



Servant Leadership

LEADERS & STAFF



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SERVANT LEADERSHIP**Leader's Guide**

How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Christianity Today, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

"Practical Ministry Skills" is completely flexible and designed to be easy to use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of church ministry and comprises brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

This theme on servant leadership is designed to help you gain a biblical foundation of what servant leadership really means, to learn how to apply these principles to your leadership, and to train those you lead to do the same. You may use it for a training session or give it to key people involved in leadership. Simply print the handouts needed and use them as necessary.

For an introduction on the biblical foundations of servanthood, read "The Heart of a Servant Leader" (p. 3) and "Building Servant Leaders" (p. 8). For a theological reflection on the principles of servant leadership displayed in Ezekiel, read "Principles of Relational Leadership" (pp. 4–6). In "Called to Serve" (p. 8–11) three prominent ministry leaders draw from their years of pastoral ministry to help define what it means to practice servant leadership. Read "Serving as a Team" (pp. 13–14) for tips on serving your staff and equipping them for servant leadership. "Maintaining the Balance" (p. 15–20) offers practical tips for avoiding burnout while heeding your call to servant leadership.

We hope you find this theme eye opening and useful as you and your ministry team seek model servant leadership to each other, to your congregation, and to the surrounding community.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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SERVANT LEADERSHIP**The Heart of a Servant Leader**

We are servants first and leaders second.

Ephesians 6:6

The heart is the very seat of our soul, our emotions, and our passions. It is the very essence of our being and that which drives our thoughts and our motives. No wonder God tells us to guard our hearts (Prov. 4:23).

The heart of a leader is the foundation of his or her life. It is what drives her passion for the Lord and her passion for service in the kingdom. No doubt most of us feel called to lead in a deep way from the bottom of our hearts.

And yet, with seemingly little notice, out of our hearts can spew some of the most ungodly thoughts and attitudes—even in the midst of ministry. It was only a few weeks ago that something happened to totally unnerve me. Surely you know the feeling. I was less than thrilled with a situation (and in particular with one of many bosses) and was just about to share from the seat of my emotions the most spirit-filled reaction to what was happening when God intervened.

The person was not there for me to share with! And now I thank God for that. My spirit-filling was not coming from God; it was coming from the enemy. Even though I felt righteous in my motive, it certainly was not the best way to handle things. As leaders, we must be constantly aware that the enemy will do everything he can to render us ineffective in service to our Lord.

I had to come before the Lord and pray to him, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10).

“Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name” (Ps. 86:11). “Refresh my heart in Christ” (Pm. 1:20b). God gave me his promise in response,

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26).

To be a servant leader, we need to keep in mind that we are servants first and leaders second. We must learn to model Christ-like servanthood in every situation. God has chosen us to lead. Not only must we be strong and do the work, we must be strong in our wholehearted devotion to him and remember who we are working for! He is in control of every situation.

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col. 3:23–24).

—JAYE MARTIN serves as director of women’s leadership at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) in Louisville, Kentucky; adapted from our sister site *Gifted for Leadership*, © 2009 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.giftedforleadership.com.

Discuss

1. How would you describe your heart? What attitudes and feelings most often reside there?
2. What does it look to be a servant first and a leader second? Is this something you consciously think about in your ministry?
3. How does servanthood relate to your call to leadership?

SERVANT LEADERSHIP**Principles of Relational Leadership***Five working principles for effective servant leadership.*

Ezekiel 34:1–24

You are probably familiar with the powerful words of Ezekiel to the leaders of Israel in Ezekiel 34. If these are not immediately familiar, I encourage you to read them regularly. In a scathing denunciation of leaders who used their power and position to get fat off of God’s flock rather than to shepherd them, Ezekiel reminds us all of our accountability to God for the exercise of our leadership. It is a strong message, but it strikes a note of accountability to God that anyone engaging in leading others should keep in mind.

That is precisely the image that sits in Jude’s mind as he writes against some would-be leaders in his community. Six hundred years after Ezekiel, nothing has changed. Jude, the brother of our Lord, challenges the self-proclaimed leaders about the same misuse of power that God had addressed through Ezekiel. Jude uses the language of Ezekiel as he addresses his community of believers, counseling them against the leadership of false teachers within their ranks who are flaunting their power and seeking to promote themselves as the leaders of this religious community.

In his powerful critique of the ungodly leadership he was observing, Jude uses five graphic images of the non-leader (all found in verses 12 and 13), and in so doing, I believe, gives us five working principles for effective servant leadership.

Principle 1: Leadership is about influence and service.

Jude’s first image is of “shepherds who feed only themselves” (v. 12). These leaders use their power for their own benefit. As we see in Ezekiel and elsewhere in the Bible, the shepherd is a common image for leadership, modeling the care and investment that the leader must make for the growth and nurture of the followers. Jude, however, confronts the false leaders in the community to which he writes for precisely the same reason Ezekiel attacked the ungodly shepherds of Israel. They are using their power, not for the nurture of the community, but to draw people to themselves, to put themselves on a pedestal above the rules and values of the community. They are getting fat off the flock.

Servant leadership, on the other hand, is community-directed. It uses its power for the growth of those who are being led and the accomplishment of the shared mission of the community.

