

Lead Like It Matters to God

What's in it for me? Find out what it takes to become a Christian leader.

True leadership isn't about making money or achieving a personal goal. It's a spiritual responsibility. As a Christian leader, you should commit to embodying positive values, and aim to transform an organization for the better. Drawing on Biblical wisdom and decades of experience in leadership roles, the author offers you guidance on Christian leadership inspired by the ultimate leader – Jesus Christ. In these blinks, you'll learn

why humor can be an effective tool in the workplace; a more practical alternative to the slogan “What would Jesus do?”; and the story of how a few dollars in the mail contributed to the creation of an archbishop.

At work, Christians should remember their main job - acting as ambassadors for Christ.

After attending church on Sunday, going into work on Monday morning, for many Christians, can feel like entering another world. The language and values of the secular workplace often seem completely unrelated to faith. So how to deal with this abrupt change in culture? Compartmentalize? Treat faith and career as two separate worlds? The author argues that Christians should actually aim to integrate their religious values with their work. After all, a Christian has only one true job – not company director or office manager, but ambassador of Christ. This is the key message: At work, Christians should remember their main job – acting as ambassadors for Christ. Many of us spend so much time at work that it can lead to a loss of our personal identities. Christians must act with intention to prevent faith from becoming walled off from the rest of life. This means acting according to Christian values always and everywhere – in the office as well as in church. People in leadership roles have an additional, important responsibility, regardless of how many they lead. The anthropologist Margaret Mead observed that even a small group of people has the power to change the world. This is evident when you think of the construction of bridges and skyscrapers, or the invention of vaccines or smartphones – they're all the result of group efforts. A group can achieve so much more, as people contribute their different skills and abilities. Considering the enormous potential, it makes sense that the character and behavior of the group leader are particularly important. You need only look at responses to the COVID-19 pandemic from leaders in every kind of institution to understand the importance of leadership style. Some leaders unite their communities, while others foster division. Leadership is important to God too. He doesn't care if someone's a CEO, but does care how a person leads. So, how should Christians lead? How should they act at work? Clearly, the Bible has many of the answers. And as you'll see in the following blinks, the author's own life story can provide inspiration for Christians trying to integrate their faith more deeply with their working lives.

Surrender and sacrifice are the starting

points for Christian leadership.

As a young man, Stearns could never have imagined the path his life would take. He was studying neurobiology at Cornell when he met and fell in love with a woman named Reneé. But she was a devout Christian and Stearns wasn't. She couldn't see a future with someone who didn't share her beliefs. The breakup led to a period of deep introspection and study for Stearns, who soon became convinced of his need to have faith in Christ. And the only way to have faith was to surrender. As the scripture says: "Not my will but thy will." The key message here is: Surrender and sacrifice are the starting points for Christian leadership. This moment was Stearns's first experience of surrender as a Christian. He married Reneé and then went on to have a successful business career. By the age of 33, he was CEO of the games company Parker Brothers. Although he later went through some difficult times, including periods of unemployment, he eventually moved to Philadelphia and became CEO of the china manufacturer Lenox. Stearns was happy with his career and family life in Philadelphia. But God had other plans. Stearns was suddenly offered a new position as CEO for the Christian organization World Vision. He had no experience with a role that involved helping the poorest children in the world, and the job would require his family to relocate to Seattle. Though apprehensive, Stearns accepted the job and enjoyed a successful 20-year career at World Vision. In retrospect, he realized that God had been asking him to surrender, and to sacrifice his personal dreams and ambitions in order to make a real difference in the world. Surrender and sacrifice are particularly important for people in leadership roles. A faithful, surrendered leader knows she's been called to a higher purpose, making it easier for her to rise above daily pressures, and put things into perspective. Similarly, experiencing sacrifice helps a person put her personal ambitions aside, and be a calm, focused leader in times of adversity. But these are just the starting points. To be a good Christian leader, there are many important values to cultivate, and it's not a one-time effort but a daily commitment.

See your coworkers from God's perspective, and act lovingly.

Back in the 1990s, some young Christians wore bracelets with the letters WWJD, for "What Would Jesus Do?" It was embraced as a simple reminder to be more like Jesus in everyday situations, but is it really that simple? It's a beautiful idea, but some may need more concrete guidance. Here's another question Christians can ask themselves: "What would love do?" It's a principle that can guide people in their daily lives, and even help them to do the right thing at work. Here's the key message: See your coworkers from God's perspective, and act lovingly. The Bible is a love story – the tale of God's love for us – and Jesus's main message is one of love. When asked about the greatest commandments, he said that the first commandment was to love God, and the second was to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is the essence of the Christian faith. Of course, it's not always easy to love your neighbors, but Christians should aim to live by this principle. A Christian who has a hard time getting along with a coworker must try to see them as another person made in God's image, to be treated kindly and with love. In practical terms, there are many ways for Christians to act lovingly at work. It can be as simple as a shift in attitude, focusing on a coworker's positive attributes rather than shortcomings. Or, if a Christian is in a position of authority, he could show an interest in others' aspirations, and offer coaching and direction for others to realize their potential.

