

Leadership for Our Times



A look at:

- Authority
- Leadership Style
- Today's Challenges

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Leadership for Our Times - 1

Fresh Start

Talking Points

The Bible is full of people who provided leadership and were viewed with authority by God's people. They exercised leadership in a variety of ways, sometimes reluctantly, and some of them were able to see God's hand at work even as the world around them was changing and to challenge people to adapt. The prophets of the exile are such leaders, raising questions about how the community will respond to the uncertain future awaiting it in exile. Jesus, too, called his disciples into leadership for a different world than they knew. Our times as well call for leaders who can lead in uncertain times.

As we begin our discussion, I'd like to start with some questions about what leadership means to you.

What words does "leadership" call to mind? **Facilitate a group brainstorming, capturing the ideas on a flip chart.**

Why would you follow a leader? Where does a leader's authority come from? **Facilitate a group brainstorming, capturing the ideas on a flip chart.**

Where Does Leadership Authority Lie?

- **Position** – follow because they have to
- **Expertise** – follow because they lack knowledge
- **Results** – follow because of what you achieve
- **Relationship** – follow because they like you
- **Personal Authenticity** – follow because they respect you and what you represent

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Talking Points

We usually think of authority deriving from one's position, expertise, results, relationship, or personal authenticity. Think about Moses – when the Israelites finally followed him it was largely because of the impressive results he demonstrated to pharaoh (though their initial response to Moses' leadership was rather tepid). He had God-given position and authority, but even that did not keep people from grumbling and, some, from leaving while in the wilderness. Over time relationships and his personal authenticity probably kept the Israelites together.

**“Being in power is like being a lady.
If you have to remind people that
you are, you aren’t.”**

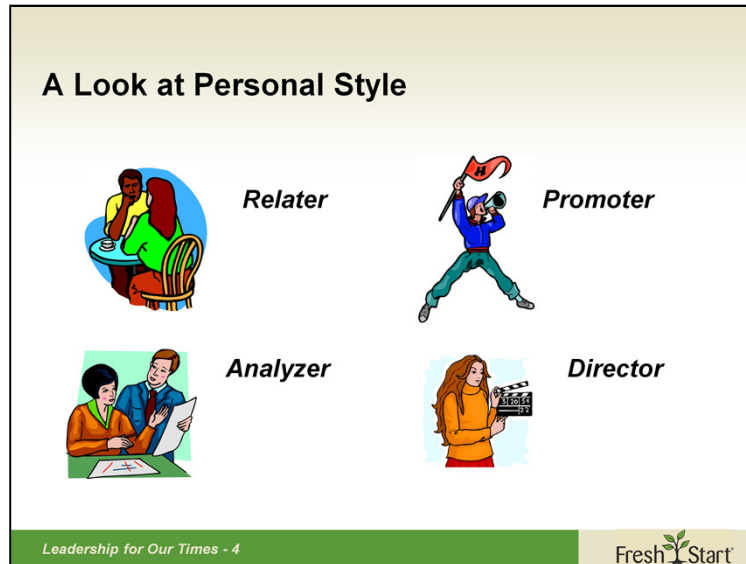
Margaret Thatcher

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Talking Points

Of the different sources of authority, reliance on the authority of position is the least effective and is an approach increasingly at odds with a culture that challenges authority. Even expertise in a world where many of the issues we face have no obvious solutions may be shaky ground upon which to stake your claim to authority, and if you fail to produce results you can lose followers even if you have been successful in the past. Relationships and authenticity are the most important sources of authority in today’s world.



Talking Points

Our exercise of authority and leadership is affected by our personal style. Effective leadership comes in many forms. All of us have our preferred styles, and the most effective of us can access whatever style is needed for the situation regardless of our preferred mode of operating.

Let's take a moment to reflect on our preferred styles of leadership.

Distribute Handout 1a, "Who Am I as a Leader?" and give participants time to write their responses. When they are done, have them "score" themselves using Handout 1b.*

What is your predominant style (i.e., the one where you circled the most adjectives)? Does that "ring true" to you? Did you find that your styles were mixed? Let's look at these same styles in a different way.

Distribute Handout 1c of "Who Am I as a Leader?" and give participants time to write their responses. When they are done, distribute Handout 1d.

Compare your answers on Handout 1c to the descriptions I just gave you. Are you "true to type"? Where are there similarities? Where are there differences? How does the style you discovered this time compare to the one you identified when you circled the adjectives in Handout 1b? Are they the same or different?

Facilitate a general discussion.

