

## Leadership: Helping Others Flourish

By Philip W. Eaton

A MENTOR OF MINE TOLD ME EARLY ON IN MY LIFE as a leader and manager that until you have to make a decision that impacts directly the life of another person, you don't really know what it means to manage. It's a high calling indeed that we hold the lives of others in our hands. We have the ability to hire or fire someone. We can make the lives of those who report to us miserable or joyful. We can assist others to flourish in their careers or to flounder.

What an incredible responsibility. I'm often sorting through what principles might guide the way as I carry out such a responsibility. Let me share some thoughts.

I begin with a bedrock biblical and theological principle by which I've tried to function as a leader: *I believe God wants all of his children everywhere to flourish.* Because this is so, I believe we're called to participate in this grand, sweeping vision. The assumption is that people need to flourish.

God wants it that way. When people suffer, when their lives are diminished, when they fall short of using their gifts to the fullest, God's heart aches, and we must do something to bring love and grace and good news back into their lives.

And so how does this bedrock principle apply to the way I try to manage and lead? Well, first, while I'm constantly falling short, I know I must lead and manage with ideas and vision. People flourish when they're compelled to follow big ideas.

This part of our calling requires of us to be thoughtful, to take time to read, reflect, and spend time in the Scriptures and in prayer. We must lead with vision in order for people to flourish. Good ideas are part of God's sense of flourishing.

Second, leadership requires an intense and constant effort to say thank you. You cannot manage successfully with ideas alone. If you lead without saying thank you, without recognizing personally and publicly the achievement and accomplishment of others, people will flounder and falter.

I have been learning a great deal lately about the leadership of the Apostle Paul. In studying 1 Corinthians quite intensely, it's clear that when Paul wrote his letter, this

scruffy little group of new Christians were not flourishing. They were fighting among themselves over divisive and sometimes unimportant issues. They were hurting, ineffective, going nowhere.

It is in fact quite dazzling to see Paul go to work as a leader and manager in this turnaround situation. In the first two or three verses, he casts a huge, exciting and compelling vision that the gospel of Jesus Christ is spreading throughout the world. "Wow," he seems to say, "catch this vision. We Christians, through the power of the gospel, can change the world." Paul leads with big ideas, to say the least.

But then he immediately turns to the dysfunction among this group of folks. You can almost hear him shout at them: "Stop fighting with one another! We have no chance of changing the world if we continue to scrap with one another over the small stuff. You have to come together. You have to think together. You have to treat one another with kindness and courtesy."

I think here of Peter Drucker's admonition that no organization can flourish as long as it tolerates bad manners. Learn, Paul says with force and eloquence, to actually love one another. Big ideas will motivate us, but love will empower us to be effective.

But then the third thing Paul does is the most amazing of all. He says we'll flourish as individuals and as an organization if we gather at the foot of the cross of Jesus. The cross changed everything, profoundly, fundamentally. If we live under the cross, if we manage and lead people under the cross, we will come to this high calling with the posture of humility and gratitude.

That's what the word of the cross will do for us. Scandal to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, even to this day, the word of the cross has the power to transform our lives, our management, and our organizations.

So, those are my thoughts. God wants all of his children to flourish, indeed, and it's our privilege to participate in that big vision for his world. Flourishing is all about leading with big ideas, the simple gesture of saying thank you, and living, leading and managing with humility and gratitude from the foot of the cross.

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