



Placing Christ at the Center of Christian Leadership Values

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Christian values should strongly influence Christian leaders. This article discusses the meaning of values, their origin, and how they develop. It goes on to discuss the transformation of values when Christian transformation re-shapes or strengthens the values of a believer, providing a permanent, core set of values for Christian leadership. Ultimately, Christian leaders, like most leaders, have an important influence on their organizations. This article proposes that appropriate values are critical to successful leadership in contemporary organizations. Furthermore, it suggests that transformed values—specifically Christian values—honor God and positively influence the organizations led by transformed leaders. The article concludes by summarizing and integrating key concepts.

Values Defined and Discussed

Boudon (2001) suggested that values reflect a person's beliefs about what is good or bad, fair or unfair, legitimate or illegitimate. Values can reflect how strongly people feel about issues and how committed they are to their beliefs. As an underlying foundation for ethics, values help to determine behavior and set limits regarding what an individual is willing to tolerate or overlook before taking exception. What is less clear is where values come from and why people believe the things that they do (Boudon, 2001; Joas, 2000). After all, what seems to be fine for one person or a society can be totally unacceptable for someone else or a different culture. This ambiguity leads to the search for the origin of values, the development of values, and the importance of appropriate values. The following section provides a glimpse at only a few perspectives on these

issues, but it lays the foundation for value transformation and the application of values—particularly Christian values—in organizations.

The Genesis and Development of Values

Values come about through a combination of experiences and learning: exposure to situations and information, and interpretation of those experiences. Interaction and socialization, which help to form common values, also play important roles. Numerous theories exist to explain this process (Boudon, 2001; Joas, 2000). According to Boudon and Joas, Friedrich Nietzsche introduced the role of resentment, which was later refined by Max Scheler who reflected the impact of psychological appeasement. Boudon suggested that others, such as Clifford Geertz, noted that the socialization process establishes values that vary from culture to culture. However, Boudon credited Emil Durkheim with pointing out that even when beliefs are consistent with those of others, at some point the believer is likely to question the validity of the belief solely on the merits of truth. This may explain why Boudon emphasized that Max Weber “insists heavily on the role of rationality in moral life and history” (p. 7). Unless the logic of human beliefs is understandable, how can those beliefs be viewed as anything other than illusions or decisions void of logic?

Philosophy and religion also play a role in the origin and development of values (Boudon, 2001; Joas, 2000). What is right, or normal, or perceived to be good may not be right, or normal, or good to those with different beliefs. Furthermore, values continue to form and change over time. As circumstances change and new information becomes available, individuals reflect on the nature and truth of those experiences, which can change their feelings or beliefs. Nevertheless, true Christian values, reflecting acceptance of Jesus Christ as one’s Lord and Savior, anchor religious and spiritual values to biblical standards. These standards establish a solid foundation for a set of permanent, core values: values that come from the highest authority and are based on truth and love.

Because values vary among different societies and cultures, the potential exists for conflict among groups with different commonly held beliefs. Biblical values can help to resolve this conflict. After all, it is far more difficult to argue against collective, universal values when the origin of those values is the supreme creator of the universe.

Ultimately, beliefs lead to behavior. Furthermore, behavior that is consistent with expressed values is essential for establishing credibility. Simons (1999) argued that behavioral integrity is “a critical ingredient for transformational leadership” (p. 89). Without behavioral integrity, leaders undermine their own credibility, destroy trust, and risk losing the commitment of their people. Bredfeldt (2006) and Covey (2006) both discussed the importance of trust in relationships. These authors noted that trust is a function of credibility, which relies on character and competency. Character is based on integrity and intent, while competency is based on capability and results (Covey, 2006). Without behavioral integrity and wholesome intent, which rest to some degree on perceived results, credibility is lost. However, behavioral integrity and wholesome intent originate from a transformed heart. Before Christian leaders should attempt transformational leadership, it stands to reason that they should first be transformed by the love of God. After all, transformation plays a pivotal role in the process of establishing and developing Christian values.

Value Transformation

While many paths can precede salvation, only one path leads to salvation as described in the Bible. Isaiah 45:5 states, “I am the LORD, and there is no other” (New Revised Standard Version). Verse 22 goes on to declare, “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!” For New Testament confirmation, Acts 4:11-12 states, “This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.’ There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” The Bible makes it very clear that salvation comes from God through the person of Jesus

Christ. It is a free gift for all who believe in Him (John 3:16). Salvation through acceptance of Christ does more, however, than pardon humanity. Salvation sets the stage for transformation.