****Note – you can also distribute Handouts 1a-d stapled together and ask them to work through one sheet at a time, not looking ahead, then facilitate a general discussion as above.***

The Gifts of Style	The Challenges
Relater: Warmth, concern for impact on people, subjective analysis	Relater: Overly protective; prone to manipulation and obsessive worrying
Promoter: Enthusiasm, ability to “sell” the vision	Promoter: Tunnel-vision; feel rejected if challenged
Analyzer: Objectivity, eye for data, organization; strategy	Analyzer: Callousness; analysis paralysis
Director: Decisiveness; ability to see the “big picture”	Director: “Lone Ranger” mentality; too quick to decide

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Talking Points

All styles of leadership are needed – and need each other. Here are some of the things each style brings to the leadership table. At the same time, every style has a “down side” – times when the style works against them.

When has your preferred leadership style worked for you? When has it been problematic? Find a partner and share a story about a time when you exercised leadership effectively. What was the situation (briefly)? What did you do? What was the outcome? Then talk about a time when your preferred leadership style was not effective. Again, what was the situation? What did you do? What was the outcome? You will have 10 minutes each to share your stories.

Keep track of time and give the pairs a 10 minute warning so they can switch roles (listener to talker). After 20 minutes reconvene the group and facilitate a report out of what they have learned.

I would encourage you to give the list of attributes from Handout 1a and ask several people you trust to circle the six that represent your greatest strengths. Are their lists the same as yours? Are they different from each other? You might ask them when they have seen you exercising your strengths, as well as when they have seen you challenged. It will be a good way to get some feedback and to corroborate your self-assessment.

Keeping these gifts and challenges of style in mind, let’s look at the issues facing your congregation. What are they?

Facilitate a brainstorming session, capturing the issues on a flip chart and posting it for future reference.

Technical vs. Adaptive Situations

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| • Problem clear | • Problem complex |
| • Solution clear | • Solution requires learning |
| • Expertise required | • No expertise available |
| • Leader as expert | • Leader as facilitator |
| • Dependency | • Interdependence |

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Talking Points

Ronald Heifetz, director of the Leadership Project at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, provides a model for sorting the challenges faced by leaders today. Heifetz, who is also a medical doctor, uses medical analogies to distinguish between what he calls technical problems and adaptive ones. A broken bone is an example of a technical problem – the problem is well-defined, as is the treatment. The doctor serves as the expert and sets the bone; the patient is dependent upon the expertise of the doctor for a good outcome. Terminal cancer is an example of an adaptive challenge – the problem is not the cancer, it is getting the patient to adapt to the reality of death and prepare for it. Meeting the challenge requires learning on the part of the patient (prognosis, what needs to be done to prepare for the end of life, etc.). The doctor can provide support, palliative care, and encouragement but ultimately meeting the challenge successfully requires the patient's actions more than the doctor's.

Some challenges can be a mix of the two. Heifetz uses treating stress as an example – the doctor has some technical expertise that can help, but the patient must make changes in lifestyle (diet, exercise, etc.) in order for there to be a cure. So while the problem is clear, the solution requires learning and cooperation on the part of the patient. **Distribute Handout 2.**

What of the challenges facing your congregations are technical? Adaptive? A mix? **Refer back to the list on the flip chart.**

Distribute Handout 3 and have them work through the questions individually, then share their responses in their small groups or facilitate a large group discussion. If discussion occurs in small groups, hold a large group debrief afterwards to share what they have learned.

