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*Equipping, Enabling, and Encouraging Marketplace Leaders*

## 28 Lessons on Leadership

Someone was said, “If you want to know if you’re a leader, turn around and see if anyone’s following you.” This may be a simplistic statement, but it is nonetheless an accurate test. Many managers think of themselves as leaders because they have leadership positions. But a position does not a leader make; followers make a leader.

A friend once asked me, “Do you think certain people are born leaders or can leadership be taught?” As I pondered the question thinking about some of the great leaders in world history I came to the conclusion that leadership can only be taught. Leaders are made, not born. There has never been a newspaper headline that announced, “A 7-lb. 14-oz. *Leader* was born today at St. Luke’s hospital.”

People with leadership skills had leaders as models when they were kids. Their parents taught them leadership skills. A teacher may have taught them, or perhaps the military, but someone, somewhere, sometime along the way helped that young child or young adult develop leadership skills.

Given that leadership is learned, not genetic behavior, there is a potential for leadership among all of us. The real issue is, “Do you want to be a leader?,” and, “Will you make the effort necessary to develop your leadership skills?”

On the left side of your Bible, in what may be slightly dusty pages, are stories of some of the greatest leaders in the history of the world. Many of these great leaders were kings, judges, and prophets, but many were also common people placed in unusual circumstances and led in extraordinary ways by God. Studying the stories of these great leaders one begins to see a profile of Biblical leadership emerge.

Solomon was the tenth son of David and second son of Bathsheba, and became the third king of Israel reigning for 40 years. God provided him with many talents and great wisdom. His father, David left him great wealth and the throne of Israel.



Solomon was a prolific writer with over a thousand songs, and three thousand proverbs to his credit. Much of his writings centered on the subject of wisdom and knowledge. It seems that he possessed the philosophical ability to discuss the subjects but sadly, lacked the ability to do many of the things he wrote about. Solomon had more money, more possessions, and more power than anyone else on earth, yet apart from God he found them all “vanity.”

Some people consider Solomon a poor leader, one who had many talents, yet squandered them on searches for the “meaning of life” in wine, women, and song. Others, looking at Solomon’s accomplishments, consider him a great leader. Regardless of which camp you fall into, Solomon’s writings contain much that is beneficial to someone hoping to define and develop strong leadership characteristics.

In this first issue we will review twenty “Be’s,” and eight “Don’ts” as they pertain to leadership characteristics. Next month we’ll continue our study in *“Lessons on Leadership, Part 2.”*

## Here are the 20 “Be’s for Leaders

**Be diligent.** Leaders are diligent in their work. Often they are described as having a passion for their work, or of even being driven.

*“Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth” (Prov. 10:4). “The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied” (Prov. 13:4).*

**Be patient.** A good leader understands that actions taken in haste often lead to regrets.

*“A quick tempered man does foolish things” (Prov. 14:17). “A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly” (Prov. 14:29).*

**Be discrete.** You’ve heard the expression, “Discretion is the better part of valor.” No leader can remain successful without maintaining discretion in sensitive issues.

*“Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you” (Prov. 2:11).*

**Be truthful.** Abraham Lincoln once said, “No man has a good enough memory to be a successful liar.” If you always tell the truth you will never have to remember what story you told who.

*“A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only for a moment. The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful” (Prov. 12:17, 19, 22).*



**Be compassionate.** If you want people to work at peak capacity you must learn to lead with compassion.

*“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up” (Prov. 12:18, 25).*

**Be a peacemaker.** People disagree. A leader must be able to bring peace to an issue so that both sides will work together for good. Further, a leader cannot stand by dividing the loyalties of his or her followers.

*“There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil, but joy to those who promote peace” (Prov. 12:20). “Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out” (Prov. 17:14).*

**Be kind-hearted.** You can be a successful despot by being ruthless, but a leader with loyal followers has a kind heart.

*“A kind-hearted woman gains respect, but ruthless men gain only wealth. A kind man benefits himself, but a cruel man brings trouble on himself” (Prov. 1:16-17).*

**Be generous.** Whether with praise or with time, a leader learns to be generous with those that follow.

*“One man gives freely, to lead yet gains even there more, another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (Prov. 11:24-25).*

**Be honest.** An honest leader is easy to recognize. Many leaders try to be honest, but they have different standards for different people, or they are outright liars. The dishonest leader is quickly found out.

