

Leadership with Passion

This article is excerpted from the book *Grace-Full Leadership: Understanding the Heart of a Christian Leader* by John C. Bowling, published by Beacon Hill Press, 2000. [Click here for more information.](#)

During one of his early travels, Sigmund Freud visited the lonely church of San Pietro in Rome and came face-to-face with Michelangelo's statue of Moses. Years later, still gripped by that experience, he returned to the church and, day after day over a three week period, studied the statue, measured it, sketched it, and lingered for hours over its detail. He noted how precisely Moses held the tablets against his side, how he turned his cold stern face toward those who were worshiping the golden calf, and how his long beard flowed to one side. Freud was taken by the way Michelangelo had captured the passion of Moses. He saw in the statue not a passion unleashed impulsively, but a passion under control that gave strength, determination, and direction.

A few days after I was elected as a university president, two friends gave me a beautiful porcelain replica of that stature. It stands in my office just beyond my desk. I see it nearly everyday and have never grown tired of it. It is a great symbol of passionate leadership--a passion born of conviction that clearly identified Moses as the leader.

Moses was one of the first towering "charismatic" leaders who influenced history in two ways: through his personality and through the ideals for which he stood. Moses combined both the power of his presence and the passion of his character.

There is a passionate dimension to grace-full leadership. In a way, to lead is to lay your life on the line--your time, energies, resources, and reputation. It is "all out" or "get out." For a leader, it is more than "just" a job. This dimension of leadership fills the leader with desire and commitment. Passion takes many forms. Sometimes it fills our work with great energy and a sense of adventure.

Our challenge is to resist the strain of seeing each day as "just one more day" or each task of leadership as simply "one more" in an endless series of tasks. It is vital that a leader resists the self-talk of defeat. *"I did this yesterday and the day before and the day before that. What difference will it make what kind of job I do?"* Excellence comes as we overcome the daily-ness of our work and mission. Excellence comes inch-by-inch and day-by-day. It comes as we work through the tedium, doing our best at every point time after time.

The second figure from history shows us another side of passionate leadership. His name is Jesus.

Jesus could have lived his life in a small village. He could have had the comforts of home. He could have lived to a ripe old age. He could have settled for

popularity. But a fire burned within him. A mission compelled him, and so he gave himself away. He *“went about doing good”* and saying to all who would hear and heed, *“Come follow me. . .”*

God's cause can bring passion to any odyssey. In the final analysis grace-full leadership is an expression of commitment to Christ. The daily routines of life can become flooded with eternal meaning. The presence and blessing of Jesus can transform the ordinary tedium into magnificent service.

Grace-full leaders are passionate about their cause.

A leader who is not passionately committed to the mission and cause of the organization will find it hard to go the second mile and do the difficult items often required of leaders. Without passion, leaders will find it difficult to inspire commitment from others. However, when passion is present there is added power. Passion brings energy and galvanizes support from others. *“The world will make way for someone who knows what he or she wants, because there is not much competition when it comes to passionate commitment.”*

Grace-full leaders are passionate about the people they serve and with whom they serve.

All leadership takes place within the context of human relationship. Leaders must care deeply about the people with whom they work. When people in the organization are convinced that the leader cares about them, they feel significant. They rightly believe that what they do makes a difference and therefore, they feel empowered and become more passionate about their individual work.

In organizations where people are valued, community and teamwork develops and those forces help create and sustain corporate morale. Passionate leadership effects people and results in fun, stimulating, and challenging work. This identification, in turn, fosters the desire to be part of the team. When others are counting on your input, there is added power and purpose.

Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric, said it boldly when he suggested that the future will *“not belong to ‘managers’ or those who can make the numbers dance. The world will belong to the passionate, driven leaders--people who not only have enormous amounts of energy but who can also energize those whom they lead.”* Passion is contagious and a leader's influence can spark passion and commitment from colleagues and co-workers.

Grace-full leaders are passionate about the One who calls individuals into leadership.

All grace-full leaders recognize the hand of God at work in their lives. They see their leadership as an extension of God's grace and His kingdom. Their commitment to Christ must be complete; nothing held back, nothing reserved.

This is particularly true for leaders in the church. The vitality of the church does not depend on elaborate organization or creative administration, important as those are; not even on eloquent preaching or adequate theology, valuable as they are; or on unlimited financial resources, helpful though they may be. What the church needs now, as always, is a band of men and women who care more about God and His precious Kingdom than anything else on earth. We need a multitude of men and women pressing *on toward the goal to with the prize for which God has called me;*" (Phil 3:14) taking hold of that for which He took hold of us. *"The church which pitches its tents without looking out constantly for new horizons, which does not continually strike camp, is being untrue to its calling."*

For grace-full leaders merely to repeat Jesus' words is not to continue his work; they must be intent on reproducing his life and passion. Such leaders are not building their kingdoms, but His. Grace-full leaders are passionate people, set aflame by the Spirit.