Acceptance of Christ transforms an individual. As the Bible states in 2nd Corinthians 5:17, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” This scripture reflects the transformation that occurs when someone accepts Christ; however, the scriptures following this section of the Bible reflect the importance of reconciliation and the ongoing transformation process that Christians embark upon, having accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Biblical values may be eternal, but they must be learned and embraced to take root.

In sanctification, new believers turn over their personal, individual rights, relinquishing authority to Jesus Christ and identifying completely with the will of God (Chambers, 1992). To do so, Christians need to know the difference between right and wrong and good and evil. They need to know what God expects, and the Bible establishes clear guidelines. Christians learn the Great Commandments from Matthew 22:37-40.

‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’

This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

These New Testament commandments in conjunction with the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20:1-17 establish a foundation for Christian values. However, as the Bible states in 2nd Timothy 3:16-17, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” These scriptures instruct Christians to respect the word of God as the final authority for establishing and maintaining Christian values. For a Christian leader, these values have great significance beyond the leader’s private and personal life

(Beckett, 2001; Burkett, 1998; Hillman, 2004; Sherman & Hendricks, 1987; Silvos, 2002). These values should have a strong influence on how Christian leaders lead in the work environment.

Values and Organizations

The collective values of organizational members help to establish organizational culture (Yukl, 2002; O’toole, 1996). According to Yukl, an organization’s culture reflects “the shared values and beliefs of members about the activities of the organization and interpersonal relationships” (p. 108). Yukl also noted that “the underlying beliefs representing the culture of a group or organization are learned responses to problems of survival in the external environment and problems of internal integration” (p. 279). While shared values are essential, organizational culture is established based on a competing values framework (Cameron & Quinn, 2006).

Leaders frequently make decisions based on competing values (Daft, 2007; Heizer & Render, 1991; Helmkamp, 1990; Pfeffer, 1998; Stoner, 1982; Yukl, 2002). For example, when making decisions, leaders are often forced to choose among cost, speed, quality, and commitment to people. The need for quality may require additional cost, additional time, and a consensus among constituents. When constrained by time, leaders may be forced to spend more money or sacrifice quality or consensus. When constrained by cost, investments in time, quality, or consensus may be sacrificed. Although organizations might prefer to have consensus and quality, constraints of time and cost generally establish levels of quality and the commitment to consensus.

Another example involves value shifts based on levels of responsibility. As leaders migrate through various organizational positions, their values generally shift from a narrow, tactical perspective towards a broader, strategic perspective (Charan, Drotter, & Noel, 2001). Timing and circumstances can significantly

influence the decisions that leaders need to make, the values that leaders reflect, and, ultimately, the cultures that leaders reinforce.

Cameron and Quinn (2006) identified four primary cultures—clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy—to facilitate the identification and adaptation of organizational cultures. Each of these culture types reflects values indicative of their dominant characteristics. By assessing an organization's current culture and determining the desired future culture for the organization, leaders are better prepared to establish alignment between the values of organizational members and the organization's culture. It is also true that leaders can better position their organizations for the future. The future, however, may not turn out as leaders anticipate.

The rate and magnitude of change have dramatically altered many perspectives about the future. Although change is expected, it is hard to know what to expect from the kind of change that exists today. However, values and organizational culture play instrumental roles in organizational change efforts. In fact, it is believed that major change initiatives typically fail because they fail to account for the impact of values and culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Head, 1997; Kotter, 1996; O'toole, 1996). Organizational members resist change when their values are not aligned with organizational values and culture. It is also worth noting that transformational efforts take time to succeed, which can be contrary to the expectations for immediate results, which are so prevalent in a frenzied world seeking near-term gratification. This issue is no trivial matter, as most worthwhile initiatives to improve performance through "The Human Equation" (Pfeffer, 1998) take significant effort and a long-term commitment.

Because the world is changing so rapidly, it can be very difficult for leaders to create the right balance among many competing demands. Leaders are constantly forced to make decisions under the pressures and stresses of extreme competition, globalization, economic turmoil, social instability, and the deployment of new technologies (Bennis, 1999). There are almost always constraints and competing values among constituents.

Reflecting these considerations, O'toole (1996) summed up values-based leadership with the following statement: "At its core, the process of values-based leadership is the creation of moral symmetry among those with competing values" (p. 258). He went on to state that "values-based leadership brings order to the whole by creating transcendent values that provide a tent large enough to hold all the different aspirations" (p. 258). It is more than just a mere compromise. When all sides are heard, opportunities frequently surface that can provide for mutually beneficial alternatives.

Christian Values and Organizations

Although leaders regularly need to manage a variety of tradeoffs, Christian leaders should reflect their Christian values by being good stewards and by demonstrating servant leadership and love. As Paul wrote in 1st Corinthians 10:31-33,

Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved.