*“The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight” (Prov. 11:1). “A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare” (Prov. 21:6).*

**Be humble.** A key to strong leadership is a humble nature. The greatest cause of the fall of leaders is pride. Leaders who begin to think that all the success they are experiencing is because of them alone usually find out quickly just how wrong they are.

*“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones” (Prov. 3:7-8). “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom” (Prov. 11:2).*



**Be discerning.** No leader ever survived without the ability to discern truth from superiors, peers, and followers.

*“My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet” (Prov. 3:21-24). “The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly” (Prov. 15:14).*

**Be disciplined.** An undisciplined leader’s career is short-lived. People won’t follow someone who is undisciplined, and an undisciplined leader is a target for anyone looking for power.

*“The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for the lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly” (Prov. 5:22-23). “He who heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray” (Prov. 10:17). “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid” (Prov. 12:1). “A fool spurns his father’s discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence” (Prov. 15:5).*

**Be prudent.** A careful leader acts out of knowledge; focusing on the best, not necessarily the easiest, solution to problems.

*“Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly” (Prov. 13:16). “The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception” (Prov. 14:8).*

**Be a thoughtful planner.** Strong leaders plan their strategies long in advance. They plan for problems. They also develop plans that are honest and good based on strong moral principles.

*“A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps” (Prov. 14:15). “Do not those who plot evil go astray? But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness” (Prov. 14:22).*

**Be a doer not just a talker.** The expression, “Actions speak louder than words,” applies to every leader. People evaluate not only what you say, but what you do. Followers have little respect for a leader who talks, but never gets their hands dirty.

*“All hard work brings profit but mere talk leads only to poverty” (Prov. 14:23).*

**Be just.** Followers can spot duplicity in a leader from a mile away. Leaders must make informed decisions that focus on solutions without favoritism to an individual or a cause.



*“By justice a king gives a country stability, but one who is greedy for bribes tears it down” (Prov. 29:4). “The lips of a king speak as an oracle, and his mouth should not betray justice” (Prov. 16:10). “It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the innocent of justice” (Prov. 18:5). “When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers” (Prov. 21:15).*

**Be guided by the Holy Spirit.** Solomon’s greatest frustration as a leader came from neglecting his relationship with God. No matter what he did, no matter what he built, no matter what pleasure he indulged in, he found that apart from God they were all vanity.

Your ability and strength as a leader comes from the strength of your relationship with God.

*“The Righteous One takes note of the house of the wicked and brings the wicked to ruin” (Prov. 21:12). “Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him” (Prov. 30:5).*

**Be righteous.** A righteous, ethical leader provides a guiding light to followers. Who among us wants to follow a wicked, unethical leader?

*“The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble” (Prov. 4:18-19). “Ill-gotten treasures are of no value, but righteousness delivers from death” (Prov. 10:2).*

**Be concise.** A verbose leader stands a better chance of creating confusion than clarity. Be as concise as possible while providing necessary direction.

*“A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered” (Prov. 17:27).*

**Be fair and firm.** Employees will make mistakes. When mistakes are made, fair, firm discipline will yield increased productivity in the future.

*“He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him” (Prov. 13:24).*

## Here are the 8 “Don’ts” for Leaders

**Don’t be complacent.** Anyone who accepts the “status quo” won’t be in a leadership position for long. Edward Deming once said, “If it isn’t broken fix it anyway.”

The point is, improvement is always possible and leaders are always looking for new solutions.



*“For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them” (Prov. 1:32).*

**Don’t be prideful.** Pride does funny things to many leaders. They begin to think they alone have the right answers to every problem. More leaders have fallen from excess pride than anything else.

*“Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice” (Prov. 13:10). “The Lord tears down the proud man’s house but he keeps the widow’s boundaries intact” (Prov. 15:25). “A man lacking in judgment strikes hands in pledge and puts up security for his neighbor” (Prov. 17:18).*

**Don’t gossip.** Leaders necessarily know things that most of the organization does not. Don’t be tempted to display your knowledge by talking out of school about anyone or anything.

