



Leadership is both something you are and something you do.

—Fred Smith

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

—Phil. 2:5

Grace-full leaders . . . are more concerned with spirit than style

No two leaders are alike. Leadership takes many forms and varies naturally from situation to situation and person to person. Leaders have different management philosophies and personality traits. Some leaders are logical and methodical, others are emotional and impulsive. Although there is no one formula for effective leadership, there are certain qualities that transform how people view leadership. A grace-full leader is one whose primary concern is not style but spirit.

Leadership style varies with personality and context. A person who seems controlling in one situation might appear an equal participant in another situation. Another may lead by the sheer force of personality under some circumstances but through careful process when the circumstances are different. Christian leaders should not try to homogenize their leadership styles. In fact, there are obvious times in the life of organizations when individuals should boldly break out of the pack and lead. But those break-out leaders must be grace-filled leaders, not ego-filled.

If an individual is to be a grace-full leader, God must be rightly placed at the center of his or her life, work, and relationships. The grace of God at work in those dimensions produces a leadership difference—not a difference of style but of spirit.

It's popular today to concentrate on the rationale side of leadership, on getting things done in the "right" way. This preoccupation with style makes it all too easy to overlook the powerful untapped source of energy and motivation coming from a proper spirit. Reason *can't* solve all problems.

Understanding leadership begins with attention to who we are and not just what we do. While it is appropriate for managers to evaluate their leadership styles from time to time, all leaders must recognize that “as practice is to policy, so style is to belief. Style is merely a consequence of what we believe, of what is in our hearts.”¹

Leading from the inside out is an expression of grace-full leadership. A grace-full leader has the right combination of confidence and humility

Leadership is the tapestry of integrity of heart and life, words and deeds, thoughts and actions.



to recognize strengths and weaknesses and to consciously seek to build character, competency, and the confidence of those who

are led. This formula is a key component of leadership.

Leadership is intensely personal and public at the same time. “It’s just impossible to be a closet leader.”² Because of the public nature of leadership, leaders are often held to a higher standard. Thus, a leader must be an example of honesty and dependability. Leadership is the tapestry of integrity of heart and life, words and deeds, thoughts and actions.

Living with integrity means wholeness, completeness, and consistency. The Scripture notes: “The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity” (Prov. 11:3). Being a person of integrity is essential for anyone in leadership, and the expression of integrity is a function of spirit more than style. Like leadership itself, integrity is something you are, not something you do.

All of this means that a Christian’s understanding of leadership must be theological as well as technical, for beliefs and being precede doing. Our values must be as closely integrated into our working life as they are into our family and church life. For example, if we believe that each person is made in the image of God, then for those of us who have received the gift of leadership from the people we lead, this belief has enormous implications.

Such a belief transforms how leaders view the people with whom and for whom they work. We come to value and respect others apart from what they do or how well they do it. We broaden our mission from simply managing results to leading and developing people. This shift grows in us a spirit of service. In his book *Not by Bread Alone*, Briant Hinckley writes:

Service is the virtue that distinguished the great of all times and which they will be remembered by. It places a mark of nobility upon its disciples. It is the dividing line which separates the two great groups of the world—those who help and those who hinder, those who lift and those who lean, those who contribute and those who only consume. How much better it is to give than to receive. Service in any form is comely and beautiful. To give encouragement, to impart sympathy, to show interest, to banish fear, to build self-confidence and awaken hope in the hearts of others, in short—to love them and to show it—is to render the most precious service.³

Such a shift in spirit will inform and enrich our leadership style in any given situation, for the truth is, people want to be led, not managed. A leader with the right spirit knows that individuals, regardless of their position in the hierarchy, have the same basic set of needs, rights, and expectations as he or she.

A leader with the right style may be able to get people to do what needs to be done, but the grace-full leader whose focus is on spirit as well as style can motivate people to *want* to do what needs to be done. The difference in organizational culture is enormous.

When we focus simply on leadership style, we find ourselves concentrating on the wrong things:

- the bottom line rather than the horizon
- mistakes rather than possibilities
- control rather than confidence
- reputation rather than relationships

When we recognize that there is more to leadership than style, the focus shifts from method to spirit. We:

- coach rather than control
- mentor as well as manage
- strengthen others, not just supervise their work
- empower, not just employ
- create shared visions

Style and spirit are both important. But without spirit, even a good leadership style is sterile. It may produce some short-term results, but it is powerless to transform an organization into a living organism.

Grace-full leaders recognize and accept that they are stewards of trust—that they are interdependent and responsible to others. Such a leader knows that a person's rights are much less important than a person's obligations.

Grace-full leadership brings into view something different than the styles so prevalent in leadership literature. Focusing on spirit rather than style strengthens the concept that the leader is not preoccupied with conformity for conformity's sake but rather creating a vision-centered environment where objectives and expectations are met through the efforts of individuals who don't just *work* for the company but *are* the company.

The real power and energy of grace-full leaders rests in the relationship of both the leader and the followers to a commonly held set of values and objectives instead of merely the relationship of the leader to the follower.

A focus on spirit more than style implies that leadership must be value-centered.



At the opening of a new school year at our university not long ago, I spoke at length with our faculty and staff about the difference

between being a Christian university and a university of Christians. We cannot be as a whole what we are not as individuals. It is vital that everyone on our faculty and staff is a person of faith. To the extent that we are not what God calls us to be as individuals, who we are as a university is diminished.

A focus on spirit more than style implies that leadership must be value-centered. Leaders strive to engage the entire organization in a process of values clarification. That is a two-sided coin. First, leaders must guide the organization toward determining by what values it will operate. "What should our values be? Where are we in conflict over these issues?" Second, leaders must also determine what values are currently in place in the organization. The reality of the values in place might be disappointingly distant from the organization's mission statement.

When the values of an organization are clearly articulated, they must be effectively communicated both internally and externally. You can do this in several ways: through routine communications, by way of special events that focus on company values, and by the public recognition of individuals who model those expectations.

Leaders must also find ways to monitor how well the values are being embraced and communicated. Do the formal reporting systems deal only with bottom-line issues? Is recognition given only to those who meet their quota, no matter what?

Decisions made throughout the organization must harmonize with core values, and this emphasis should be a continuous concern. It can't be "We're doing values this year, last year it was market share, and next year it will be 'total quality management.'" Clear and consistent values are a vital part of grace-full leadership.

Closely aligned with an emphasis on values is the recognition that leadership is character in action. Character is not a function or product of style. The word comes from the idea of engraving. My father was a printer who became a publisher. When I was a young boy, he was the production manager of the daily newspaper in our county seat. In my visits to him at work I learned that in the printing business each letter is called a character. The idea is that each letter leaves a distinctive mark. Just so, a leader's character is defined by the mark he or she leaves behind. Character is the sum of a person's values, actions, and attitudes. For the leader, character resides not in one's style but in one's spirit, and the right leadership spirit is a product of the heart. From the heart flows moral courage, conviction, and conscience as well as compassion.