Leadership in a Chaotic World

Melvin Roy McNeil Jr.
John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
Liberty University
1971 University Blvd.
Lynchburg, VA 24515
USA
M46C56@outlook.com

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to show that today's chaotic world presents numerous and formidable challenges to leadership, in both the world view and biblical view. Successful leadership requires a leader to have two types of knowledge: general knowledge and culture specific knowledge. Successful leadership in today's environment requires a vision, a purpose, integrity, and training. Every leader needs to be dedicated, capable of learning from others, and never servile. Leadership needs to stay focused on the worldview and how it affects everyone. Knowing this, leaders are less likely to make snap judgements or perpetuate stereotypes. Do not assume somebody is going to be different from you. Learning is the key; leadership is not innate; it is learned.

Keywords: leadership, culture, training, biblical view, world view

1. Introduction

How is a leader supposed to lead or teach in a world being turned upside down by wars, threats of nuclear war, new diseases like Covid, violent demonstrations in the city streets, and what is the lack of ethics within the workplace? Leaders everywhere in the secular world and the church need wake-up and say enough! A universal challenge involves how to deal with a chaotic world. Leaders need to reevaluate their leadership skills as workers are struggling with the workday overload of too many emails, too many meetings, competing deadlines, office drama, and the high rates of attrition over the last few years in the workforce. Technology has seemed to be more of a hindrance than help. The world has become surrounded by the so-called virtues of smart work and how to manage the finite resource of time. Technology is supposed to make our lives simpler, instead thousands of hours are wasted every day by people staring at their smart phones and computer screens. Leaders need to realize that no matter how good a company's technical solutions are, technology cannot replace leadership. Leadership needs to learn to maximize the capabilities of their technical tools to support the changing cultures, reevaluate the business through workers staying at home (off site working) on computers working virtually, and determine how to communicate both virtually and in person with the workers.

Businesses and churches are being overwhelmed by the vast numbers of people from all cultures of the world immigrating to the more democratic countries of Europe, Canada, and the United States. Much of these immigrants come from what is called the 10/40 Window. It is "an imaginary rectangle window between the 10th and 40th latitudes, bordered around Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. This window also contains the bulk of the non-Christian religions" (Moreau, et al., 2004, p. 12). Leadership needs to reintroduce itself to cross-culturalism. According to Moreau, et al., "cross-culturalism recognizes two types of knowledge, (general and specific), that are helpful in preparing a person to adjust successfully to a new culture" (p. 183).

General knowledge helps leaders to understand new cultures and how to integrate them into their businesses and with a knowledgeable leader it helps the people of the new culture integrate into their new society. Culture specific knowledge "relates to the idiosyncrasies of the newcomer's culture...this is the knowledge of the specific social skills necessary to develop good relationships" (p. 183-184). People often act first from their emotions. Lingenfelter (2007) states that, "the natural consequence of this attribute of human experience and response is that leading multicultural team always involves irrational and emotional relationships" (p. 137). Knowing this, leaders are less likely to make "snap judgements or perpetuate stereotypes by focusing on a person's ethnicity, sexual orientation, or faith' (Bryant, 2019, p. 1). Although businesses look at the worldview of relationships to ensure success in their operations, churches on the other hand, "face the largest challenge: the religions of the world" (p. 263).

Religions and Christianity clash with competing truth claims, "The impact of agnostic science will turn out to be child's play compared to the challenge to Christian theology of the faiths of other men" (Warren, 1995, as cited in Moreau, et al., p. 295). It is important to "focus on issues impacting daily life rather than simply theoretical ones" (p. 295). Bryant states that "Cultural similarities are based on factors like education, socio-economic status, generation, and occupation" (p. 1).

2. Essentials of Leadership

There are also four essentials of competence that all true leaders must possess: "1) a vision and shared meaning; 2) a purpose, self-confidence, and a sense of self; 3) integrity; and 4) adaptive capacity that allows leaders to respond quickly and intelligently to relentless change" (Bennis, 2009, pp. xxv-xxvi). Every leader needs to "be dedicated, observant, capable of working with and learning from others, never servile, and always truthful" (Bennis, p. 35). Christian leaders need to stay focused on the biblical worldview and how they "affect everybody, regardless of their situation and background" (Bryant, 2019, p. 1). Knowing this, Christian leaders are less likely to make "snap judgements or perpetuate stereotypes by focusing on a person's ethnicity, sexual orientation, or faith. Cultural similarities are based on factors like education, socio-economic status, generation, and occupation. Do not assume somebody is going to be different from you" (p. 1).