*“A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret” (Prov. 11:13). “He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity” (Prov. 21:23).*

**Don’t chase fantasies.** Leaders focus on clearly established objectives. Fantasies waste precious resources and detract from the primary goals of the organization. Leaders know that the way to achieve results is to work toward them not “hope” that they will miraculously be achieved.

*“He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment” (Prov. 12:11).*

**Don’t be greedy.** A little success, a little prosperity often turns to a hunger for more. A good leader doesn’t let greed cloud his or her mind or affect the decisions they need to make.

*“A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he who hates bribes will live” (Prov. 15:27). “By justice a king gives a country stability, but one who is greedy for bribes tears it down” (Prov. 29:4).*

**Don’t be hasty.** “Haste makes waste.” Judgments made in haste are often regretted in the morning light. Strong leaders learn to get adequate information before making important decisions.

*“It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way” (Prov. 19:2). “The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty” (Prov. 21:5). “Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (Prov. 29:20).*



**Don't be vengeful.** No leader exists for long without being wrongfully accused or mistreated in some way. Vengeance wastes time and distracts you from your primary mission as a leader.

*“Do not say, ‘I’ll pay you back for this wrong!’ Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you” (Prov. 20:22).*

**Don't be self-indulgent.** There is a bumper sticker that reads, “The one with the most toys wins.” Nothing could be further from the truth. Whether wine, drugs, relationships, or toys self-indulgence leads quickly to self-destruction.

*“He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich” (Prov. 21:17). “Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags” (Prov. 23:20-21).*

## One Final Thought

Perhaps the reason we have so few really good leaders is that we accept poor leaders in the first place. Or perhaps it is because being a leader necessitates a certain amount of loneliness. Perhaps it is because leadership requires extra work, and carries with it additional responsibility.

Whatever the reason, strong leaders have always been in great demand, and they continue to be today.

Developing your leadership skills will require a great deal of time and energy. If you are already a leader you need to constantly hone your skills, and beware the pitfalls common to those in authority.

Remember that God puts leaders into positions of authority for a reason, and remember also that *“There is a way that seems right to man, but in the end it leads to death”* (Prov. 14:12).

Your contributions as a leader are essential to our society. Focus on God and He will provide a light to your path, and the strength to complete your task.



## Words to Ponder

“And when we think we lead, we are led most.” *Lord Byron*

“When a leader sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the commands of the Lord his God, he is guilty.” *Lev. 4:22*

“Leadership. The art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.” *Dwight D. Eisenhower*

“If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” *Matthew 15:14*

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” *Romans 13:1*

“The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on.” *Walter Lippmann*

“This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing.” *Romans 13:6*

“In the great mass of our people there are plenty of individuals of intelligence from among whom leadership can be recruited.” *Herbert Hoover*





## Meeting Notes

Use these meeting notes to stimulate discussion on the leadership qualities that are important in your organization.

- 1) Ask the group to define what a leader is, and what leadership is.
  
- 2) Ask the group to discuss the strength of your organization's leaders.
  
- 3) Ask the group to list attributes of a leader that are important to them. Capture the list on a generated chart.
  
- 4) As part of a group discussion develop an understanding of how these important leadership characteristics are currently being modeled in the organization. Also discuss how are they lacking.
  
- 5) Ask for group discussion on the pitfalls to leadership. Specifically discuss examples of how leadership has broken down in the past and what can be done to avoid similar situations in the future.



## Key Points:

There are dozens of characteristics of strong leaders and many pitfalls that can destroy a leader's ability to lead.

### **Included among the leader's "need to be's" are:**

Be diligent.

Be patient.

Be discrete.

Be truthful.

Be compassionate.

Be a peacemaker.

Be kind-hearted.

Be generous.

Be honest.

Be humble.

Be discerning.

Be disciplined.

Be prudent.

Be a thoughtful planner.

Be a doer not just a talker.

Be just.

Be guided by the Holy Spirit.

Be righteous.

Be concise.

Be fair and firm.



**Included among the leader's "Don'ts" are:**

Don't be complacent.

Don't be prideful.

Don't gossip.

Don't chase fantasies.

Don't be greedy.

Don't be hasty.

Don't be vengeful.

Don't be self-indulgent.