

FIVE REMINDERS FOR LEADERS

By Bob Young

There is no absence of leadership lists--characteristics, tasks, methods, challenges, needs.... This list seeks to be different. It is written for church leaders. It reflects basic leadership concepts as it sets forth specific challenges for church leaders. While it does not restate the characteristics listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, it summarizes many of those leadership qualities. The list is memorable, providing a quick check list that a leader can "click through" in his or her mind: be faithful, be a servant, be open, be courageous, be visionary.

Be Faithful

I know of nothing more important. Be faithful. Whatever happens in your life or the life of the church, being a good example requires Christian faithfulness. Be an example of commitment. Be present, be involved, be active; demonstrate spirituality and sacrifice. Don't be absent for a bunch of petty, personal reasons. Don't be absent all at if you can help it. Make it obvious that you put God first. Be prepared for whatever comes. Lots of unexpected things will come. Some will be fun, some will be miserable. God will get you through both. Ministry and church leadership are not intended to be fun, although they often (usually) are. Few are the churches who haven't gone through some rocky places. Faith will see you through. Being faithful will be easier if you know what to do. Be competent. Read and study and learn. Attend workshops and improve your spiritual leadership capacity. Do as much as you expect the faithful members to do—and more. Exceed the expectation. So live that none will question whether you are faithful.

Be a Servant

The people have a right to expect leaders to lead in the area of service. This is especially true down at the church house. Effective leadership is servant leadership. Service is hard work, and takes a lot of time. The people know if you are a genuine servant. Church leaders live in a fishbowl with few hiding places; they are public property. The demands of leadership and service are often difficult to balance (and more so for the leader's family). God calls some to Christian leadership and those called must not reject the calling. In this sense, church leadership is not a choice. Since you are called by God and selected and confirmed by the people you serve, never forget that you are not the boss. You work for the Lord, and for the people. Sometimes leaders spend most of their time making decisions and "commanding the troops". Such leaders are often shielded from the normal routines of life and forget what service looks like and feels like. It is true that church leaders make decisions, but never let decision-making replace hands-on service.

Be Open

The people have a right to know. Transparency is better than secrecy. Few are the items that church leaders have to keep from the congregation. The openness or secrecy of a church leadership group often depends on the attitudes of the elders and ministers. Don't be afraid to include the congregation—they might have a good idea. Ownership is increased when information is available and responsibility is shared. Don't think you have all wisdom. Don't pretend you are perfect. Share your struggles. Learn how to lead from vulnerability.

Be Courageous

The church has a right to courageous leadership. Catch a vision and sacrificially pay the price to reach goals that are bigger than you are, goals that are beyond the apparent grasp of the congregation. Whether you are preaching from the pulpit or are a church leader giving direction and sharing God's vision, to speak for God is an audacious thing. People are courageous before they are audacious. Be courageous, do not be afraid. Help God's people know that he is with them, as surely as you are confident that he is with you.

Be a Visionary

Give the church a vision. Keep the vision in front of the people. Do not let it fade. Avoid distractions. Avoid petty scuffles. God deliver us from little-thinking leaders. Immerse yourself in the "God story" and see what he has done for his people throughout the centuries. Believe that the same God has the same power and the same desire for his people today. Seek God's vision, and share it with those you lead. This is the essence of leadership—it is the goal, the result, the eternal outcome. It is unlikely that you will leave much of a legacy beyond the hope and vision that you instill. Even the most inspirational vision is just talk if not combined with action. Turn your (God's) vision into reality.