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Leading with Wisdom

By Karen B. Ford

Leadership is influence.

Define Wisdom-

- Is it a quality?
- Is it a skill?
- Is it a value?
- Is it a characteristic?
- How do we recognize it?
- How can we possess it?

Where does it come from?

How can we develop it?

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Wisdom is characterized by three things:

- ***Knowledge- accumulated philosophic or scientific learning.***
- ***Insight- the ability to discern inner qualities and relationships.***
- ***Judgment- good sense or a wise attitude or course of action.***

Everyone possesses the capacity to raise their level of leadership ability. Each one of us can improve the way we influence others, by seeking wisdom. Wisdom deals with the MIND of a leader, how she THINKS. Who would dispute that great leaders think differently from the average leader. Great leaders see

things before others do, they see beyond what others see, and they think bigger than others think.

Some leaders may barely feel able to see and plan beyond next week, but great leaders think, envision and plan well into the future.

The primary difference between a good leader and an average leader is perspective. The primary difference between a good leader and a great leader, an effective leader, is better perspective.

All leaders can have strong character, possess warm relational skills, have a strong personality and a strong will and lead. What separates the good from the great and effective is how they think, and their willingness to seek wisdom before they act.

Wisdom can be a leaders best friend especially in times of decision, in making the right choices.

Leadership development begins with “being” before “doing”. Wisdom is available to leaders who pursue it diligently, but it is not automatic.

Therefore we must, then begin with evaluating our OWN perspective- improving the way we THINK and therefore ACT.

First focusing on the way we lead ourselves, THEN focusing on the way we lead others.

Leadership begins with our thoughts. Our thoughts then affect actions. When our mind and our attitudes are right, we position ourselves to lead well. Wisdom desires to be the best friend of any leader. Wise leaders also have discernment in relationships, a recognition of what is wrong when there is conflict, and a willingness to resolve it, therefore raising our level of influence and leading more effectively.

Today our focus will be on the three areas that require the greatest wisdom for effective leadership.

- *Leading ourselves*
- *Strong healthy relationships*
- *Resolving conflict effectively*

If GREAT LEADERS seem to know what steps to take into a bright future, how can we learn from them, and begin to take those steps ourselves. We need to look at the answer to these two questions to start-- What enables them to know what to do? How do they really differ from others?

The answer and the key seems to be desire, and seeking wisdom.

So when leaders look for wisdom, for what are we searching?

First we must all answer four great questions in life-----

- 1. What do we want?**
- 2. Why do we want it?**
- 3. How badly do we want it?**
- 4. Are we willing to pay the price?**

Our influence and leadership has less to do with our position or title than it does with the life we live. It is not about position, its about reproduction and development. It is not the education we get, but the empowerment we give, that makes a difference to others.

The key word is credibility. We gain credibility when our life matches our talk and when both “make a difference” for others.

In the words of Proverbs 17:2 “It’s better to be a wise slave than a foolish son”.

Answer the following vital questions in regards to your “self”. The C words that make a difference in our state of “being”.

- 1. Consistency-** *Are you the same person no matter who is with you?*
- 2. Choices-** *Do you make decisions based on how they benefit you or how they benefit others?*
- 3. Credit-** *Are you quick to recognize others for their efforts when you succeed?*
- 4. Character** *Do you work harder at your image or your integrity?*
- 5. Credibility-** *Have you recognized that credibility is a victory not a gift? Exceptional leaders distinguish themselves because of self- improvement and continual growth.*

Why do many leaders plateau and never breakthrough to the next level?

Because there is not enough self- leadership. *Sometimes the hardest person to lead is the person who looks back at us every morning when we look into the mirror.*

Our leadership focus should be:

50% leading ourselves and the other 50% divided into three areas-

Leading down- leading those who have come after you

leading up- empowering those who have gone before you

leading laterally- connecting with likeminded leaders around you

How do we lead ourselves?

1. *Develop and maintain an aggressive personal growth plan.*

Personal growth does not just take place by gaining experience. Personal growth must be planned and implemented on a continual basis. An aggressive personal growth plan will allow you to give more to others and lead more effectively. You cannot give what you do not possess. A growing leader maintains a level of confidence that attracts others to her. A growing leader fosters a healthy sense of trust from those who choose to follow her lead.

