

DEALING WITH LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS—WHO WILL FOLLOW YOU?

By Bob Young

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Back in August, after the death of Senator Ted Kennedy, I began an article about changes in leadership. The creative juices waned and the article remained unfinished. Today, as I reflect back on 2009 and consider again the topic of leadership, the list of those who died in 2009 is longer (and still incomplete). The list of those who died in 2009 now includes Gertrude Baines (oldest person in the world), news anchor Walter Cronkite, journalist William Safire, Jack Kemp, Paul Harvey, Robert McNamara, Millard Fuller (Founder of Habitat for Humanity), Mary Travers (of Peter, Paul and Mary fame), and Dae Jung Kim (former president of South Korea). Of course the list of notable people who have died is much longer, and each of us could add our own list of notables—perhaps unknown to the world but important to us.

As I think about leadership, I am not thinking about culture or government. I am thinking about the church. I am thinking about Christians and our opportunity God to serve in the Kingdom. I am thinking about the past, but even more about the present and the future. In Deut. 34:9 is an interesting account of leadership transition, *"Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses."* This text suggests that effective leadership change involves God, the current leader, the new leader, and the followers.

If you are a leader, I have some questions for you to consider. Who will take your place? Who will take up the mantle and the torch when you are gone? If you could choose your successor, whom would you choose? If you could train the person who will take your place, what kind of person would you select? All kingdom leaders—teachers, preachers, elders, ministry leaders, missionaries—should be concerned about who will follow them.

If you are not yet a leader officially (a leader in training or in development), I also have questions. When will you begin? What do you need to do to begin to lead? What are you doing to prepare yourself?

If you are a follower, you may want to consider the following questions. What kind of leaders do you like to follow? What can you do to make their job easier? Is God calling you to become a leader? What can you do to develop your own leadership abilities?

Finally, the following questions can help us think about leadership, leadership traits and characteristics, leadership skills, and leadership succession, if we are a current leader or a future leader.

- What characteristics are most important for leaders?
- What are the essential gifts that enable effective ministry and leadership?
- What advice would you give to someone getting ready to be a leader?
- What leadership lessons have you learned?
- What mistakes have you made that could help others choose a better path?

- What warnings would you give regarding leadership?
- What dreams do you have? What dreams have not been reached?
- What problems could you have avoided?

Transition is not easy or predictable. The longer one has served, the more difficult it is to "hand-off" the baton. It is possible to make a change that honors God and stabilizes the Body of Christ. May God be with us as we develop future church leaders.