it to others. I find the more people in the organization teaching or involved in developing others, the more effective the organization will be.

A big part of developing leaders is telling stories. Stories can shape attitudes and actions. When we know our stories and effectively communicate them, it allows those involved to know our heart, our passion, to know us. Stories create a connection with others by forming a bridge to our minds and lives, allowing others to feel they are an important and vital part of the team.

As I continue to lead, I am learning that I cannot be content apart from people. To be truly content I must continue to grow and to help those around me grow. It is the way to truly discover what life is all about.

A few years ago, the Olympic Committee decided to allow professional basketball players to participate in the Olympic Games. I remember the selection of what became known as “The Dream Team,” the United States Olympic basketball team. It had players such as Michael Jordan, Charles Barkley, Magic Johnson, and Larry Bird. It had to be the greatest team ever assembled. The question soon became not who was going to win but by how much. Even opposing players were in awe, asking for autographs before, during, and after the games. All coaches dream of having a dream team, a team of players that will lead their team, organization, or church to be unbelievably effective. The most effective teams are those intentionally developing their leaders.

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