In its broadest definition, leadership is a relationship of influence. It is a relationship between two people in which one person seeks to influence the vision, values, attitudes, or behaviors of the other. This definition makes it clear that everyone exercises leadership. At one time or another, we all seek to exert such influence and thus engage in leadership.

When leadership is formally granted to a person by a group, community, or organization—when that person is given the responsibility of being a shepherd—that leadership carries with it the expectation that the influence will be directed toward two purposes: the accomplishment of a mission or objective shared by the leader and the followers and the care and nurture of the community or organization.

Personally, leadership is a relationship of influence. Organizationally, it is a relationship of influence with purpose: maintaining the community and achieving the shared mission. When leadership is truly exercised in our organizations and in our churches, the mission is being accomplished and people are growing into community.

Principle 2: Leadership is about vision and hope.

Jude’s second image is just as potent. Non-servant leaders are “clouds without rain, blown along by the wind” (v. 12). Imagine a farmer in a hot desert countryside trying to scratch out a living in the harsh climate. As he looks to the sky, he sees a cloud heading his way. The promise of rain looms large on the horizon. He has a vision of crops growing, of food on the table. And yet the clouds pass by, blown along by the wind, failing to deliver on their promise. The vision withers.

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Jude is accusing the false leaders of promising a future to the people but not delivering. They are too intent on following their own desires and pursuing their spiritual visions to empower the dreams of the people they claim to lead.

Leadership is about vision. It is about tomorrow, about hope, about mission. Leadership articulates a compelling vision for tomorrow that captures the imagination of the followers and energizes their attitudes and actions in the present. It gives meaning and value to living. Leadership in community focuses the dreams and commitments of the people on a shared vision of the mission that brings them together, and then leadership works with the people to see that that mission is accomplished. Leadership is a relationship of influence that points people to a shared vision that shapes their living today in such a way that the vision is realized.

Servant leadership offers hope, it offers vision, and it delivers on its promise. Servant leadership empowers people. It makes a difference.

Principle 3: Leadership is about character and trust.

The third image is of “autumn trees without fruit and uprooted—twice dead” (v. 12). Trees without roots produce no fruit. This image, too, focuses on the expectation of results. The leadership of the false teachers did not produce growth. There was no fruit, no product to show for the leadership that was being exercised. And Jude is not surprised since the leadership of these non-leaders is not rooted in the love of God for his people. They are doubly useless—not grounded in a relationship empowered by God and therefore not producing any growth in their community.

As Jude recognized in his opening verses, leadership arises from character. Recent research has shown a direct link between leadership and credibility. Leadership is a relationship of trust. We listen to people we trust. We accept the influence of a person whose character we respect.

Leadership is grounded in the faith, beliefs, commitments, and values of the leader. Leadership that produces fruit is rooted in the character of the leader. It is impossible to provide consistent leadership out of insecurity. Leadership emerges from secure people, from men and women who know who they are and live authentically in the security of that knowledge. The person who lives securely in the knowledge of the love of God will be a person whose influence is sought, whose leadership produces fruit. What is the fruit of effective leadership? Warren Bennis, the distinguished professor of leadership at the University of Southern California, says that the three things people want from leaders are direction, trust, and hope.

Leadership points people in the right direction, showing them how what they are doing contributes to the shared mission of the community. Leadership believes in people and fosters relationships of trust between members of the community. It points people to God and roots their identity, dignity, and security in their relationship with God in Christ. And leadership offers hope. It provides a vision that lifts the eyes of the followers from the path they are walking to the horizon of God’s eternal perspective and reminds them why they have life—to enjoy a relationship with God!

Principle 4: Leadership is about relationships and power.

The fourth picture in Jude’s description of these leaders describes them as “wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame” (v. 13). Jude focuses on the power in the waves of the sea and leaves us with the feeling of unbounded power, power without purpose, power that leaves a trail of debris behind it. The self-appointed leaders in the community were using their influence to make a big splash, but they were not going anywhere. They were not working for the mission or unity of the community or the development of the people; instead they were divisive and contentious, flaunting a lifestyle that denied the lordship of Christ.

Leadership is a relationship of power. It is the exercise of power. Power is the potential for influence. It denotes the character or resources that others see in you that cause them to accept your influence. It may be the authority of your position. It may be the spirituality of your character. It may be the benefits you can provide. It may be the knowledge or skills that you possess.

Power is at the heart of leadership. Power exists, however, only when someone sees in you a reason to accept your influence. At that moment you exercise power and have the opportunity to lead. But power needs

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purpose. Power without purpose leaves a wake of debris, a trail of litter. Tornadoes have power, but look what they do. Power needs to be harnessed to purpose.

The power that permits leadership in communities must be directed to the mission that forms the community. Leadership must be responsible and accountable. Leadership is a relationship of influence with a purpose. Servant leadership points people away from the leader to the mission of the community and empowers their individual contributions toward that mission.

Principle 5: Leadership is about dependency and accountability.

The fifth image offers another timely correlative to false leadership, describing such leaders as “wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever” (v. 13). These leaders are like shooting stars, streaking onto the scene with flash and excitement but eventually fading and disappearing. There are short-term gains but no long-term perseverance. Such leadership may offer a quick fix but does not nurture the long-range health of the community. There is a lot of activity, but no relationship.