Focus on Relationships: Seeing the Big Picture



*If a butterfly flaps
his wings in Brazil,
does it cause
tornadoes in Texas?*

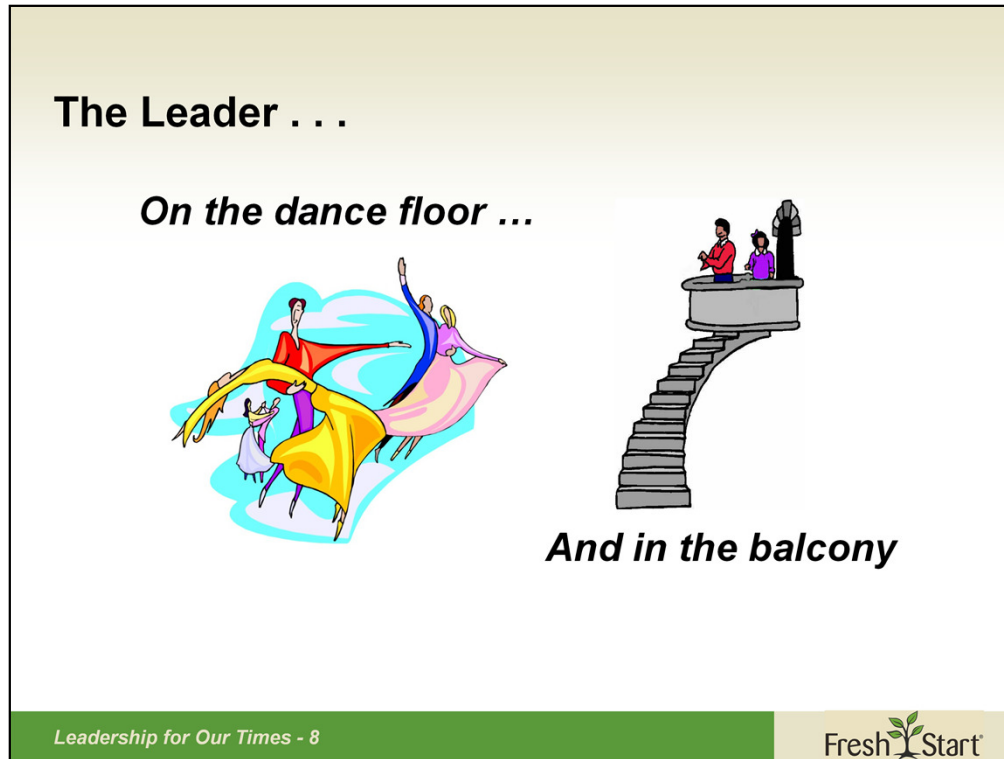
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Talking Points

Another aspect of the challenges facing us today is our increasing understanding that much of life is interconnected – one must deal with the “whole system” if the challenges are to be met. The “butterfly effect,” attributed to American mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz has become a common illustration of power relationships and interdependence in the world. And for Christians, the symbol is apt for the butterfly is a sign of the resurrection itself.

But if all life is somehow connected, what does that imply for leadership?



Talking Points


An important aspect of leadership becomes the ability to see things from a whole systems perspective.

Heifetz, William Ury, Peter Steinke and others who study leadership discuss the need for the leader to both engage in the work AND periodically withdraw in order to view the patterns of what is happening. The images invoked are of being on the dance floor or on the stage and then retiring to the balcony to watch the patterns of action below. We find similar behavior on the part of adaptive leaders in the Bible: Think of Moses retreating to the mountain top to commune with God, then engaging the Israelites by walking among the camps and dealing with the very real issues of feeding and leading them through the wilderness. Or Jesus taking time from his active ministry to rest and pray for direction.

If time for observation and reflection is not found, it is difficult to assess the whole – from the floor you can only see a small part of the whole. But the balcony cannot be a retreat – after observation and reflection, the leader must return to the floor to influence the work itself.

The Work of the Leader in Adaptive Situations

- Identify the underlying issues
- Balance action and need for agreement
- Keep the focus
- Reflect the problem so others see need to change
- Protect voices of dissent



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Talking Points

Adaptive challenges arise from conflicts around values or strategy or from gaps between shared values and the reality of people's lives. From the balcony, the leader needs to look at the whole picture, identifying the challenge. What is causing the distress? What does history have to say about the causes? Are there contradictions or paradoxes inherent? What do different groups or individuals (including the leader) represent in the way of perspectives and interests? Is the conflict mirroring what is going on in the larger community of which the congregation is a part?

With the challenge identified, the leader's role becomes one of regulating the amount of anxiety or distress in the system. A pressure cooker regulates the heat so that food gets cooked, but the pan doesn't blow up. So a leader facing an adaptive challenge needs to keep the pressure high enough that movement (a resolution) can be found without having it become so high that the community falls apart.

Sometimes when people or systems are under stress, they simply go into denial or turn their attention to something that is less knotty to solve. The leader needs to keep the attention focused on the real challenge, and not let the congregation (or self) become distracted.


The leader needs to avoid assuming responsibility for the outcome in adaptive situations – returning responsibility to those for whom change or adaptation is required. Remember, in adaptive challenges, there is no one right answer! And allowing the system to fail may be necessary to getting the challenge met.

Sometimes the people who raise the hard questions involved in meeting an adaptive challenge are ostracized by others. Truth tellers are often those at the margin of the system – they see things more objectively than those whose interests are more entangled in the issue. The leader needs to make sure that their voices are not silenced.

How do these apply to the adaptive (or mixed adaptive/technical) challenges you identified for your congregation? What do you need to think about doing?