3. Principles of Leadership

According to Sanders (2007), leadership requires certain principles to be a true leader: discipline, vision, decision, courage, humility, integrity, and sincerity (p. 75). Leadership implies that there are followers. Leadership also implies watching over those followers, whether in business or in the church. King (1965) in his civil rights speech said, "we shall overcome". We Shall Overcome became the rallying cry of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. It set the tone of the struggle for African Americans and all downtrodden people - to regain their civil rights. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah stated, "The Lord is a God of justice" (Isaiah, 30:18, NKJV). Justice means "method, order, or system. God is methodic and orderly...requiring His managers and stewards that all things be done decently and in order...No religion is complete in its creed, in its influence, which does not insist equally on all these" (Sanders, 2007, p. 87).

Leadership is not perfect; however, it is the "duty of a leader to reflect the orderliness of God in all we do for Him" (p. 87). Equality is for everyone, not just for a select few. King's movement caused the passage of the Civil Rights Act assuring equality for everyone. A leader must be disciplined and the conqueror of self. Sanders states that, "Those who rebel against authority and scorn self-discipline—who shirk the rigors and turn from the sacrifices—do not qualify to lead...Lazy and disorganized people never rise to true leadership" (p. 61). Leadership requires having vision and "those who have most powerfully and permanently influenced their generation have been "seers"—people who have seen more and farther than others" (p. 65). Leaders are decision makers. "When all the facts are in, swift and clear decision is another mark of a true leader. A visionary may see, but a leader must decide...and weigh evidence and make his decision on sound premises" (p. 69). Leaders must show "courage of the highest order—always moral courage and often physical courage as well. Courage enables people to encounter danger or difficulty firmly, without fear or discouragement" (p. 71). Martin Luther was among the most fearless of men when he went to Worms. As stated in Sanders, Luther said, "You can expect from me everything save fear or recantation. I shall not flee, much less recant" (p. 71). The least admired in the political and business world is humility, the hallmark of a spiritual leader. The Apostle Matthew wrote that Jesus told his disciples to turn away from the pompous attitudes of the Gentile despots, and instead take on the lowly bearing of the servant (Matt. 20:25-27).

There are two more qualities of leadership; integrity, and sincerity. "These two qualities of leadership were part of God's law for the Israelites" (Deut. 18:13). Leaders need to "show a transparent character, open and innocent of guile" (Sanders, p. 74). Of all the characteristics of a true leader, patience is the most difficult to conquer. A true leader shows "patience by not running too far ahead of his followers and thus discouraging them...A person who is impatient with weakness will be ineffective in his leadership" (p. 82). Today's society has created a world of chaos and evil, where good is evil and evil is good. Humanity has become more tyrannical, self-serving, and power hungry at the expense of others. Leaders of today must learn that "leadership is relational, rather than positional...people are more important than authority and control" (Lingenfelter, p.110-111). Instead of powering outcomes like a tyrannical boss, "the relational leader builds trust and influences followers through integrity of character and depth of relationship" (p. 111). A true leader will mentor and empower his followers, giving them the tools needed to grow and show them the character needed to become successful leaders. Just as Jesus mentored His disciples and sent them into the world, leaders and mentors must also aspire new leaders to go into the world and lead others to do the same.

4. Responsible-For and Responsible-To Leadership

These two types of leadership present a way of creating chaos or removing chaos. Leaders that are responsible-for are chaotic "demonstrating emotional attachment to their role and results, and they exercise power and control to achieve results and assure quality...they cannot relinquish control, since they are emotionally attached to both their role and to the achievement of results" (p. 133). In contrast, leaders that are responsible-to reduce chaos "demonstrating emotional detachment from their role and results, granting authority, responsibility, and freedom to subordinates whom they counsel and hold responsible to achieve results and quality...placing responsibility on the members of the team" (p. 133).