Leadership is about people. It is about relationship. Leadership is a relationship of influence with a purpose, the achievement of the shared missions and the nurture of the community. Leaders are dependent upon the people. They are not charismatic comets racing alone across the sky. Leadership is a relationship of dependency. Leaders need followers. They are dependent upon the community because, in the end, leadership is in the hands of the followers. It exists only when someone decides to follow, decides to accept the influence. Max De Pree, author of the best-selling book *Leadership Is an Art*, says that one of the responsibilities of the leader is to say thank you—an acknowledgement of dependence. In the final analysis it is always the one who follows who determines if leadership is being exercised. It doesn't matter how much power or charisma you think you possess, how exciting you think your vision is. What matters is if someone chooses to accept your influence and alter his or her vision, values, attitudes, or behaviors. Leadership is a relationship of influence with a purpose, perceived by those who choose to follow.

So what?

What does this mean for you? What will you do with your power? Will you lead to empower others or will you use your power for your own benefit—to gain recognition and solidify your position and status?

Sometimes you may not think you have much power; you may think that you exercise little leadership. Remember, however, that if leadership is a relationship of influence and power, the potential for leadership is what others see in you. The strengths, gifts, and resources other people see in you give you the opportunity to lead—to influence their beliefs, their values, their behaviors. Knowledge is power; information is power; personal integrity and confidence of vision are perceived as power. The security you have in your own relationship with God gives you a spiritual power that can impact the lives of those around you.

Will you be a servant leader? Will you make a difference in the lives of those around you? Whether you are in a formal position of leadership or simply engage others in relationships, you are already equipped to lead. Out of your biblical knowledge, your maturing relationship with God in Christ, your integrated Christian worldview, you can make a difference in your world.

Your decision is what you will do with this power. Will you use it for your own benefit—to feed yourself—or will you use your power for the growth and nurture of people? Will you empower others? Will you be caring, encouraging, and motivating? Will you acknowledge your accountability to God? Will you offer vision and deliver what you promise? Will you make a difference in this world?

—WALTER C. WRIGHT is a senior fellow of the Max De Pree Center for Leadership in Pasadena, where he previously served as executive director. He has also served as president and professor of leadership at Regent College and on the management team of Fuller Theological Seminary in California; adapted from *Relational Leadership* (Biblical, 2009). Used by permission.

Discuss

1. In what ways are you accountable to God for your leadership? What does this look like? In what ways are you accountable to others for your leadership? What does this look like?

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2. Which of these principles most challenged your idea of what servant leadership looks like? Why do you consider these principles challenging?
3. If the potential for leadership is what others see in you, how are you currently modeling servant leadership in your ministry, community, and family?

SERVANT LEADERSHIP**Building Servant Leaders**

Jesus offered an alternative to the politic of power.

Matthew 20:28

“An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest” (Luke 9:46). It’s scary to realize that a dozen men could be in the company of Jesus day after day, listen to his teaching and watch his ways, and yet not get it. Get what? That Jesus lived by a different politic: servanthood. His slogan? “The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

His followers grew up in a culture that understood only one politic: power. The power of kings and armies—brute force. The power of the religious community—pronouncing or denying God’s approval. The power of family, village, and tribal tradition—nailing people to mindless conformity to “the way we do things.”

These concepts of power were hardwired into the souls of the disciples. They were sensitized to locating sources of such power and submitting to it or using it for their advantage. They were used to exercising power if they found themselves in a position to do so.

Within the small movement of Christ-followers, it was natural for them to sort themselves out through competition and debate. Who of us is the most faithful? The most genuine? Who is the one to run things when Jesus is absent? Who should prevail when decisions are to be made? Who’s in charge? These debates (and there was more than one) seemed to happen whenever Jesus talked about suffering, martyrdom, and resurrection. He spoke of suffering, and they preoccupied themselves with rights and privileges. Not much has changed, has it?

This “politic,” over which there was so much misunderstanding, is one of the great divides among human beings—to dominate, intimidate, control by power, or to win over people by serving them. We talk much in the church today about serving. Do you ask yourself from time to time, “How much of it really happens?”

Jesus’ men had had enough of serving the Romans, the religious establishment, the rich. Yet the Son of God was asking them to adopt this servanthood perspective for new and different reasons. They apparently thought Jesus was their chance to break out: to become the power-brokers instead of being the “power-broken.”

Jesus’ brand of servanthood means that everyone (child, leper, Gentile, opposite gender, sinner) is more important than me. Servanthood means that all I have and all I am are placed at your disposal if they will bring you into the presence of God. Servanthood is not about how I add value to my life, but about how I add value to yours.

Jesus not only taught it, he did it. By leaving heaven, by becoming a man, by dying on a cross, by building into the lives of men and women. It took those dozen men a long time to figure out this counterintuitive conviction: serving changes the world; ruling does not. And when they “got it,” history was never the same.

—GORDON MACDONALD has been a pastor for over 40 years and serves as editor-at-large for *Leadership Journal*; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2000 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. MacDonald writes that the concept of power was “hardwired into the souls of the disciples,” and that not much has changed since. How have you seen this to be true in your ministry? How can you relate?
2. What is the difference between Christ’s concept of “laying down your life” and acting like a “doormat”?
3. How does your ministry actively seek to add value to the lives of others?

