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How to Perfect Your Leadership Triangle

The most effective pastors, staff, committee chairs, and ministry-team coordinators possess three skills in equal proportions: relational, organizational, and spiritual.

Relational Leadership

Yes, church leaders need more than relational skill. But without relational skill, other skills become irrelevant. Relational skill includes twenty qualities:

1. Joyful Attitude—spiritual institutions whose leaders need a joy transfusion attract few participants.

2. Sense of Humor—counteracts the tendency to develop an overly serious demeanor that is the personality equivalent of a turpentine bottle.

3. Enthusiasm—displayed in facial expressions, body language, and words.

4. Optimism—which the Bible calls *hope*. People who dispense this quality in their conversations tend to attract rather than repel allegiance to themselves and their goals.

5. Caring Spirit—genuine interest in people and a concern for their individual needs.

6. Indiscriminate Affirmation—praise-filled conversations, despite bushels of reasons to go in the opposite direction.

7. Sensitivity—the ability to understand people and their reaction patterns.

8. Objectivity—the ability to accurately assess and respond to reality, which protects people from seeing issues through a window of bias and emotional distortion.

9. Forgiving Spirit—a poor memory of wrongs done by others, which counterbalances the wrongs observed via objectivity.

10. Nonjudgmental Nature—the habit of communicating grace to people who do not share identical moral, ethical, or religious standards.

11. Receptive Listener—able to gather information and insights from conversations with people who express a wide variety of concerns and opinions.

12. Openness to Considering New Ideas—the inclination to express a “Why not?” attitude when listening to a proposal, instead of blocking new ideas by immediately citing several reasons why they won’t work.

13. Forthrightness—the courage to sensitively share concerns with others, even at the risk of alienation.

14. Communication Skill—the ability to clearly express ideas and goals.

15. Effective Conflict Manager—with regard to both personal criticism and organizational-conflict issues.

16. Cooperative Spirit—a team player who can mesh personal goals with those of other church leaders, in contrast to coming across as defensive, paranoid, or argumentative.

17. Honesty and Integrity—consistently (a) keeping promises, (b) functioning responsibly, even when tasks are not especially enjoyable, (c) leading a disciplined moral life, and (d) communicating identical information to various groups and individuals, rather than shading reality to tell people what they want to hear.

18. Humility—serving without a demand for public recognition.

19. High Energy Level—the stamina to maintain a fast pace and juggle several demands simultaneously, without complaining of overwork.

20. Positive Appearance—clean, neat, and appropriate apparel, shined shoes, and well-kept hair.

Can you think of people serving in church roles who lack one or several of these relational qualities? Does that deficiency damage their leadership influence?



Equalizing one's skill sets makes for more effective leadership.

Organizational Leadership

Not all church leaders with high relational skills possess strong organizational abilities. An executive coach who works with both churches and corporations lists five prescriptions for successful leaders of organizations:

1. Get clear regarding goals and standards. Understand what you are trying to accomplish and how you plan to measure the results.

2. Communicate goals and standards. Make sure that everyone is clear about expectations and feels accountable for results.

3. Set direction for and coordinate the work of others. Develop a disposition toward delegation—the inclination to coach the team rather than try to play all of the positions.

4. Address problems sooner rather than later. Instead of running from potential conflict, approach it as an opportunity to care about people and increase their satisfaction with a job well done.

5. Provide feedback to team members. Frequently applaud actions that support the organization's goals. When things do not go well, explain why a change in approach is beneficial. [Scott Eblin, "Pastors and Managers," *Congregations*, September/October 2001, The Albin Institute, pp. 22-24]

Can you think of people serving in church roles who lack one or more of these organizational qualities? Does that deficiency damage their leadership influence?

Spiritual Leadership

Effective church leaders possess more than relational and organizational skills. They give the overall impression that encouraging people to strengthen their spiritual connection with God is one of their primary goals.

The five behaviors listed below are not the only means by which people achieve spiritual growth. However, people in a national survey said that these five are the most powerful means by which they moved closer to God and grew in Christian discipleship. [Herb Miller, *Connecting With God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994)]

1. Worship: This helps us to focus on God and to sense God's presence. Be deciding to worship, we say that we are not sufficient by ourselves. We need another God besides our own ego.

2. Prayer: This lets God into our lives in four primary ways. Through prayer, God (a) changes our reality, (b) speaks to us, (c) redecorates our interiors, and (d) moves us toward our life goals. Until we are ready to put ourselves second instead of first, we do not pray.

3. Fellowship: This is one of God's ways of reinforcing our inclination to spiritually connect with, and stay connected with, God's goals for our life. Fellowship with other Christians increases our self-esteem in ways that make us more open to (a) listening to God's guidance and (b) making positive changes in our lives.

4. Bible Study: This is another tool that helps us hear God speaking to us and moves us closer to God in our

thinking and behavior. Participation in a regularly meeting group that focuses on Bible study helps us stick to our values and ideals.

5. Financial Stewardship: Why do the four Gospels report Jesus talking more about money than about love or repentance? Then, as now, people are tempted to put the god of their money ahead of the real God; and thus, break the first commandment—"You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Giving financially to God keeps money idolatry from replacing God and destroying our ability to grow spiritually.

Can you think of people serving in church roles who lack one or more of these spiritual qualities? Does that deficiency damage their leadership influence?

Equalizing Your Triangle

The three sides of an equilateral triangle are the same length. Shortening one side changes the triangle's character. Most people serving in church roles are stronger in one of the their triangle's three sides than in the other two. They rationalize that imbalance by thinking, "If I excel in my gifted side, the other two sides will take care of themselves." That assumption is inaccurate.

Productive self-evaluation requires feedback from others. Pick six people whom you trust. Ask them to meet with you as a group for two hours. Open the meeting by asking everyone to keep the discussion confidential.

Hand each person a copy of this *Parish Paper* issue. Without discussion, ask each person to rank you on each item, using a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest. Ask people not to sign their names.

Collect the sheets. During a break, ask someone to tabulate the answers and calculate the average score for each item. Distribute another copy of this *Parish Paper* issue. As you read the averages aloud, ask group members to write the average beside each of the items.

On the five items with the highest scores, go around the room, asking everyone to say one sentence regarding why she or he thinks that score is high.

On the five items with the lowest scores, go around the room, asking everyone to say one sentence regarding how you might strengthen that quality.

Articulate to the group any points at which you need their help or the help of other church leaders in strengthening these traits.

Close with one-sentence prayers, asking each person in the group to pray.

The Bottom Line

In which side of the leadership triangle are you most gifted. How can you lengthen the other two sides?