

What Makes A Leader Effective?

Understanding True Leadership From a Biblical Perspective

“And when Jesus went into Capernaum, a centurion came up to him, begging him. And saying, Lord, my servant (boy) is lying at the house paralyzed and is distressed with intense pains. And Jesus said to him, I will come and restore him. But the centurion replied to him, Lord, I am not worthy or fit to have You come under my roof: but speak the word, and my servant (boy) will be cured. For I am also a man under authority, with soldiers subject to me, And I say to one, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes and to my slave Do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard him, he marveled, and said to those who followed Him, I tell you truly I have not found so much faith as this with anyone, even in Israel.”

-Matthew 5:8-10 (from the Amplified Bible)

The purpose of this essay is to illustrate an example of effective leadership using a text from the Bible as a backdrop. There are many passages that can be used to do so (the entire book of Nehemiah, for one), but this one, in particular, has always stood out in my mind as one of the purest examples of what it means to be a leader. The same ideas and concepts that applied then are still useful today, and can be found in use on virtually every level of management, in every conceivable environment, business or otherwise.

Introduction

The passage deals with an officer in the Roman army with the rank of Centurion, which translates to, in the original Greek, *hekatonstarchos*, or “a captain of one hundred men”, and finds its equivalent in the company commander of most modern-day armies. Thus his position was one of great responsibility, as the lives and well being of his men rested on his shoulders, and his alone. Of course, he was free to delegate certain tasks, but in the final analysis, liability for whatever took place within his sphere of accountability, for good or ill, would be laid at his doorstep.

The centurion seeks out Jesus, and finds Him as He enters a town called Capernaum, in the midst of His evangelistic travels, and knowing who He is, and that He possessed the power to heal the sick, requests that Jesus would heal His servant, who lies at home, desperately ill. Jesus, being who he was, responded immediately, expressing His desire to alleviate the plight of this man, who by ancient Jewish custom, was an *infidel*, an unbeliever, and yet had come to Him with a measure of faith and humility that even some of His own people had not possessed. The centurion’s reply is a strange one, and it is from it that we take the main focus of our discourse.

Emotional Intelligence and Effective Leadership

In showing concern for the health of his servant, the centurion showed himself to be a man who had compassion for those who worked under him. Granted, the passage depicts the employee as a *servant*, and some translations use the word “slave”, and yet, whether this was a highly- paid member of his organization, or a captive from some past battle, the centurion was possessed with a degree of empathy that was rare in his day. The ancient world was harsh and barbaric, and human life was cheap, yet this man, who was a commander over hundreds of soldiers, or in modern times, the manager over a large

department of a major business entity, was searching for a remedy for the predicament of a single employee, and a lowly one at that. Our lesson text, *Contemporary Management* tells us that, "Emotional intelligence also can help managers perform their important roles such as their interpersonal roles (figurehead, leader and liaison). Having a keen understanding of how your subordinates feel is central to developing strong interpersonal bonds with them. Moreover, emotional intelligence has the potential to contribute to effective leadership in multiple ways" (pg. 68 para.1). Seeing oneself in the place of those in one's employ enables one to treat them with kindness and concern, which in turn causes them to become loyal and effective workers.

Effective Leaders Understand Authority

A good manager understands that no matter what his position within what is known in the business world as the "managerial hierarchy", or in the military environment as the "chain of command", he must be accountable and answerable to another. It can truly be said of every great leader that he was first a follower. Some people can "dish it out", but they cannot "take it." Jesus commended the centurion because by his words, he demonstrated that he understood leadership. Instead of boasting about his having a high- ranking position in the Roman army, he first stated that he was a man *under* authority, then going on to say that he was in a position where he was not only one who gave orders and issued directives, but that when he did, they were instantly obeyed. In other words, what the centurion was, in effect, saying that "I am a man who has shown myself to be one who is subject to another, and that in turn, has made me fit to be placed over others." Again, one cannot be an effective leader until one has first learned how to follow. It is to the leader's benefit that he be conscientious concerning how he deals with

his superiors, especially in the presence of those whom he leads. The support that one gives is often the same kind of support that he or she receives. I myself, on my job, have sometimes chosen to perform relatively menial tasks that I could easily delegate, but I would like to first show those with whom I work that I would not ask them to do anything that I myself would not do.

Conclusion

Our lesson text, *Contemporary Management*, on pg. 448, paragraph 2, defines the type of power that is derived from the leader's ability to influence others based on his having earned his subordinates' respect, admiration, and loyalty, as *referent power*. This type of power is essential to effective leadership. It can be done without, but how well can an organization function with managers who can only lead others based on their desire to avoid punishment, or merely to obtain a paycheck? Workers will go above and beyond the call of duty when they feel that they have a leader who first cares about them and their well-being, and is one who is willing to be led, as well as to lead others. "Mark the blameless man and behold his steps..." the Bible tells us in Psalm 37: 37. In other words, look for the one who has the qualities of an effective leader. One who sets the example by first being a good follower, and who treats others as he or she would want to be treated.

References:

The Amplified Bible, Zondervan Publishing, 1987

Contemporary Management, Third Edition, Gareth R. Jones, Jennifer M. George

