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## Lessons on Leadership (Part 2)

Last month we began our look at leadership characteristics taken from the profiles of leaders in the Bible. All of the examples we looked at came from the pen of Solomon recorded in the book of Proverbs. This month we continue with an examination of 29 additional Biblical leadership characteristics.

**Accept correction.** As imperfect vessels we are all subject to the errors common to man. Regardless of how perfect you consider yourself there will be times when someone will have a better idea than you, or perhaps even catch you doing something wrong. Anyone who is truly successful will tell you that part of their success is due to their willingness to accept correction from others.

*“He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored” (Prov. 13:18).*

**Accept instruction.** Every heavy-weight boxing champion in the world has a trainer. Every professional golfer has a teaching pro they go to when they need help with their game. Every professional football, baseball and tennis player, no matter how great, improves their skill sets by using coaches. Leaders in business should be no different from professional athletes; we should never think that we have learned so much that we can't learn from others.

*“The wise in heart accepts commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.” (Prov. 10:8).  
“He who scorns instruction will pay for it, but he who respects a command is rewarded.” (Prov. 13:13). “Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.” (Prov. 19:20).*

**Wisdom.** No doubt about it, wisdom is a critical characteristic for all leaders. But wisdom is not one of those things you can buy at the corner drugstore. Wisdom is elusive. Some people have it, some people don't. According to Solomon, wisdom is more precious than jewels. The good news



is that no one has a corner on the world's supply of wisdom. It is attainable with a life focused on God.

*“Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.”* (Prov. 3:13-18).

**Timing.** Man's timing is often not the same as God's timing. As fast as the world is changing we keep going faster and faster trying to keep up. Remember the bumper sticker that read, “The hurrieder I go the behinder I get!” Sometimes we rush to get things done, and we fail because it isn't God's timing.

On the other end of the spectrum there may be things God has been trying to get you to do, and you've been procrastinating. Maybe you think you don't have the skills or the resources, but remember that where God leads He will provide. Sometimes the best answer is to step out in faith.

*“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.”* (Prov. 3:1).

**Avoid hot-tempered people.** OK, truth time. How many of you like to associate with people who get angry all the time? Raise your hands. No one? The greatest risk of being around these kinds of people is that you will become just like them, and then no one will want to be around you either!

*“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.”* (Prov. 22:23-24).

**Set priorities.** Given all I learned from my grandfather on his farm, I have a special affinity for proverbs that have their roots in farming.

*“Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house.”* (Prov. 24:27).

What good is a house if you have no crop in the ground to harvest? In Solomon's day there were no supermarkets. If you didn't grow it, you didn't eat. So they made sure to plant seed, tend crops, and harvest before they worried about building their house.



We have so many opportunities in our lives, we have so many options of things to do. But many of these “fun to do’s,” or “nice to have’s” won’t help us accomplish what is really important to us. A good leader knows how to set and maintain priorities to stay focused on the work at hand.

**Experience yields wisdom.** The experiences of a righteous man or woman can provide much wisdom for those who are younger. A good leader knows better than to ignore the counsel of wise elders. Solomon recognized the wealth of experience gained by living a righteous life when he said,

*“Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life.” (Prov. 16:31).*

**Never stop learning.** Churchill’s shortest speech was, “Never, never, never give up.” He was right, but today you could also add, “Never, never, never quit learning.”

*“The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.” (Prov. 18:15). “Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge.” (Prov. 23:12)*

**Seek counsel from others.** No one knows everything about every situation. A good leader seeks out the counsel of others before making important decisions.

*“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” (Prov. 15:22).*

**Build others up.** Whoever said, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” hasn’t been living on this planet for long. Words do hurt. Ask anyone for an example of something said to them that hurt them when they were young. I’ll bet they can recall it instantly and provide details of the situation 10-40 years later. Leaders know that a key to developing strong, independent employees lies in building them up with words of encouragement.

*“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” (Prov. 12:18). “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.” (Prov. 16:24).*

**Create a team.** No one working in isolation will develop skills as well as a person working in a group. That includes leaders. People will rise to the standards that are held by their peers. By building one, you can effectively build the skills of the group.

