

Leadership Vs. Management

"Leaders manage and managers lead, but the two activities are not synonymous. Management functions can potentially provide leadership; leadership activities can contribute to managing. Nevertheless, some managers do not lead, and some leaders do not manage". This is Bernard Bass's assessment in his 1,200 page opus, "Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership" (page 383). They overlap, but they are not the same. Since the distinction is not always clear throughout our society, it should come as no surprise that we are not clear about it in church life either.

Warren Bennis shares the same view. He is a popular writer of leadership resources and business professor at the University of Southern California. "There is a profound difference between management and leadership, and both are important. To manage means to bring about, to accomplish, to have charge of or responsibility for, to conduct. Leading is influencing, guiding in a direction, course, action, opinion. The distinction is crucial". One of Bennis' most quoted phrases is, "Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing". Bennis further defines the difference using the following paired contrasts (taken from, "Learning to Lead: A Workbook on Becoming a Leader", pg. 9. Perseus Books / Addison Wesley, 1997):

- The manager administers; the leader innovates.
- The manager maintains; the leader develops.
- The manager accepts reality; the leader investigates it.
- The manager focuses on systems and structures; the leader focuses on people.
- The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust.
- The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective.
- The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why.
- The manager has his or her eye always on the bottom line; the leader has his or her eye on the horizon.
- The manager imitates; the leader originates.
- The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.
- The manager is the classic good soldier; the leader is his or her own person.

Leadership and management are both important, but they seek to do different things. About 40 years ago Kurt Lewin put it this way. Every organization structures itself to accomplish its goals in a way that is in tune with or responsive to its environment. Once the efficiency of the organization is established, people go about simply maintaining the system, assuming that the environment will stay the same. Management, then, is the main focus because it keeps the organization going well with little change. But the thing is: the environment for any organization is always changing. There are always shifts in consumer tastes,

social attitudes, society's culture, technology, historic events, and so on. The world is not static as we assume. Organizations tend not to spot these changes quickly, often because of a "management orientation" which is focused more on "looking in" instead of "looking out". Over time, the organization can become less and less in tune with or responsive to its environment, creating more and more management problems. Times like this require organizations to think more in terms of leadership. Leaders begin to ask questions like, "What is really going on here? How do we become relevant again? How do we fulfill our goals in these new times? What will prompt people to think that what we do is meaningful?" Leaders seek to bring their organization more in line with the realities of their environment, which often necessitates changing the very structures, resources and relationships of their organization which they have worked so long and so hard to manage. And yet, as they do, leaders can bring renewed vitality to their people.

Here is a simple, familiar example. In the 50's and 60's auto makers built large heavy cars with huge, gas guzzling engines because that was what the public wanted. The oil crisis of the early 70's, however, shifted consumer attitudes towards lighter cars with smaller, more fuel efficient engines. The North American "Big Three" were slow to pick up on the new consumer attitudes. Yet, waiting in the wings were the Japanese auto makers, who had been producing such cars for some time.

Congregations face the same kinds of issues. Rural congregations were located for the convenience of horse and buggy travel in a time when the rural population was substantial. The twentieth century, however, saw the urbanization of Canada and the arrival of the car. In the city, "tall steeple" downtown churches have suffered because of the growth of "suburbia", the lack of parking and maintenance costs which increase with the march of time. The shift to a cultural belief today that "a person can have a vital faith and yet not need to belong to a church" has had its impact on church attendance. Congregations which adamantly maintain a 50 year old attitudes wonder why the young families no longer come to share in something these seniors find so meaningful.

Congregational leaders need to ask themselves, every so often, whether they are really "leaders" or "managers". They need to ask questions like,

- "What is changing in our neighbourhoods? Are we being responsive?"
- "What is no longer working in our church the way it did 20 or more years ago? Why is this the case?"
- "In the long run, what is really important for the future of this church? What do we have to do to ensure this?"
- "What does our faith call us to be? Are we living these qualities out here?"
- "The congregation we are today is the personal legacy of the leaders who have gone before us. What do we want our legacy to be to those who follow us?"

Frederick R. Kappel, at the time he was CEO of AT&T, came up with these six signs of "inbred management". For him, inbred management were people who were so entrenched in the habitual practices of handling the organization that they were incapable of innovation, change, or even of maintaining organizational health. Their focus was so captured by routine that their ability to appreciate "the bigger picture" was hampered. Read his summary of the six signs through the lens of your committee, congregation, session or denomination:

1] People cling to old ways of working even though they have been confronted by a new situation.

2] They fail to define new goals with meaning and challenge.

3] Action is taken without studied reflection. Behaviour is rooted in tradition rather than need.

4] Institutionalized contentment exists: activity is secure and stable, not venturesome.

5] Old "wisdom" is passed on to new people. Older managers tend to adhere too rigidly to old ideas, to antiquated approaches and methods.

6] Low tolerance for criticism acts to stifle independent thinking.

Every organization – including every church— tends towards these characteristics. The question is: how much is your church dominated by them? If your church is dominated by them, then perhaps it is time for your church to think in terms of leadership and change instead of management and maintenance.

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Further Reading from Warren Bennis:

"On Becoming A Leader" second edition. Addison Wesley, 1994.

"Organizing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration". Addison Wesley, 1997.