It's also important that leaders show an interest in their team members as individuals, learn about their lives and interests outside of work, and treat people equally regardless of title or rank. A janitor is just as worthy of kindness and respect as a CEO. When a leader acts lovingly, everyone benefits. The leader finds fulfillment, too, integrating work life with her Christian values. Work relationships also improve, as people in the organization feel more valued and respected. And all of this starts from just one kind word or gesture.

A leader can create a positive work culture through encouragement and humor.

In the New Testament, the apostle Peter comes across as a deeply flawed man – impulsive, inconsistent, and quick to anger. If you were his boss, what kind of performance review might you give him? Would you criticize him, and highlight his areas for improvement? Jesus had a different approach. He praised Peter in front of the other disciples and announced that Peter would become the future leader of the church. Jesus's leadership style was one of praise, not criticism, the carrot over the stick. As a good leader, he understood the power of encouragement. The key message here? A leader can create a positive work culture through encouragement and humor. The great thing about encouragement is that it's free. It also works on every level – you can offer encouragement to anyone you work with. Whether it's your boss, your subordinate, or a coworker in another department, be sure to tell them when they've done a good job. When people lead with this attitude, they see a return in investment in terms of performance, loyalty, and motivation. Humor is another effective tool leaders can use in the workplace. Self-deprecating humor works particularly well, helping a leader appear more human and relatable. Stearns was careful not to take himself too seriously at work. At Christmas he would dress up in a Santa costume, with glittery red shoes and star-shaped glasses, bringing a smile to the faces of staff during the stressful fundraising season. And as long as humor is gentle – never vulgar or spiteful – it can be an excellent way to relieve tension, and put people at ease in stressful situations. When working at World Vision, Stearns and his team were confronted by human suffering on a daily basis, and occasional moments of lightness and laughter were a kind of therapy. Humor probably isn't the first quality that comes to mind when you think of Christianity. While it's true that the Gospels don't refer to Jesus as a joker, he is presented as a warm, welcoming and cheerful person – singing songs, telling stories, and turning water into wine. In doing so, he brought people together. So if you're in a leadership position, why not follow his example, and create a positive atmosphere in your workplace?

Leaders should prioritize integrity, and set a good example for their teams.

Integrity is the North Star of leadership – a moral compass that allows the leader to guide the organization in the right direction. As a leader you may have many positive qualities, but without integrity, you're lost. While working at World Vision, Stearns faced an integrity challenge. Once a year, the organization contacted two million potential donors by mail and included a pack of pumpkin seeds in the envelope. The recipients

were encouraged to send the seeds back to World Vision along with a donation. The organization would then send the seeds to farmers in Africa and provide agricultural training. One day, Stearns discovered that thousands of packets of pumpkin seeds were piling up in the warehouse. Some junior staff had decided it was inefficient to send the seeds to Africa. But, by not sending the seeds, World Vision was breaking a promise to donors. Its integrity was compromised. This is the key message: Leaders should prioritize integrity, and set a good example for their teams. Stearns believed that integrity was the single most important quality for a charitable organization. As leader, he launched an investigation into the incident and called an all-staff meeting. The message was clear - it's okay to occasionally miss a target, but unethical behavior is never acceptable. Christians should set a positive example for others to follow. To let their light shine, as Matthew 5:16 exhorts, so that others see this good and praise God. Leaders should keep this guidance in mind, and ask themselves what kind of example they're setting for those around them. To understand the consequences of leadership without integrity, you need only look around you. Poor leadership at Fox News resulted in a culture of sexual misconduct. The founder of the Silicon Valley start-up Theranos created a culture of deception, covering up the fact that the technology didn't work. Then there's the deeply unethical behavior of drug companies, whose promotion of opioids has led to an addiction crisis in the US. The consequences of valuing money above all else can be disastrous. The Bible says that money should be treated as a servant, not a master. A Christian leader should never compromise on her values for money. Integrity must come first.

A courageous leader with a vision can stay motivated, and motivate others.