In Romans 13:7 Paul wrote, "Pay to all what is due them.... Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." Ephesians chapter 4 reminds Christians to operate in unity of the Spirit, using God given gifts to their fullest, acknowledging sound doctrine, and "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15). Paul emphasized that Christians need to grow in Christ until the whole body of believers is neatly joined together and working effectively, walking in the light of Christ and operating in love. They are to be renewed and recreated into the likeness of God with true holiness and righteousness. Verses 29 to 32 remind Christians to speak no evil but only that which lifts others up. Christians are to avoid malice, anger, and slander; furthermore, they are to be kindhearted and forgiving. In 1st Timothy 3:1-12, Paul outlined expectations for church leaders, which should apply to all Christian leaders. They were to be above reproach,

well-tempered, levelheaded, respected, and capable teachers who managed their own households respectably. They were to be tested and proven not to be quarrelsome or greedy. As Paul reflected in 1st Timothy 6:3-11, disagreement with the words of Christ and the teaching of false doctrines come from conceit and a desire for controversy. These can lead to all manner of evil. The purpose of godliness should not be construed as a means for gain. It is not that godliness will not produce joy or prosperity; it will. However, Christians are not to place material gain over “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, [and] gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11).

Servant leadership should be the norm for Christian leaders. Acts 20:35 suggests that “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Matthew 20:25-28 serves as a reminder that Christian leaders are not to Lord over others. Just as Christ came to serve humankind, Christians are to be servant minded and servant leaders. These scriptures reinforce the notions of stewardship, servant leadership, and love. Without Christian values and ethical conduct, Christian leaders cannot position themselves optimally to do right by their organizations or the people they serve. It is only with a contrite heart, full of the love of God, that Christian leaders can operate in obedience to God and in the fullness of His blessing. Without the love of God and the conviction to operate with Christian values, Christian leaders might easily fall into the same traps as other leaders who too often operate in self-interest, vain glory, or a for-profit motive that ignores the human impact.

Part of the moral dilemma is that gaps exist between the various “worlds” in which leaders operate. Varying experiences—in church settings, in the home, in public places, and in the work environment—present opportunities for leaders to exhibit multiple value systems. Even within a given system, values can be ignored or distorted. These inconsistencies can be very damaging. A lack of integrity, malicious intent, inconsistent results, and a perceived lack of ability can destroy credibility, which is essential for wholesome relationships

and authentic leadership. Authentic leadership requires that leaders participate as moral agents, striving for “noble ends, legitimate means, and fair consequences” (Ciulla, 2004, p. 193).

Kunnalath (2006) in his review of *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday: The Challenge of Fusing Christian Values with Business Life* stated: “There is a vast chasm today between church and business that hurts both sides” (p. 65). Church culture has not adequately engaged with the corporate world or the everyday lives of Christian business people. In the context of the Enron scandal, Beckett (2007) related that core values are of no real use “if they’re not worked into the fabric of the organization” (p. 125). If leaders separate their faith from the world in which they work, ethical failures are likely to occur. Finally, Rothchild (2005) suggested that legal regulation, while necessary, is insufficient to control corporate behavior. It would seem that only consistent, strong moral values are sufficient to avoid corporate misconduct. This article strongly suggests that those values have the best chance of succeeding when they originate with God and have transformed an individual through the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Conclusions

Values are understood to mean different things to different people. Even the definition and description of what values are can be interpreted differently. It should be no surprise, therefore, that different people view the origin of values and the development of values in different ways. For the Christian, however, there is a set of values that is understood to be absolute. This perspective comes from a Christian worldview that is biblically based. Nash (1992) suggested that world views should be reasonable, relevant, and applicable in the real world, concluding that a Christian worldview meets these criteria. As Christian leaders transmit their values, it seems only logical that their values should be as consistent as possible with a Christian worldview.

Christian values, which are reflected in the Bible, originate from the transfer of knowledge about God and humankind through biblical understanding. Values develop as biblical wisdom and understanding grow, and they become absolute as an individual is transformed by the saving grace of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The ongoing process of development and transformation occurs as believers dedicate themselves to living a godly life based on biblical principles. Part of that process is for Christian leaders to reflect godly values in the organizations that they work for. By placing Christ at the center of Christian values, Christian leaders, through commendable values and ethical behavior, can demonstrate to others an unnatural commitment to truth and love. By reflecting the love of God through servant leadership and integrity, Christian leaders have more than just an opportunity to benefit their organizations: they have an opportunity to be a witness for Christ, transforming the lives of others.

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Biography

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