

A COMMON TRAIT OF EXCEPTIONAL LEADERS

By Robert J. Tamasy

If you go into any bookstore or library, you can find hundreds of books about leadership. And if you do a search on the Internet, you could probably devote a lifetime to exploring the seemingly endless thinking about what comprises a good leader. I am not about to claim special insight into the foremost qualities of top leadership, but exceptional leaders seem to share one particular trait.

"Successful people are always looking for opportunities to help others. Unsuccessful people are always asking, 'What is in it for me?'" states author and speaker Brian Tracy. I believe he is correct. It has been said many times, "you win with people," and an excellent way to do that is by helping others to achieve their own goals and, in the process, enable them to participate in achieving yours.

Of course, helping others sounds like a noble aim, but how do you go about doing it? One of the first U.S. presidents, John Quincy Adams, offered this perspective: "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

So it seems to be a combination of leading by action as well as by words. We can communicate verbally how much we value others and seek to motivate them, but when we actively demonstrate our desire to help them reach their potential and achieve their dreams, we are proving to be leaders worth following.

I will never forget one boss who told me, "If you need a place where you can flourish and become all God has designed you to be, we have a place for you." Then he backed up those words by giving me a position with his organization that in fact enabled me to explore opportunities I could not have imagined before.

When Jesus Christ was selecting His followers, one of the factors that drew others to Him was the promise to help them become much more than they could envision for themselves. His initial choices – Peter and Andrew, James and John – were engaged in their families' fishing trade. They probably expected to spend the rest of their days casting nets into the sea and hauling fish into their boats.

Jesus did not demean their vocation, but urged them to set their sights higher. "*Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men*" (Matthew 4:19). After they had observed wondrous miracles He had performed, Jesus told them, "*I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father*" (John 14:12).

After His resurrection, Jesus clarified the call He had for each of His followers, an ambitious assignment: "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:19-20). Is it any wonder that years later, the apostle Paul declared, "*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God*" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Reviewing your career to this point, who has helped you? Who has inspired you to dream more, learn more, do more and become more? And can you identify anyone you are now striving to help, urging and challenging them so they can aspire to become more than they are today?

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of the statement that successful people are always looking for opportunities to help others? Do you agree that is – or should be – one characteristic of success? Why or why not?
2. Considering the final questions, who comes to mind as someone that has helped you to this point in your career – and in what ways? Can you think of someone you presently are helping – or are you looking for opportunities to do so? Explain your answer.
3. Think of some specific ways a leader can help others in their professional or personal development, or both – how might this enhance the leader's influence and impact?
4. From what you know of the life of Jesus Christ, even though his time on earth was 2,000 years ago, how would you assess his leadership effectiveness? What – if anything – does that show about the legacy of a charismatic, vision-casting leader?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions from the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages: Proverbs 27:23-27, 28:2; Philippians 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:2; 1 Peter 5:1-4