Jesus was a leader with a vision. He inspired his followers with a clear vision of a better world - something to look forward to and work toward. God uses leaders to change the world by transforming and redeeming organizations. That's why it's vital for leaders to create compelling visions which provide clarity and foster unity and motivation. But how can a leader see the future, and then lead with that vision? It's a tricky task. The author likens it to driving a bus down a dark, winding road through a snowstorm while the passengers complain about the driver's skills. The key message here is: A courageous leader with a vision can stay motivated, and motivate others. The first stage of vision-setting is to assess reality - as a leader, you need to understand the present situation. Then you should assess what needs to change, and articulate the desired future. The next step is to identify a way forward, and set the course to bring about change. Finally, you have to own the vision and embody the vision by setting an example. When Stearns was CEO at Lenox, his vision involved improving sales of fine china. Stearns personally invested time and energy in the project, visiting competitors' showrooms and sitting in on product design meetings. His commitment paid off - and market share increased dramatically. A vision will help both you and your team stay motivated during challenges. Of course, in really difficult moments, you need other qualities too, like courage and perseverance. Stearns had to show courage as a leader when working at World Vision and overseeing a campaign for children impacted by AIDS in Africa. Many at the organization were afraid. They were afraid of alienating donors and afraid of the overwhelming size of the challenge. World Vision faced strong opposition from other Christian organizations, which criticized it for helping people who had committed sexual sins. But Stearns was committed to his vision and his values. Despite these challenges, World Vision succeeded in its mission, helping millions of people across Africa.

A leader should be humble, self-aware, and ready to listen to others.

There are many ways for Christians to follow Jesus's example. But they shouldn't only look outward. Sometimes it's necessary for Christians to look inward, evaluating their strengths and weaknesses with humility and honesty. Stearns recommends 360-degree performance reviews for leaders. Every year, he asked his direct reports at World Vision to provide in-depth evaluation of his leadership. It wasn't always a comfortable experience. Getting this candid insight into how he was perceived, however, helped him to become aware of his weaknesses, and improve as a leader. Here's the key message: A leader should be humble, self-aware, and ready to listen to others. Self-awareness is crucial. Jesus said that a person should take the plank out of his own eye before trying to remove the speck in someone else's. In other words, people should become conscious of their own shortcomings first. It's worth keeping this advice in mind when considering the issue of bias. Many people – particularly white men – have subconscious biases that can have a negative impact on their perception and decisions. For example, Stearns became aware of his biases when working with a woman in rural Uganda. Judging the woman by her informal dress and casual attitude, Stearns doubted that she was qualified to run a microfinance program. In fact, if anything, she was overqualified – he later discovered that the Ugandan woman had a master's degree from the London School of Economics. This was a wake-up call for Stearns, as he realized the importance of self-awareness and understanding how biases can distort leadership. As you strive to become more humble and self-aware, you should also reflect on your listening skills. A fundamental part of Christian leadership is listening to others. Other people are also made in the image of God, and they may be able to offer helpful insights and contributions. There's no doubt that collective wisdom beats individual wisdom. Just remember the examples of collective human accomplishments mentioned earlier, like buildings or scientific inventions. In his book *The Wisdom of Crowds*, James Surowiecki shows how, time and time again, a crowd outperforms an individual expert. When you listen, everybody wins. You learn from your team member, who in turn feels affirmed and respected, and the end result is a committed, caring organization. That's the goal!

Forget about conventional notions of success, and focus on faith.

Sometimes, all it takes is a small act of faith – planting a seed, and watching it grow. The story of Jackson is an example of the power of faith, and how a small act can lead to incredible results. Jackson grew up in a poor family in Kenya in the 1970s. Throughout his childhood, he took part in a World Vision program for children living in poverty. He received regular support through donations from families in the US. As a result, he stayed healthy and had food to eat. He also got to attend Bible programs, and he finished high school – a rare achievement at the time. By making small donations, a faithful family in the US had planted the seed. But the harvest came decades later. In 2016, Jackson Ole Sapit became archbishop of the Anglican Church of Kenya – and the spiritual leader of millions. The key message here is: Forget about conventional notions of success, and focus on faith. Should Jackson's story be considered one of success, or a story of faith? Secular society is obsessed with success. In the world of work, success usually means things like more revenue, higher income or a nice job title. But Mother

Teresa famously said, “God called me to be faithful, not successful.” Of course it’s important to work hard and do your best. There’s nothing wrong with success. But at the end of the day, faith is the most important thing. If you have faith, God can use you to accomplish amazing things, just like the family whose donations helped Jackson to become an archbishop. Real success is staying true to the Christian values like love and integrity. As a Christian leader you must prioritize these values over personal ambitions, and remember your faith is a fundamental part of your role and purpose in life. After all, when you go to work on Monday morning, it’s not really about increasing revenues and hitting targets. Your real job is acting as an ambassador and creating a better world. That’s why your leadership matters to God.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks: Christianity isn’t just about what you believe – it’s how you act. Christian leaders have a special responsibility to show love and kindness to others and to act with integrity at all times. A good leader should set a positive example for others and help the organization to grow in the right direction, following Christian values. Ultimately, the true definition of success is not status or wealth, but having faith in God and helping to shape communities through loving leadership. And here’s some more actionable advice: Create balance and boundaries. Work is important, but it isn’t everything. We all need a healthy work-life balance – that goes for leaders and their staff too. You should establish boundaries, and not expect 24/7 availability from your team – nor they from you. It’s also essential you save enough time and energy for your personal life and interests outside of work. That way, you’ll be a more grounded, balanced individual capable of being more productive and making better decisions.