

Organizational Leadership Lessons Based on the Pauline Epistles

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Ever wondered where contemporary organizational leadership concepts originated and if they are based on secular philosophy? The truth be told, they are based on biblical principles found in the Pauline epistles. Through a careful compare and contrast analysis of Romans, Corinthians, Thessalonians, Galatians, and Philemon, this article provides practical insight into the leadership lessons of Paul as they relate to contemporary diversity movement, strategic activities, and organizational change concepts to assist today's Christian leaders to become effective Christian leaders. In order to become an effective Christian leader, let's first examine Paul's leadership lessons as translated in Barker's (1995) New International Version Study Bible.

Paul's Leadership Lessons

The Pauline epistles depict lessons that Paul learned throughout his leadership journey. These lessons are timeless and applicable as leadership principles for today's Christian leader. Paul's leadership lessons include sacrificing self, leading by example, and valuing followers.

As a leader, Paul displayed a self-sacrificing attitude when he chose to accept the offense of a brother in order to keep the peace, as recorded in Philemon verse 18, "If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me." Paul teaches us that as leaders, we ought to lead by example. This premise is conveyed when Paul rebukes Peter for not being a good example to his followers in Galatians 2:14 by writing, "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" Paul's lesson here was that the leader's conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel. In doing so, leaders must value their followers enough to be the example they need.

Paul further displays how much he values his followers in 1 Corinthians 1:4 by writing, "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus." Paul's leadership lessons teach us that leaders take care of others through having self-sacrificing attitudes and valuing followers

by becoming their examples. Let's see how these lessons play out in diversity movement, strategic activities, and organizational change.

Paul's Diversity Movement

Paul's diversity movement encompassed diversity and multiculturalism concepts whose goal is to extinguish racism and build tolerance of differences. The early Christian church was confronted with numerous issues relating to diversity and multiculturalism including religion, race, class, and gender. The Pauline epistles depict biblical principles that do away with separation and promote desegregation involving various areas of diversity and unity and equality. Paul records an amazing amount of interface between diversity and unity.

In Romans 12:6-8, he highlights the many different motivational gifts serving the one body in Christ by writing, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith...If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach...if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Paul highlights an amazing partnership of diverse spiritual gifts, ministries, and people towards a greater end by writing, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit...There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord...There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men." Although diversity and unity play key roles in promoting desegregation in the early church, Paul also includes equality as a biblical principle to move the church forward. In Romans 10:12, Paul writes, "There is not one God to the Jews, more kind, and another to the Gentiles, who is less kind; the Lord is a Father to all men." The premise for this verse lies in the fact that God will treat all equal and so should leaders. Through applying the principles of diversity unification and equality, the strategy process can flourish.

Paul's Strategic Activities

Paul's strategic activities included thinking, planning, and implementation concepts that involve seeing the "big picture", devising a plan to obtain the "big picture", and carrying out the "big picture" respectively. The Pauline epistles depict preliminary strategies to move the early church forward. These strategies included incorporating biblical principles involving planning, purpose, and flexibility. In the promotion of strategies, God was the first to provide a "big picture." In Galatians 3:8, Paul confirms God's plan to include the Gentiles, by writing, "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him."

By God providing and conveying the "big picture" to Paul, he began devising a plan through the principle of purpose to obtain it as outlined in, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Paul began rallying the people through one common purpose—their allegiance to Jesus Christ, the unifying factor. Paul accomplishes this by writing, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ...Now the body is not made up of one part but of many."

In order for the early church to move forward as a multi-faceted system, unification of the people was needed in Christ Jesus. Even when God gives us the “big picture” and we find purpose within it to begin carrying it out, there must exist the principle of flexibility. Paul had to learn as a leader to be flexible, which meant, someone other than him had to implement the plan. To paraphrase 1 & Thessalonians, his strategy to keep the growing church stable and instructed was through writing and sending Timothy, a son of the Gospel to provide support and hands-on leadership. Once strategies are in place, organizational change can occur.

Paul’s Facilitation of Organizational Change

Paul’s facilitation of organizational change involved organization transformation and developmental concepts that are radically centered on improving the effectiveness of organizations and the people in those organizations. The Pauline epistles depict the Apostle Paul as leader and facilitator in helping the early church escape its cultural isolation through transformation and servanthood.

Paul incorporates his leadership lesson of unity to promote an inclusive culture within the early church. This inclusive culture involves the principles of servanthood, oneness, and sameness. In the promotion of culture, we must understand that culture is a process, is best viewed in small increments of time, and evolves over time. With this in mind, Paul chose to humble himself and become a servant leader to win his followers over to achieve the goal of transforming the church. For example, in 1 Corinthians 9:19, Paul describes himself “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.” He chose to put the needs of others over his own. By doing so, Paul could effectively infuse the principles of oneness and sameness to achieve the inclusive culture that was desired. We see examples of oneness and sameness in Paul’s letters to Galatia and Rome.

Paul’s letters to the Galatians (3:28), speaks about issues relating to oneness in Christ, by writing, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Additionally reading on oneness can be found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31). His letter to the Romans (10:12), addresses sameness in Christ, by writing, “For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.” Paul’s successful incorporation of these biblical principles led to an inclusive culture within the early church.

A call to Christian leadership brings with it an increased responsibility to seek God for wisdom. Through in-depth exploration of God's word, history provides practical insight for the contemporary Christian leader. It also gives us a platform to assess current leadership practices, since the principles and demonstrated character of Paul remains unchanged. For the Christian leader, the Bible follows a strategic and consistent path that leads to a certain conclusion, which is the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. Once we understand God’s unfolding plan in the scriptures, we are much more able to interpret the great forces and events of human history, and then project future successes through scriptural application. Leadership success is obtainable for those who are willing to correctly interpret biblical demonstrations of leadership and apply the concepts to both current and future operations. Contemporary organizational leadership concepts are not new and did not emerge from the secular world. They are biblically based upon leadership principles found in scripture. As Solomon so eloquently states, in Ecclesiastes 1:9, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”

References

Barker, K. (1995). The new international version study bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company.