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Called to Serve

Three pastors discuss their experiences serving, leading, and doing both at the same time.
John 13:12–15

Painted on squad cars of many police departments is the motto: “To serve and to protect.” The calling for pastors is similarly twofold: to serve and to lead.

Two noble tasks. But those two aspects of the pastoral calling don’t always mesh smoothly. Some people want you to be more of a leader—until they disagree with something you’ve done. Then they suggest you should be more of a servant.

Leadership Journal sat down with three pastors who’ve had extensive experience in serving, leading, and figuring out how to do both simultaneously.

Leith Anderson serve as president of the National Association of Evangelicals and pastored Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota from 1977 to 2011. He has written *Leadership that Works* and *A Church for the 21st Century*.

Erwin McManus, after planting churches among the urban poor in Texas, is lead pastor of Mosaic, a congregation in Los Angeles, and author of *Uprising: A Revolution of the Soul*, *An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God Had in Mind*, and *Seizing Your Divine Moment*.

Glenn Wagner served as pastor of Calvary Church in Charlotte, North Carolina from 1997-2004. He currently serves as chancellor of Oxford Graduate School in Crystal Springs, Tennessee. He also served as vice president of Promise Keepers, and is the author of *Escape from Church Inc.* and *The Church You’ve Always Wanted*.

You’re all in ministry leadership, called to serve and to lead. Is “servant leadership” an ongoing tension?

Anderson: The term is fraught with conflict and misunderstanding. It’s almost an oxymoron. Both servanthood and leadership are culturally and contextually defined. For instance, we say the President of the United States is a public servant, but we also say that someone who waits on tables is a servant. Clearly those are different roles.

Simply stated, a servant does what someone else says to do. A leader tells other people what to do. So the expectations can create tensions.

When you talk to business guys, they’re asking, “Okay, how does this servant-leader thing work? I’ve got to make a tough decision for the good of the company, say, firing an incompetent worker, but that hurts an individual. Who am I serving?”

As Christians there should not be a conflict between humility and leadership, but there may be lots of conflicts between servanthood and leadership.

Wagner: Lots of things get mixed up. Serving Christ. Serving the body. Considering others more important than ourselves. Those are all a part of it.

Who exactly do you serve? The church? The elders? The “least of these”? God alone?

McManus: Isaiah 49 is helpful: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel.” This was Israel’s problem. They wanted God to be all about them. Their concept of servanthood was bringing back the tribes and restoring the people of Israel.

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God says that's too small—"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

The bottom line is if the congregation's passion isn't to extend God's kingdom by seeing people's lives transformed through a relationship with Christ, then you're not creating a servant community. Churches can't be all about themselves. I don't care how much they are nice to each other or not.

Wagner: Yes, as a leader I don't serve well if I merely oversee the church continuing to serve itself. When we serve others, there's healing in the body.

How is "servant leadership" most often misunderstood?

Wagner: When *servant* becomes the overarching definition of the role—doing what other people want, and losing sight of the need to lead. Rightly understood, "servant" denotes the humility with which I handle my role as leader.

McManus: Servanthood is about character, and leadership is about your role.

Wagner: Any time you make an unpopular decision, you'll hear the accusation: "You're not a servant!" I heard that when I had to release a staff person.

I replied: "I am serving God by being a steward of what he's entrusted to us as leadership here at Calvary Church. I'm serving this body, and also I'm serving you, because the situation as it was clearly wasn't right."

But being a servant leader also means you ask yourself: *Lord, is the problem me? Do I just have a personality quirk? Am I serving you in this decision?* That's an essential part of the process.

What's the goal of a servant leader?

Anderson: The Bible describes leaders with the metaphor *shepherd*. I don't think that's because I'm supposed to walk around with a staff. The main thing is that a shepherd's life was not his own. Usually shepherds oversaw a flock for someone else. They served by caring for and leading the flock. That's what pastors do; they serve God by feeding, protecting, and leading the congregation.

McManus: I serve the church of Jesus Christ when I help it to reflect his heart and to fulfill its mission. Yes, this means, at times, firing people when you have to, or shutting down ministries that don't reflect the spirit and attitude of Christ. If you're going to lead the church of Jesus Christ, your primary obligation is to make sure that the church is becoming what God has in mind for the church.

Serving, for me, also meant that part of the decision to become a pastor was making a shift from giving my life to fulfilling whatever dreams I have for myself to seeing that other people's dreams and visions are unleashed. That is a concrete, practical shift that servanthood requires.

Correcting or disciplining people doesn't always feel right at the onset, but that's serving. You're investing in a community and trying to see an energizing environment where people are unleashed to accomplish what God has created them to do.

Sometimes the concept of servant leadership is applied in a transactional way: "I'll serve you, care for you, visit you in the hospital, and in return you'll let me exercise leadership and make decisions for the organization." Is serving, then, the way you gain credibility so that when you have to make an unpopular decision, you have the political capital you need to lead?

McManus: That's a prostitution of the biblical understanding of being a servant of Christ. That can easily become merely another form of self-serving or self-promotion. Do you gain credibility and trust when you

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legitimately serve people? Yes. But if I act as a servant simply in order to gain power, then I'm not functioning as God intended.

What was Jesus doing when he washed the disciples' feet? Modeling servanthood?

McManus: He wasn't *modeling* servanthood. Jesus *was* a servant. He wasn't feigning something, or just role-playing to teach us something. He was letting us see who he was. He was being himself.

