

Lead with a Human Focus; for Christ's Sake!

Leadership Advance Online – Issue XIX

by Angelia V. Arrington

So, what does it mean to be a leader? There are so many definitions of what leadership is and is not. “Generally leadership is a highly sought-after and highly valued commodity” (Northouse, 2007, p.1). There are multitudes of books, publications and research literature on what it means to become a leader. Extensive and collective research suggests that leadership is far more complex, sophisticated and conceptual than what is extolled in some of the popular books available (Northouse, 2007). Thus, leadership should be considered much greater than simply theory, methodology, concepts and application. Effective leadership requires a human focus and reflects servant and transformation leadership. This article examines what it means to be a leader by defining leadership and by addressing leadership theory, style and qualities. The article discusses the relevance of ancient Biblical texts to the modern-day leader and ultimately explores how one may become a God-honoring leader by leading with a human focus (Matviuk, 2009).

What is leadership?

It is important to understand what leadership is and the essential principles and values of a humanly focused leader as they ultimately determine whom we follow and how we lead. According to Winston (2002), leadership starts with values, as his approach to leadership is to focus on leadership as described in the Beatitudes found in Matthew 5:13 – 7:27. According to Chemmers (2002, p.1), a widely accepted definition of leadership by most researchers and theorists is the “process of [social influence](#) in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.” In his book *Leadership in Organizations*, Yukl (2002, p. 45) suggests that most definitions of leadership “reflect the assumption that it involves a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization.” From a Christian perspective, Blanchard and Hodges (2003 p. 12) affirm that “In His instruction to His first disciples on how they were to lead, Jesus sent a clear message to all those who would follow Him that leadership was to be

first and foremost an act of service...For a follower of Jesus, servant leadership isn't just an option: it's a mandate.”

According to Northouse (2007, p. 3), “Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.” Northouse (2007) believes there are many ways to conceptualize leadership and presents key components that are essential to the leadership phenomenon including: (a) process, (b) influence, (c) teams and (d) goals and objectives. In his seminal book, *Leadership*, James MacGregor Burns (1978 p. 4) wrote that leadership is “one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” ... and that this leadership phenomenon is an elusive concept. While these scholarly researchers articulate well on the definitions of leadership, Northouse (2007), Yukl (2002) and Chemmers (2002) all define leadership as influence, while Burns (1978) suggests the elusive nature of leadership is too complex to grasp without thorough research, exploration and study. Yet, both Northouse (2007) and Burns (1978) agree and further illustrate leadership as a phenomenon. While a finite definition of leadership may be elusive; leadership is certainly inclusive of influence, motivation and service.

Leadership Theory

With a quick Internet search, one will find more than 50 leadership theorists and a myriad of leadership theories. Scholars such as Bennis (1990), DePree (2004) and Greenleaf (1970) have researched and written about leadership theories. Bennis (1990) and DePree (2004) share similar views on leadership theory; they think that leaders should be servant leaders who coach, influence and empower team members toward goal achievement. Bennis (1990) teaches that leadership is a result of knowing yourself and effectively communicating a clear vision while establishing trust amongst peers, colleagues and followers, and ultimately owning your actions as an effective leader. DePree (2004) believes that leadership is an art and teaches stewardship over this art in regard to relationships evolving around effectiveness, principles and values, and a legacy toward humankind. Greenleaf (1970) shares a similar principle as he believes leaders must possess a clear vision and willingness to serve so that others will be drawn to this servanthood, because it is a selfless and sacrificial nature that attracts people. These scholars all support many leadership theories and styles to include servanthood and transformational. Most of all, they reflect the human aspect of leadership styles.

Leadership Styles

Thaker (2009) also shares many of the commonly used leadership styles to include servant and transformation. According to Greenleaf (1997), a servant leader facilitates goal accomplishment by giving its team members what they need in order to be productive. This leader is an instrument employees use to reach the goal rather than a commanding voice that moves to change. Similarly, Burns (1978) defines a transformation leader as one who motivates its team to be effective and efficient. Transformational leaders focus on the big picture, surrounded by people who take care of details. Now, we observe two different leadership styles that embody a similar definition, purpose, objective and effect. Yet, they epitomize leadership with a human focus. According to Blanchard and Hodges (2003), effective leadership comes from within and from those who wish to make a difference by serving and transforming others. Therefore, leadership from a human perspective explores leadership style as well as leadership qualities.

Leadership Qualities that Foster Servant Leadership

According to Miller (1995), there are 10 keys to servant leadership that include (1) honesty and servanthood; (2) seeing yourself as a leader and learning the art of self-perception; (3) networking; (4) vision; (5) decision making; (6) motivating; (7) politics and power; (8) leadership and difficult people; (9) delegation and team spirit; and (10) surviving failure. Miller (1995) believes that as leaders, your personal and work lives must both be self-scrutinized constructively and individually. A leader must have self-esteem and confidence in knowing who they are. One of the most important questions a leader can ask themselves is “Who am I?” A good self-perception will aid the leader in developing a clear vision of their long-term objectives. Thus, servant leadership is about balancing self-behavior through self-reflection, self-esteem and self-respect; yet self-sacrificing while serving others.