5. Fear vs Courage

Today's society with its complex and rapidly changing environment and the constant changes in technology can cause uncertainty and fear among the workers. It is during these times that leaders tend to leverage fear to their advantage in getting things accomplished. Brown (2018) states that, "Unfortunately, it has been an easy formula throughout history, that if you can keep people afraid, and give them an enemy who is responsible for their fear, you can get people to do just about anything" (p. 104). But true leadership is not about control and fear. "Other people's emotions are not our job. We cannot both serve people and try to control their feelings" (p. 69). Leadership is not fear mongering, it requires courage and determination. "In the midst of uncertainty and fear, leaders have an ethical responsibility to hold their people in discomfort—to acknowledge the tumult but not fan it, to share information and not inflate or fake it" (pp. 104-105). Leaders need to show courage, letting the people know they are in charge of the situation and that in some situations "this may seem difficult and there are no simple answers...but we will walk through this in a way that makes us feel proud. It will be hard, but we will do it together" (p. 105). Showing courage becomes contagious and leaders need to cultivate courage in their teams and organization. Leadership is not a self-interest or a self-serving position, "leadership is about serving other people, not ourselves. That is why we choose courage" (p. 69).

6. Leadership Affectability

The affectability of true leadership relies on communicating effectively, providing accountability, support, and engaging in honest self-evaluation. Irving and Strauss (2019) states that, "Although leader service of self is common across diverse sectors and organizations, biblical wisdom and contemporary research support the priority of leaders focusing on followers as they seek to carry out team and organizational mission" (p. 13). In the film "We Were Soldiers", Lt. Col. Hal Moore makes a promise to his soldiers: "I cannot promise you that I will bring you all home alive. But this I swear before you and before Almighty God: that when we go into battle, I will be the first to set foot on the field, and I will be the last to step off. And I will leave no one behind. Dead or alive, we will all come home together. So help me God" (Wallace, 2002).

Irvine and Strauss (2019) noted that, "this commitment to being the first into battle and the last to leave exemplifies the core of modeling what matters...leadership is more about influence than control, the positive example and model of a leader is essential" (p. 17). The adage of "do as I say and not as I do" is no longer a model of leadership. "While it may be tempting simply to dictate to or tell followers what to do, the most effective leaders understand the importance of action. Leader behaviors provide a powerful example for followers" (p.17). The Apostle Paul understood this when he said "Therefore I urge you, imitate me. Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1, NKJV). Being a role model is not always easy, it requires integrity, authenticity, and responsibility.

7. Conclusion

Leadership is not for the faint hearted. It requires courage and determination. Brown (2018) states that, "In the midst of uncertainty and fear, leaders have an ethical responsibility to hold their people in discomfort—to acknowledge the tumult but not fan it, to share information and not inflate or fake it" (pp. 104-105). Serving other people is not subservient leadership, it is servant leadership. Servant leadership is "empowering and other- centered leadership that enables people to fulfill their calling before God. Servant leadership is also equipping leadership with a focus on training up the next generation of leaders" (Irving and Struss, 2019, p. 4). The modeling of good behavior is the prime example for a leader to follow. "Followers can sense hypocrisy a mile away...Confidence is inspired by congruence between our words and actions" (p. 20). Leadership relies on effective communication skills to provide accountability, support, and to engaging in honest self-evaluation. With the world in chaos, politically, socially, and economically, leaders need to show courage, letting their followers know they are in control of the situation without fear.

References

Bennis, W. (2009). On becoming a leader. Basic Books.

Brown, B. (2018). Dare to lead. Random House.

Bryant, S. (2019). Cultural similarities vs cultural differences. Retrieved from Country Navigator: https://countrynavigator.com/blog/expert-view/cultural-similarities/Holy bible: new king james version. (1983). Thomas Nelson, Publishers.

Irving, J. A., & Strauss, M. L. (2019). Leadership in christian perspective: biblical foundations and contemporary practices for servant leaders. Baker Academic.

King Jr., M. L. (1965). Speech: We shall overcome. Temple Israel of Hollywood.

Lingenfelter, S. G. (2008). Leading cross-culturally: covenant relationships for effective christian leadership. Baker Academic.

Moreau, A. S., Corwin, G. R., & McGee, G. B. (2004). Introducing world missions: a biblical historical, and practical survey. Baker Academic.

Sanders, J. O. (2007). Spiritual leadership: principles of excellence for every believer. Moody Publishers.

Wallace, R. (Director). (2002). We Were Soldiers [Motion Picture].