To say that God is a servant sounds blasphemous and heretical and demeaning because we don't value servanthood. It's easy to acknowledge that God is all-powerful and all-knowing and such because that's the stuff we want. But if you see only God's might without his loving, serving, sacrificial side, it's terrifying.

What's amazing to me about God is not that he's more powerful or more intelligent than anyone else, but the fact that God is more humble.

When Jesus says we need to be last so we can be first in the kingdom, it's not a boomerang effect—if you go last long enough then you get to be first. No, it's because low and humble is where God is. If you want to be great in the kingdom, be a servant. Because that's where God is.

Wagner: As pastors, we are to do the tasks that leadership requires, and do those things with the attitude and heart of a servant. So there are stewardship responsibilities and some hard choices, but I must implement them as a servant.

So, for instance, I agree with Francis Schaeffer's observation: If you're doing church discipline without tears, then you're probably not doing it in the character and heart of Christ.

How do the roles of servant and leader mesh when, for instance, you're candidating at a church and discussing salary, boundaries, expectations, and working conditions?

Wagner: I dislike that term *candidating*. In the process of seeing if God is bringing lives together for his kingdom glory, I don't think the first thing to talk about is salary package and working conditions. In fact, I find it offensive if that's the first thing on the agenda. God hasn't even indicated we share a common vision yet, and we're talking about benefits?

I met some people who want to negotiate their salaries and benefits as if they're applying to IBM. And I'm not sure that's the right approach for ministry.

But discussing it is an appropriate part of the process. I neglected that in the past. At one church I served earlier in my ministry, I showed up not knowing what I was going to be paid. I was simply told I'd be taken care of.

We didn't know how poor we were until our child was born and social services came and said we qualified for public assistance. I was selling my plasma every week to buy books. But I didn't know any better. We were just happy to be ministering someplace.

But as we were coming to Calvary, my wife asked for a couple of things. One, that a retirement plan be in place. And, two, for life insurance. I didn't have life insurance, and I had a physical problem ...

Anderson: Because you were giving too much plasma. (*Laughter.*)

Wagner: Hey, man, 15 bucks was a lot of books in those days.

Blood money. (*Laughter.*)

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Wagner: The point is, I have a responsibility to serve my family as well as to serve the church. And there needs to be a way to articulate that without being accused of not being a servant and without having it drive the process.

Anderson: I'm feeling the need to be more concrete in this whole area of serving and leading. I've tried to identify some rules to decide how to serve in particular situations. Here are three guidelines; there could be a lot more.

1. *Serve the greater number rather than the greatest need.* If you can serve 100 people or 1 person who seems to have a greater need, as a rule, you serve the greater number.

2. *Give priority to the basics.* Lyle Schaller would say, "You pay the rent." If you don't pay the rent, you don't last. For pastors the rent is next week's sermon and prayer and going to the board and staff meetings and having regular family time and having available margins for an unanticipated crisis. That's the rent. Without that you can't serve anyone.

3. *Be aware of your limitations.* Sometimes we think, I'm a servant of everybody, therefore I have to serve anyone who asks, when you may in fact do more damage than good by trying to serve beyond your competence. A wise counselor once told me, "If anyone calls you and insists their need is so urgent that they must see you immediately, you are not qualified to help them! They need someone more qualified." It's a temptation for leaders to venture into things we're not competent to deal with. If one of you needs heart surgery right now, I wouldn't serve you well by trying to do it.

If you pour your best time into the extraordinarily needy people, that may seem to be compassionate, but you're failing to adequately serve the larger number. Some of the larger number may in fact be far more qualified to serve the needy person than you are.

McManus: Yes, if I'm responsible to teach on Sunday, and at 3 a.m. that morning a homeless guy suddenly calls me to pick him up somewhere, it would probably violate my serving of the many. And chances are, someone else would do a better job of serving him.

Anderson: Now if he has a gun to his head, that's different. Sure, then you've got to make a situational decision. But you need a guiding principle out of which you make exceptions.

Unfortunately for some pastors the guiding principle is "whoever screams the loudest," or "whoever has the greatest need," or "whoever looks the most demanding is the person I acquiesce to because I'm a servant." That's neither serving well nor leading well.

—adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2003 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. When have you experienced a conflict between servanthood and leadership? How did you work it out?
2. What is your definition of servanthood? How does that play out in your vocation as a leader?
3. What do you think about Anderson's principle of serving the greater number over the greater need? How does a servant leader—especially a pastor—apply this principle to his or her ministry? What tensions or conflicts can arise when trying to apply this principle? What are the benefits of applying it consistently?

SERVANT LEADERSHIP**Serving as a Team***Serve your staff so they can serve others.*

John 15:9–17

“You have to learn to share.” Coaxing from my mom didn’t convince me. Nor did seminary discussions on servant leadership.

Only when I decided to move our church to a team-based ministry did I begin to learn what shared ministry really meant. In the past I would have argued our church was team-friendly, but we weren’t. Teams, I discovered, are mostly about sharing—sharing goals and sharing life. It takes the first to act like a team and the second to feel like a team.

Sharing Goals

Team members, of course, need to accomplish something to feel productive. Like the players of any sports team, each needs to know that she or he has executed the play and seen some results. But drift and entropy are constant threats.