Distribute Handout 4 and give participants time to write down their responses, then to share them with their small group or facilitate a large group discussion. If discussion occurs in small groups, reconvene the whole group to share what they have learned.

Questions, Not Answers



“The wicked leader is he whom the people despise. The good leader is he whom the people revere. The great leader is he whose people say, ‘We did it ourselves.’”

Lao-Tzu

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Talking Points

The title of Heifetz’s primary work sums up adaptive leadership – Leadership Without Easy Answers. Like the doctor faced with a patient with a terminal illness, the role of the leader becomes one of posing the questions that the congregation needs to struggle with, not succumbing to people’s felt need for answers.

Go back to the adaptive challenges you identified for your congregation. What are some of the questions that you need to be raising?

Give participants a few minutes to think about some questions that should be raised, then either have them share them with their small group or facilitate a general sharing.

The Non-Anxious Presence



“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

Galatians 5:22

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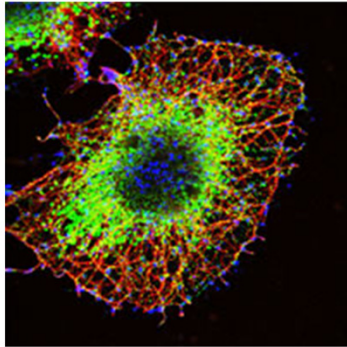
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Talking Points

In this kind of a world, the key role of the leader is to remain the non-anxious presence. As Peter Steinke points out in his book, Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What, this is really a state of being – the capacity to:

- Stay in control of one’s own emotions and reactions
- Withdraw sufficiently from the heat of the moment to observe what is happening, including in oneself (get up on the “balcony”)
- Reflect on one’s observations
- Tolerate ambiguity and pain
- Maintain a clear sense of direction

Boundaries



**“Beginning with cells,
all living things
have boundaries.”**

Peter Steinke

Talking Points

Part of staying a non-anxious presence is having a clear sense of self, of one's boundaries. This cell wall needs to be firm enough so that you can think and act for yourself, while being permeable and flexible enough to allow for connections to others. Boundaries allow you to protect yourself and for others to protect themselves as well. Encouraging respect for boundaries is another key task of the leader.

Steinke's Model of Influence

Circumstance

- Crisis
- Bewilderment
- Stagnancy
- New situations

Leader's Influence

- Calm
- Focus
- Challenge
- Change

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Talking Points

Steinke views leaders as needing to provide different types of influence depending upon the challenges facing the congregation: to restore calm during a crisis, to help focus energies when there is bewilderment, to challenge the congregation when things are stagnant, and to help the congregation change when that is required.

Look at the two or three congregational challenges you identified in Handout 3. Under which of Steinke's circumstance categories would you place them? What does that say about the approach you should take? What might you want to continue to do? What might you want to change about your approach?

Give participants several minutes to categorize the challenges they identified and come up with an appropriate response to the situation. Have them share their thoughts with their small group or facilitate a large group discussion. If the discussion occurs in small groups, reconvene the large group to share what they have learned.

Some Final Thoughts . . .

- Distinguish between **self** and **role as a leader**
- Externalize conflict
- Find partners
- Keep in touch with yourself
- Find a sanctuary
- Preserve your sense of values and purpose

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Talking Points

Staying calm in the midst of all that is going on isn't easy. Here are some things to think about.

Be clear on your personal boundaries – don't confuse your self with your role. That will make it easier to not take criticisms (and there will be some) personally.


Focus attention on the issues and don't internalize the conflict, framing the conflict in ways that allow people to see that change (adaptation) is required. For example, remember how Martin Luther King, Jr., never characterized the civil rights conflict as one between blacks and whites, but as one between the American value of equality and the realities of American life.

The "lone ranger" is a myth – you need confidantes and allies. Find them.

Use balcony time to observe yourself, your feelings, your impact on the group, your own biases and reactions. It will enable you to take a deep breath and modify your behavior if need be.

Take time for spiritual and physical rest.

Remember what you are doing this for – don't lose sight of your values and purpose.



**“The Lord is my light and my salvation;
Whom then shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
Of whom then shall I be afraid?
I believe that I shall see
The goodness of the Lord
In the land of the living.
Wait for the Lord;
Be strong, and let your heart
take courage;
Wait for the Lord!”**

Psalm 27:1,13-14

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Talking Points

We end with words from Psalm 27: 1, 13, and 14 – for it is the Christian message of hope in the goodness of the Lord and his command to have courage that can be a touchstone for all of us facing adaptive challenges.