

## LEADERSHIP AS INTERPERSONAL

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Leading takes place in the interpersonal circumstance and has the purpose of helping people grow in their social skills necessary for getting the job done. Leadership is gained and exercised by interpersonal means. In the church, leadership does not come by heredity, force, being “pushy,” or by shortcircuiting, “riding in on another person’s shirt tail,” or bypassing lesser roles through formal education. People do not become leaders because they refuse to be involved otherwise—the “won’t-work-so-let-lead” syndrome.

Leadership is both earned and given, but it needs to be earned to a significant degree before it is given in any degree. Those who would serve as leaders must possess the skills appropriate to the activity and the people involved in it. In the church that means knowing scripture, people, and how to get things done. But most importantly, would-be leaders in the church must evidence in their own person the moral qualities, social skills, wholesome practices, and domestic situation appropriate to the Christian endeavor they are trying to lead. Without that base for influence, the words, techniques, and programs they employ will not produce what Christ wants accomplished among his people (James 3:1). People earn leadership in Christ by first becoming the kinds of people Christ helps people become. The bottom line in the church is the quality of social life. Only people who possess it should—and will tend to—become leaders in the church. In fact, legitimate leadership in any area requires personal character as the basis for the rest of what is needed to be effective. Having everything else without that character base does not result in lasting, effective Christian service.

As a generalization, what accentuates positive personality tends to accrue personal influence, and influence is leadership. Influence is interpersonal as distinguished from authority, which is legal, and from force, which is based on natural. We speak here of matters beyond basic moral concerns—like initiative, positive attitude, enthusiasm, tenacity, dependability.

Receiving leadership refers to the response of other people to our actions. Our actions represent character, but charisma and ethos mean the impression we make on observers. Character is what we have; charisma is what people see in us. That tendency toward natural leadership may be formalized into positions. Formalizing positions is what scripture means by “calling.” Since calling comes from persons beyond us, receiving leadership formally as well as informally constitutes an interpersonal process.

The manner of exercising leadership corresponds with the manner of obtaining it. As it is earned then given, so it is by influence (natural leadership) before it is by responsibility reinforced by authority (formal leadership). All the qualities developed and used in gaining

leadership remain in force while exercising it. Leading by influence requires communication and demonstration.

Leadership that stifles persons must be avoided because it is not effective for what God wants. It is foreign to how people operate. Leadership is responsibility for the welfare of the group. Consequently, authoritarianism, economic duress, emotional manipulation, and the like, do not belong in the process.

In the exercise of leadership, personal persuasion must precede impersonal authority. Paul's letter to Philemon illustrates forbearing to use authority in deference to using influence so the recipient's response can come from free will instead of compulsion. Paul sought Onesimus' manumission by personal influence rather than by apostolic authority. Leaders do not appeal to authority until their influence has been rejected. A correlation exists here with salvation in that judgment by authority (holiness) comes after persuasion by influence (love) has been rejected. This interpersonal atmosphere must surround and precede authority. It will do so if leaders earn their position before receiving it and if natural leaders are the ones given formal leadership.

The question about whether there is authority in church offices can be solved by the subjective-objective variable with persons. Objectively, supervisory authority resides in several offices in the church—Lordship, apostleship, and eldership. Subjectively, the people in those offices do not operate that way. For psychological purposes, it is best to say that the authority resides in the office rather than in the person. *Personal authority* is the confidence a leader can create in other people. *Official authority* refers to their respect for the position. This analysis turns on the variable between subjective attitude and objective circumstance.

Self-centeredness represents a non-interpersonal attitude and behavior pattern. In leadership and ministry, egotism destroys. For example, a woman counselee sends cues to a minister that he is a wonderful, helpful counselor. He picks up on those signals because he tunes into what strokes his ego. Eventually his own marriage may suffer or be ruined, and his capacity to minister may be lost (note, for example the classic article, *Christianity Today*, “The Minister and the Other Woman,” August 1965).

Under interpersonalism also belongs the effective-efficient variable so important in leadership. Authoritative organization is often more efficient, but it is less effective; authority does not readily foster the intrinsic motivation necessary for making self-starters. Authority through organization becomes inefficient in the end because of attrition and low morale.

In Jesus' post-resurrection appearance, he asked Peter three times if he loved him. Each time Peter said “yes,” the Lord told him to feed his sheep. The implication is that leadership ministry arises out of love for the Lord and the sheep. “*You have to love me before you are in a proper frame of mind to serve me and lead my sheep.*”