Each year every staff person develops a MAP—a Ministry Action Plan. These plans are distributed to the entire staff, and then each person discusses his MAP with his or her ministry team. When the tyranny of the urgent begins to crowd out someone’s stated goals, the team leader explores the reason behind it. One person was recently challenged to evaluate whether the changes in her activities were on purpose or simply covering for the lack of growth in another staff person.

The point is that to function effectively as a team requires process. The management maxim “Your system is perfectly designed to yield the result you’re getting” is true. In an effective system, the leader acts as a catalyst, ensuring there is an agenda for each meeting, that there are individual assignments with accountability, that progress is evaluated and measured. Systems allow a team to be process-oriented rather than people-dependent, freeing up people to do the work of the ministry.

Sharing Life

But I had to learn to balance the functional and the relational. For most of our two decades as a church, staff functioned as loosely connected ministry entrepreneurs. We had a bias against meetings, viewing them as time away from true ministry. I had espoused that culture-shaping value, which works against the “sharing life” value.

My team needs to sense that I care for its members beyond their accomplishment. That’s the relational. At our last staff retreat, each leader awarded “medals” (Peppermint Patty mints on red, white, and blue ribbons) to team members, affirming in each a personal quality. Every person had the chance to talk about his or her ministry passion as well as relate a personal struggle or desire for development. Team leaders followed up, assuring each that they were praying for the requests.

Another way I balance the functional and relational is to monitor our fun together. Do we have enough of it? Fun mitigates the effects of the inevitable frustrations of ministry. At times fun happens spontaneously when we poke fun at each other and end up laughing until we cry. But I also structure unexpected trips to a restaurant or a day at the lakeshore. Our agenda may include prayer or discussing a book on leadership, but usually it’s the eating at a unique restaurant or the sand between our toes that makes the day.

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SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Discuss

1. In what ways am I sharing goals and life with my staff? In what ways do I resist sharing goals and life with my staff??
2. Does servant leadership require me to share goals and life with my staff? Why or why not??
3. How can I do more to balance the functional and relational aspects of my relationships with those I lead?

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Maintaining the Balance

God desires healthy servant leaders to lead healthy ministries.

Exodus 20:8–10

As we slipped into the booth for lunch, the young pastor of a growing Gen-X ministry dumped his frustration. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I feel buried by all the stuff of ministry. I went into ministry to teach the Word—that’s my passion—but I’m not getting to my sermon prep until Friday at best, sometimes Saturday. I never seem to have time to plan ahead, meet with my key leaders, or envision our next steps.”

God was blessing this man’s efforts, but he was frustrated, not fulfilled. His Sundays were exciting, but Monday through Friday quickly filled with appointments, counseling sessions, phone calls, and administration. His inbox overflowed with e-mail and voice mail, some from fans and others from critics. His week flew by before he knew what had happened.

He could tell it also frustrated his wife. She was committed to their ministry, but the routine was growing old. They both began to wonder, *Is this the way ministry will be for the rest of our lives? Could we find a way to juggle the demands of ministry and family, so that both stay healthy, growing, and fun?*

He was experiencing the downside of success. Success can kill you.

Leaders who experience the blessing of success will soon feel buried unless they learn how to manage the growing demands on their time and to protect the important from the urgent.

Most leaders respond by praying harder, working harder, then staying longer to get it all done. But that doesn’t solve the problem. I am convinced there is a better way. God desires healthy servant leaders to lead healthy ministries.

Our epitaph should never read:

*Died ... buried and behind,
with a widow, some kids and grandkids,
who love and miss him,
but not the life he lived.*

As I listened to my young friend, I remembered my first pastorate, a church plant in southern Ohio. I was a solo pastor, with a wife and three kids, trying to do it all. I remember the frustration I felt as I juggled, and often dropped, the demands of our growing church.

In 23 years as pastor, of small, then medium, now a large church, I’ve found a better way to juggle and not lose the joy.

The Four R’s

Every leader must learn the art of juggling. And even the best jugglers begin by choosing what to juggle. They may toss handkerchiefs, batons, or torches, but they never juggle everything people throw their way. Likewise, healthy leaders learn to juggle selectively.

By grouping all my activities into four major categories, and setting aside time for each one, I can better keep my work balanced with my family and my spiritual life. Fewer things get dropped.

I call the categories my “Four R’s”:

1. **Rest time**—focusing on my spiritual and marital health.

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2. **Results time**—focusing on the main things God has for me personally in advancing his mission.
3. **Response time**—focusing on “stuff,” administration and follow up with others who need my input.
4. **Refocus time**—focusing on evaluating what my priorities should be.

When a juggler gets in the rhythm, he stays there for a while, concentrating on his routine until it flows naturally. He would never think of taking a phone call or checking his e-mail while flipping knives over his head. Likewise, I focus on one objective at a time and allow enough time to do it well.

I plan my week in large chunks of time, full or half-day units, each devoted to one of the four R's. When I try to fit more than one of these needs into one block of time, I experience frustration and defeat. My stress goes up and my productivity goes down.

When I rest, I really, truly rest. When I'm in results mode, I don't let distractions intrude on the time I've dedicated to my primary mission. When it's response time, I give myself away as a humble servant. And when I go away to refocus, I allow myself time to listen to God, reflect, and rethink how to approach the future.