2. *Continually evaluate Personal Best!*

Great leaders are aware that their best is never quite the best they can give. Maintaining a sense of personal best drives us to greater heights and new levels of achievement as we continue to grow and develop new skills. Awareness of our personal best allows us to look up continually and improve.

A person who evaluates Personal Best knows that the keys to her success lie in her strengths, not her weaknesses. By focusing on the strengths – what she does well, she automatically minimizes the weak areas. When we work to our strengths we reach greater levels of achievement.

3. *Self leadership involves personal goals. The stepping stones to the outcome we desire. Wishful thinking, never contributed to making a difference in another's life, so goals are essential to effective leadership.*

A great leader doesn't just set goals, she sets standards. The standards are the compass to navigating and reaching the goals, that will lead to the desired outcome. By setting standards a leader strives to give more to others than they

expect to receive. Excellence defines a leader who embraces both the goals and the standards she sets for herself.

4. Leading ourselves means maintaining a teachable spirit.

John Wooden said, “It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts”

Leading ourselves means focusing more on self-development than self-fulfillment.

Motive is the difference. Self-fulfillment means doing what I enjoy most and receive the most strokes for doing. Self-development means doing what I am talented and uniquely fit to do, that becomes my responsibility. Self-fulfillment thinks of how something serves me, self-development thinks of how something helps me serve others. With self-fulfillment feeling good is short-lived, with self-development feeling good is continual.

Focusing on leading ourselves first allows us to continue to grow in four critical areas necessary for great leadership.

- 1. Relationships—This area determines how well I know and work with people.*
- 2. Attitude- This determines how well I relate to people.*
- 3. Communication- This determines how well I connect, empower and inspire those I lead.*
- 4. Leadership This determines how well I influence others.*

STRONG HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

When asked to explain the lack of great statesmen in the world Napoleon said, “To GET power you need to display pettiness, to EXERCISE power you need to show true greatness, such pettiness and greatness are rarely found in one person.

A leaders power is destroyed by pettiness, yet many times a leader mistakenly uses pettiness rather than exercising greatness at a critical point in developing relationships with those around her. This leader will plateau, and sometimes destroy trust, which is essential to a healthy relationship.

Great leaders are effective because they have developed the right kind of relationships.

A common error many make is to separate leadership from relationships. Even the toughest problems can be solved when relationships are managed well. Far too often, leaders believe their position forces them to remain distant from their people. They imagine they must remain aloof, even a bit mysterious, living at a level unattainable by others.

When leaders practice transparency, respect goes up, not down. The best leaders feel motivated by love and compassion for those they lead. This leads to an environment of mutual respect, where both the leader and those she leads need each other.

Relationships will do more to determine effectiveness than any technical skill we can master. Strong healthy relationships are essential for effective leadership.

A leader generally develops and maintains healthy relationships with those who follow her, when her philosophy is that it is not the other persons responsibility to try to get along with her, it is her responsibility to unconditionally accept a persons behavior and to get along with them.

This does not indicate an approval of inappropriate behavior, but an acceptance of different personalities and styles.

Leaders can accomplish this by focusing on blessing others, not controlling others.

Blessing others contains five key elements.

- 1. Affirming words- words that give hope and encouragement.*
- 2. Meaningful touch- an embrace or a hand on a shoulder communicating care.*
- 3. Expression of high value- a statement on the value that person adds to others.*
- 4. Vision of a special future- speaking words that communicate potential not criticism. There really is no such thing as constructive criticism, there is just criticism.*
- 5. Application of genuine commitment- through actions not words show commitment to others success.*

Leaders must relate to their people from the soul not merely from protocol. the best way to overcome relational problems is to involve your heart, not just your head. Unfortunately we are tempted in another direction. When we fail at something, we tend to see why it happened and cut ourselves some slack; we may even make excuses for our mistakes. In other words, we deal with ourselves

using our heart. Yet we often neglect the heart when dealing with others. We can be direct and even demanding. It really works best to switch the whole thing around. When dealing with yourself, use your head. When dealing with others use your heart.

Handling conflict in relationships

Motion causes friction. In every relationship where there is motion and growth, there will sometimes be conflict. Handling conflict effectively assures an environment of mutual respect and trust.

Effective leaders don't need to control others to feel confident in their leadership. All leaders will have conflict at one time or another.

The 10 keys to effectively deal with conflict.