*“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Prov. 27:17).*

**Motivate with compassion.** I get so sick at heart when I hear about managers who think it is leadership to award “boot” trophies and other similar negative awards for their employees. Threats, even if veiled, may motivate an employee to improve performance in the short run, but



they do nothing to build the strength of character of the employee that will sustain them over time.

*“The wise in heart are called discerning, and pleasant words promote instruction. A wise man’s heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction.” (Prov. 16:21, 23)*

**Avoid jealousy.** You know you shouldn’t worry about keeping up with the Jones’s at home, but what about the Smith’s at work? No strong leader has time to be jealous about the progress someone else is making in their career. Strong leaders focus on what is important in their jobs and encourage employees to do the same. Jealousy serves no other purpose than to build you up by tearing someone else down.

*“Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?” (Prov. 27:4).*

**Avoid easy solutions.** A quick easy solution may be just that, but beware the long-term consequences. Sometimes expedient solutions become the most expensive. Do you stuff more grease into a worn-out bearing and hope for the best, or do you shut the machine down to repair it properly?

*“Food gained by fraud tastes sweet to a man, but he ends up with a mouth full of gravel.” (Prov. 20:17)*

**Pick your battles.** There are times to do battle. There are times to stand your ground unyielding. But make sure that the situation really calls for battle, and make sure that the decision is reached with the benefit of a cool head.

*“A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.” (Prov. 29:11).*

**Have faith.** The greatest attribute for a leader is to have faith. God does not lead where He does not provide. He will give you the strength and the wisdom to fulfill any task He asks of you, if you will maintain your faith in Him.

*“Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.” (Prov. 3:3-6).*

**Control your emotions.** Don’t you just love bosses that yell at you when you make a mistake? My favorite is the boss who not only yells at you, but does it in front of others! Strong leaders know that the best decisions are made by cool, rationally thinking minds. Set an example as a



leader, don't tolerate destructive tempers in your group, and you will be amazed at the improvement in your decision making process.

*"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Prov. 15:1). "A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel." (Prov. 15:18).*

**Choose friends with care.** Sad to say but most anyone who has any business experience at all can tell you a story about someone they knew and trusted as a friend who turned out to be a back-stabbing traitor. Sometimes these folks are hard to spot, but the Bible tells us to be cautious in our friendships because the wicked people will eventually show themselves for what they are.

*"A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray." (Prov. 12:26). "Stay away from a foolish man, for you will not find knowledge on his lips." (Prov. 14:7).*

**Choose advisors carefully.** Solomon's son, Rehoboam, became king, ignored the advice of his father's wise counselors in favor of the advice of his young friends. He put such a heavy burden on the Israelites that they tried to stone him. Eventually the Israelites rebelled, and appointed Jeroboam king (I Kings 12).

*"The plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful." (Prov. 12:5). "Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise." (Prov. 19:20). "Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance." (Prov. 20:18).*

**Listen to advisors.** Once you choose advisors, a wise leader listens to their advice. This doesn't mean you always take it, any advisor can be wrong, but at least you listen and consider carefully their words.

*"Listen my son to your father's instruction and do not forsake our mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck." (Prov. 1:8). "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisors make victory sure." (Prov. 11:14).*

**Strive for excellence.** Lots of people are mediocre or good at their work, but none of them will be standouts in their professions or great leaders. A good leader knows the value of excellent work and models it in the work he or she does, and in the standards they hold up for their employees.

*"Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men." (Prov. 22:29).*



**Listen for Understanding.** Listening is an altogether undeveloped art form. It seems most of us are so interested in talking that we don't listen to the people we should. Practice the art of being quiet long enough to really listen to others.

*"He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame." (Prov. 18:13).*

**Lead people's strengths.** God gives every one of us gifts and talents. A good leader develops people by utilizing their gifts in their work. People who are doing work that they have a passion for will work longer hours, more productively, with more loyalty than anyone else.

*"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." (Prov. 22:6).*

**Maintain your standards.** In today's economy there is a lot of pressure to reduce costs, to cut corners, to give a job only partial effort. Sometimes it takes great courage to stay the course and insist on high standards rather than following those who compromise.