Leadership Qualities that Foster Transformation Leadership

Northouse (2007, p. 176) defines transformation leadership as “the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower.” Mohandas Gandhi is referred to as a classic example of a great transformational leader. This is because Gandhi often acted selflessly and was attentive to the needs of his followers ensuring they achieved their full potential. Because Gandhi led as an effective transformational leader, it is believed that he increased the optimism and expectations of people all over the world, while changing himself at the same time (Northouse, 2007). Consequently, an

effective transformation leader is one who can gain the trust of others while inspiring them to be high achievers with strong morals.

Leadership qualities that foster servant and transformation leadership are God-honoring behaviors. Romans 12:2 says, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (NKJV). One could interpret this scripture to mean for a person to continually evolve, grow and change as one expands their thinking to positively affect all whom they encounter and serve. Blanchard and Hodges (2003) suggest that one must feel servanthood from the heart and then think the same, as this perspective on the role of leadership is what transforms a servant leader. "As Jesus trained and transformed His disciples from enthusiastic recruits to effective 'fishers of men', He employed different leadership styles to serve their needs for direction and support" (Blanchard & Hodges, 2003, p. 69). Perhaps, transformation and servant leaders are examples of God-honoring leadership.

God-Honoring Leadership & Relevant Biblical Instructions

Ancient Biblical instructions are provided for our benefit and are very relevant to today's leaders, as I Peter, 5:2 informs us to

Shepherd the flock of God...which is among you serving as overseers. Not by compulsion but willingly. Not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you. But being examples to the flock; and when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. (NKJV)

Leadership from a human focus and from the perspective of becoming a God-honoring leader embraces immeasurable facets of leadership; servanthood and transformational being the two primary facets. In his book entitled *Be a Leader for God's Sake*, Winston (2002, p. 4) maintains "Leadership is first of all – Love!" In this instance, Winston (2002) refers to the scriptural verse, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself" (Matthew 19:19), but can you love your neighbor at work, and who is he or she? Moreover, should a leader care enough to love his or her followers? Thus, Winston defines what it means to love. He addresses the three Greek words defining love: *eros*, *phileo* and *agape*...questioning their application to love in the workplace. But, after studying the Greek text more closely, he found a fourth type of love – *agapao* love. This Greek word is moral; it is the type of love that requires doing the right thing even when you don't feel like it. This *agapao* love is to love socially, morally and unconditionally accepting that one's spirit serves as their belief, responsibility and decorum. From Winston's (2002) perspective, this type of love makes sense for a leader. Applying *agapao* love while serving as leader may transform an employee's work habits or

behaviors and create a positive effect. This God-honoring leadership could nurture servanthood and transformation among the leader and the follower alike. Thus, to fully appreciate *agapao* love in the workplace is vital to leadership with a human focus.

Conclusion

In conclusion, leadership is so much more than theory, methodology, concepts and application. To approach leadership with a human focus, one must first carefully examine what it fully means to be a leader. The study and exploration of the numerous definitions of leadership are critical since the very concept of leadership is a complex subject. While there are many characteristics of effective leadership, servanthood and transformation are two of the most critical qualities that foster leading with a human focus. This focus encompasses the practice of *agapao* love...a love that is appropriate for the workplace and also relevant to ancient Biblical texts. Finally, this article has revealed how to utilize leadership theory, styles and qualities to become a God-honoring leader. For this reason, the leader with a human focus may relate well to the words of Matthew 25:21, "Well done my good and faithful servant."

Are you willing to lead with a human focus; for Christ's sake?

About the Author

Angelia V. Arrington is enrolled in the Doctor of Strategic Leadership program at Regent University in Virginia Beach, Va. She is a passionate leader who aspires to make significance in the lives of others worldwide.

Email: angearr@regent.edu

References

- Bennis, W. G. (1990). *On Becoming A Leader*. Perseus.
- Blanchard, K., & Hodges, P. (2003). *The Servant Leader: Transforming your heart, head, hands and habits*. Nashville, Tennessee: J Countryman, a division of Thomas Nelson, Inc.
- Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Rowe
- Chemmers, M. M. (2002). *Cognitive, social, and emotional intelligence of transformational leadership: Efficacy and Effectiveness*.
- DePree, M. (2004). *Leadership is an art*. New York: Dell Publishing.

Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant Leadership: A Journey into Legitimate Power and Greatness*. Paulist Press.

Matviuk, S., Bekker, C., & Winston, B., (2009, Summer). Syllabus. *The School of Global Leadership and Entrepreneurship*. Virginia Beach, Virginia: Regent University.

Miller, C. (1995). *The Empowered Leader: 10 keys to servant leadership*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group.

NKJV. *Holy Bible, New King James Version*.

Northouse, P. G. (2007). *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Thaker, S. (2009). *Scribd*. Retrieved July 25, 2009, from Scribd:
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/6327744/Types-of-Leadership-Styles>

Winston, B. E. (2002). *Be A Leader for God's Sake*. Virginia Beach, VA: School of Leadership Studies, Regent University.

Yukl, G. (2002). *Leadership in Organizations*. Englewood Hills: Prentice Hall.