- 1. When handling conflict it is important to confront the issue, not the person involved.*
- 2. Love people more than opinions. Don't defend opinions and destroy relationships. Pick your battles.*
- 3. Give others the benefit of the doubt. Don't be defensive. Don't rationalize defenses to prove right or wrong.*
- 4. Learn to be flexible. In matters of principle, stand firm. In matters of style go with the flow. Choose the matters of true importance to deal with. In leadership, the greater the person, the more flexible she is.*
- 5. Provide an escape for the person in conflict. Give them an exit. People sometimes defend actions, not because they are right, but because they are afraid of losing face if they back down. Give them an out.*
- 6. Check your own attitude. Ask yourself this question, "Am I having conflict with others consistently?" or "Am I having conflict with several people, or is this an exception?" Many times troubled relationships reflect your own attitude. Ask, "How often does this occur, and with how many different people is it occurring. Sometimes we need to focus on our own attitude. The attitude with which we view people determines our perception of how we think they feel about us and what we think they are saying about us.*

7. *Don't overreact to conflict. Sometimes we magnify the conflict by overreacting. Learn to respond rather than react.*

8. *Don't become defensive. A leader knows how to say, "I'm sorry", "I misunderstood", "I'm wrong". The moment you feel that you have to defend yourself you have a battle, and sometimes never resolve the issue.*

9. *Welcome the conflict and learn more about the person because of it. Reality is that most of us have a problem with conflict- make it a learning experience. Conflicts will either give you ulcers or understanding. Understanding of how you can be a better person, therefore a better leader.*

10. *Take a Risk- Many people do not handle conflicts because they are afraid to put their hand out first, because they might be rejected. Be vulnerable in your leadership, it's okay.*

Don't ignore or run from conflict- when you handle the issues involved, rather than confronting the person involved- you will be a more effective leader.

Do you want to gain wisdom, lead effectively and make a difference for others? If that is your purpose in your leadership then pay attention to the metaphor of the ant. It's amazing that one of the smallest of God's creatures can become one of His greatest teachers. The lessons the ant teaches us can be summarized this way.

A—attitude of initiative- Ants don't need a commander to tell them to get started.

N-- Nature of integrity- Ants work faithfully and need no outside accountability to keep them doing right.

T—Thirst for industry- Ants work hard and will replace their anthill when it gets destroyed.

S-- Source of insight- Ants store provisions in summer.

If we consider and learn from the ways of the ant, WE CAN GROW WISE.

Wise leaders are effective leaders. The greatest leaders of our time have led with Wisdom and discernment knowing that the power to change the course of someone's life is greater than anything else. Greater than personal success, greater than the scoreboard, and greater than financial gain.

Proverbs 4:7-8 tells us

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting and understanding, Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honor, when thou dost embrace her.

Remember:

When you sow a thought

You reap an act

You sow an act

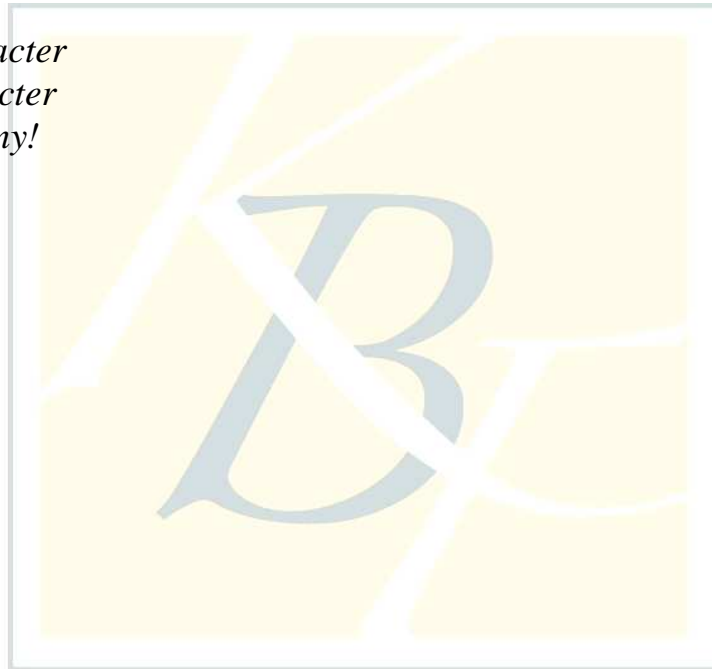
Your reap a habit

You sow a habit

You reap a character

You sow a character

You reap a destiny!



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