The key is separating what falls into each category and keeping them separate.

Start with Day Seven

Rest time is when I focus on my health, especially on my spiritual life, marriage, and family. God built into creation a universal need for rest, and he recommends, even commands, one day per week.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work” (Ex. 20:8–10).

God designed all his creation, of which you and I are a part, around the principle of Sabbath rest. We are healthier and more productive when we don't work 24/7. I know corporate coaches who advise their sales staffs: “Take one day a week for rest. In the long run, you will make more money, not less.”

Pastors are some of the worst violators of this divine principle. We work constantly, proclaiming, “We're serving God.”

Yet God says, “Slow down and take a day off.” God still loves an overly busy pastor, but he must get frustrated with our work habits. I imagine him saying, “Can they not read? I put this early on in the book. I even made it part of the top ten list to Moses, so they wouldn't miss it.” Then he shakes his head as we sacrifice our day off for him and complain about our workload.

On a quality day of rest, we do absolutely nothing related to the job. Nothing. No phone calls, no e-mail, no job-related reading, no quick stops at the church “just to check on one thing.”

One Christian businessman declared, “By that standard, I don't think I've taken a day off in 20 years!”

My three churches have ranged from a 28-member plant to my current church of over 5,000. In each setting, one of the best disciplines I've kept has been taking Mondays as a Sabbath rest for my wife and me. It's done more to keep me sane and happy under the pressure of ministry than any other thing I do.

My goal is to dedicate the day to refreshing my soul and my marriage. For me, my spiritual life includes my relationship with my wife, and I've never regretted the investment.

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Protect Priority One

Results time I dedicate to doing my “main thing.” These priorities may change as our churches grow, or if our job descriptions change, or as God begins new things. But whatever they are at a given time, main things are defined by three characteristics.

First, my main thing is *mission critical*, essential to the health and growth of the ministry. It must be done well if the mission is to move forward.

Second, my main thing is *top priority*. Though a church’s top priorities will change as the needs of ministry shift over time, it is important to prayerfully set priorities and have them affirmed by the leadership team or board.

I’ve known some pastors who, in retreat with God, have decided to change their priorities, and then they implemented the changes without consulting their leadership. There is a word for such leaders: *unemployed*.

I have learned to ask the church leadership to affirm priority adjustments. They serve as a buffer between me and the member who thinks my adjustments are out of line. Then with integrity, I can say (for example), “My priority right now is preaching and leadership. The board has asked me to limit my counseling in light of the growing needs and to use our referral network instead.”

Third, main things grow out of unique abilities. Over time, I have reduced the scope of my responsibilities to focus on my zone of unique abilities. That zone can be found by identifying and concentrating on three areas: God-given gifts, passions, and experiences. The convergence of these three areas is a leader’s “unique ability zone.”

It’s important to structure our schedule around our “main things.” When we serve in this zone, and give our best, most creative part of the day and week to it, we will produce our best stuff. Apart from an occasional crisis, there really is no excuse for pushing our main things into our least productive times.

It is crucial that you look at the week before it begins, and set aside sufficient chunks of time—preferably half-day segments—in order to do the main things with excellence.

For me, sermon prep is one of my main things. I take most of the day Wednesday, Thursday morning, and Friday morning for prayer, study, and prep time. It’s blocked out on my schedule every week from now till forevermore, amen.

Knowing that these large chunks are protected and dedicated to my main thing allows me to be more productive during the other times of the week. I don’t stress out on Tuesday when I’m busy with meetings and administrative demands. Knowing my results time is coming allows me to relax and enjoy the other stuff that also needs my touch.

Main Thing, Different Place

The church office may not be the best place to do the main thing. This isn’t true for everyone, but many pastors do a better job if they have separate places for sermon preparation and church administration.

Just being at the office often kicks me into response time, because I am surrounded by so many tempting interruptions. I’m not planning to look at those unread magazines and catalogues, and I’m certainly not planning to spend an hour and a half talking with the custodian or a drop-in visitor, but sometimes I do, and the morning is gone!

I’m twice as productive and creative when I maintain a place away from distraction to knock out my main thing. Even when the interruption from study is only 5 minutes, it takes 20 minutes to get refocused to the same level of creativity and concentration.

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Some pastors keep their study at home. Others find a quiet place to work at the church, a different room where there is no phone, no Internet access, no stack of unread books, no e-reader.

When I was in my first church, a young plant with no office, and I had three small kids at home, I'd go to a restaurant, sit in a corner booth and get to work. I got more done than you can imagine because I wasn't surrounded by distractions and unfinished business. Yes, there was noise in the room, but none of that noise had to do with me. I could tune it out, get creative, and get it done.

Time for Others

Response time is defined by two terms: *clean-up* and *follow-up*. It tackles all the stuff that is still important, just not critical to the mission.

As a servant leader, I realize that the people I serve have their own agendas, their own needs. I want to be responsive to them, as long as I first protect the rest and results times.

In ministry, stuff happens. It's a lot like debris. We may be tempted to pick up a little here or there, but if we sweep it together into larger piles, then attack the piles in a good-sized block of response time, we'll knock it out faster and more efficiently.

I set aside most of three afternoons per week for responding to e-mail, voice mail, staff issues, counseling, and the other work that flows from the well of ministry.