*"Like a muddied spring or a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked." (Prov. 25:26).*

**Don't overestimate your own importance.** Get a small bowl and fill it with water. Now stick your finger in the bowl and then take it out. See the hole? As important as you may be at work if you quit or get fired tomorrow they will find someone to take your place. The Bible is filled with example after example of leaders who relied on God and accomplished great things. Then they started thinking they had done it all on their own and they didn't need other people or God. Their downfall or death was the usual next step.

*"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil." (Prov. 3:7).*

**Don't be envious of others.** Solomon had tremendous wealth yet with all his money he found no satisfaction outside his relationship with God. Don't let envy for what someone else has drive your decisions about what is needed in your organization.

*"A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones." (Prov. 14:30). "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for fear of the Lord." (Prov. 23:17).*

*"Do not envy wicked men, do not desire their company." (Prov. 24.1)*

**Don't dwell in the past.** While it is important to learn from past mistakes it is more important to learn to move on. No one ever became a great leader by wallowing in the discouragement of a past failure. Rather, the strong leader learns whatever he or she can from every situation, and then applies the learning to the future.



*“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.” (Isaiah 43:18).*

**Reward loyalty.** Few things in business are as important as loyal employees. I don't mean just the ones that work for one company their whole lives. Loyalty is important regardless of whether the employee is a life-time employee or a consultant for a week. Strong leaders recognize loyalty and find ways to reward it. Strong leaders never, ever shoot the messenger, they thank them for having the courage to bring even bad news.

*“Like the coolness of snow at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to those who send him; he refreshes the spirit of his masters.” (Prov. 25:13).*

**Respect others.** There are many standards of respect to be seen around the world. In some cultures it is acceptable to spit on someone in the heat of negotiating a deal. In other cultures a loud burp at the end of a meal is a compliment to the chef. Whatever the signs of respect important in your culture, be respectful of employees, peers, bosses, and customers.

*“Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord.” (Lev. 19:32)*

## One Final Thought

The lessons on leadership in this issue point out some of the complexities of the leader's job. Beware advisors, yet listen to advisors. Be strong and demand high standards, yet be compassionate.

Perhaps this is why it is so hard to find really good leaders. We tend to do only certain things very well, and when they work for us we repeat the action. So we develop into people who are demanding yet compassionless, strong and decisive yet unable to listen to others.

Leadership has always been a two sided coin, with any given characteristic either a strength or a weakness depending on how it is applied in a given situation. This is where true leaders display excellence. They know when and how to apply themselves in any given situation. If these are things you want in your life then focus your business on God. Only He can provide you with the insight and guidance to lead you through any situation.



## Words to Ponder

“Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.” *Prov. 25:15*

“Anyone can steer the ship when the sea is calm.” *Publilius Syrus*

“Their leader will be one of their own; their ruler will arise from among them. I will bring him near and he will come close to me, for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?” declares the Lord.” *Jer. 30:21*

“Arrogant lips are unsuited to a fool-- how much worse lying lips to a ruler!” *Prov. 17:7*

“The nation will find it very hard to look up to the leaders who are keeping their ears to the ground.” *Winston Churchill*

“Many curry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts.” *Prov. 19:6*

“A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops.” *Prov. 28:3*

“A tyrannical ruler lacks judgment, but he who hates ill-gotten gain will enjoy a long life.” *Prov. 28:16*





## Key Points:

Last month we reviewed 28 of the strong leaders' "need to be's" and "don't be's". In this issue we review 29 additional characteristics of strong leaders. More than anything else, we see that good leaders know to apply each characteristic to the appropriate situation.

- Accept correction.
- Get wisdom.
- Avoid hot-tempered people.
- Experience yields wisdom.
- Seek counsel from others.
- Create a team.
- Avoid jealousy.
- Pick your battles.
- Control your emotions.
- Choose advisors carefully.
- Strive for excellence.
- Lead people's strengths.
- Don't overestimate your own importance.
- Don't dwell in the past.
- Respect others.
- Accept instruction.
- Timing is everything.
- Set priorities.
- Never stop learning.
- Build others up.
- Motivate with compassion.
- Avoid easy solutions.
- Have faith.
- Choose friends with care.
- Listen to advisors.
- Listen for understanding.
- Maintain your standards.
- Don't be envious of others.
- Reward loyalty.