Serving the needs of others is always important, even vital, to humble servant leadership. Meeting those needs, however, is not a leader's main thing. It is important that we never allow them to control those all-important rest, results, and refocus times.

Sometimes it's best to institute new structures or ministries to cover these response needs. The selection of the first deacons in Acts 6 is a good example.

The needs of the widows were certainly important, but they were not the main thing for the apostles. So they established a new ministry, led by other gifted servants, in order to break free and restore quality time for the teaching of the Word.

If we first set aside blocks of uninterrupted time for rest and results, we can then give ourselves with joy to responding to other people's stuff.

If I mix these categories, however, I feel frustrated and I begin to resent the people and projects that need my touch.

This Job Has No Auto-Focus

The final "R" is the most overlooked. People sometimes encourage the pastor to rest, they certainly demand results, and they regularly cry out for response, but they seldom think of a leader's need to refocus. In fact, we rarely think of it ourselves.

Refocusing is working *on* the ministry, not just *in* the ministry—time to assess, adjust, and innovate for the future.

Life and leadership are dynamic, not static. Even if the organization appears stable, the world all around is in flux. When our priorities shift, our understanding of our unique abilities is refined, or we experience a tough month, it is time to refocus our plans for rest, results, and response.

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Refocus time is usually not a complete change of direction. It is the opportunity to make the fine adjustments needed to keep life in balance. It is time to ask, “Am I getting the rest and results time I need for personal health and the advancement of the mission?” and, “If not, what changes should I make?”

When I break away from my routine, ask God these questions, and reflect on my ministry, I always get fresh insight for maintaining the elusive equilibrium of servant leadership.

But to provide adequate time and prayer for both the small and sweeping changes God wants to make, I’ve found it necessary to refocus on different segments of my life at different times.

Just as a camera uses different lenses for different distances, I use three types of refocus time to gain new perspective on my life and ministry.

1. **Refocus weekly.** Refocus time should happen routinely, at the beginning or end of every week. Even one to two hours per week of refocus time will vastly improve the future. We need honest assessment, by asking, “So, how is it going, really?”

Each of the other “R’s” needs review:

“Am I resting as I should, maintaining my marriage and family to the glory of God?”

“Am I protecting my prime time for my primary thing, my main thing?”

“Am I responding with a servant heart to those who need me most?”

2. **Refocus monthly.** I told our staff they can take a half-day every month, get away from the office, and go to the beach or park with a lawn chair, a yellow tablet, and their ministry plan.

I said, “Reflect, dream, listen to God, and refocus. Come back with some fresh goals and adjustments to your priorities.” It really works!

3. **Refocus annually.** Some pastors schedule an annual retreat for sermon planning or perhaps spiritual refreshment. I recommend dividing the retreat into three parts, or perhaps three retreats. They can be cheap, they can be short, but to stay healthy, I recommend all three:

Retreat once to work on the main things. Retreat once for personal growth and enrichment. Retreat once to refresh your relationship with your spouse.

No matter the size of our ministry, church, or staff, people will throw more stuff our way than we can imagine. Some can be ignored and some delegated, but much of it will need to be juggled.

Before you’re buried by dropped balls, get into the rhythm of rest, results, response, and refocus.

—H. DALE BURKE served for 15 years as pastor of First Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, California before founding Dale Burke Leadership Seminars; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2002 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. Where in your ministry do you most feel the temptation to give of yourself at the expense of your own well-being or that of your family?
2. How is your week divided between “The Four R’s”? Which priorities are falling behind? What could you give up in other areas to give more time to those neglected priorities?

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3. How often do you refocus? When could you work more time for refocusing into your schedule? How might this benefit your ability to lead and live as a true servant leader?

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Further Exploration

Books and other resources to help grow servant leaders.

📖 **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today.

- “How to Last as a Leader” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Discovering Your Calling” Training Theme
- “Spiritual Care” Training Theme
- “A True Servant Leader” Women Leaders
- “Encouraging Gifts in Others” Women Leaders

📖 **LeadershipJournal.net**: Our sister website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

The Servant Leader: Transforming Your Heart, Head, Hands, and Habits by *Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges*. From the creators of Faith Walk Seminars comes a thought-provoking look at a management style modeled by Jesus Christ: servant leadership. Discover why corporate teams are more powerful than the sum of their individual parts—and why leadership must manifest itself in your head, hands, heart, *and* habits to be successful. (Countryman, 2003; ISBN 9780849996597)

The Servant Leader: How to Build a Creative Team, Develop Great Morale, and Improve Bottom-Line Performance by *James C. Hunter*. This book by James Autry, former Fortune 500 executive, is a practical guide to using the principles necessary for implementing a servant leadership model. (Random House, 2004; ISBN 9781400054732)

The Servant-Leader Within: A Transformative Path by *Robert K. Greenleaf*. In this inspirational and practical book are gathered some of the classic works of visionary management consultant and educator Robert K. Greenleaf. Each provides a different but complementary perspective on servant leadership and its relationship to the art of teaching and the act of learning. (Paulist Press, 2003; ISBN 9780809142194)

Leading One Another: Church Leadership by Bobby Jamieson. Part of the 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guide series, this study teaches participants about godly leadership, God’s example as a leader, and how to submit to authority. (Crossway, 2012; ISBN 9781433525605)