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By Robert J. Tamasy

TO BE A GOOD LEADER, BE A GOOD LEARNER

Leadership offers great opportunities. Many leaders regard their roles as a tremendous privilege. But leadership also presents significant challenges, not only for effectively guiding others but also for avoiding pitfalls that have beset people in executive roles throughout history.

For example, leadership positions can inflate the ego. This is one reason we read this admonition from the apostle Paul, himself a well-established leader: *“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you” (Romans 12:3).*

One form of “thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought” is operating according the assumption that we know everything, at least more than everyone we direct or manage. We fear that if we admit we do not have all the answers, subordinates might think less of us, even question our authority.

However, one of the endearing traits of good leaders is willingness to acknowledge they still have much to learn. In fact, openness to learn from those who report to them can enable leaders to show how much they value their staff. A good leader strives to remain a good learner. Many of my greatest workplace lessons have come from people I had hired and directed.

We find the good leaders are good learners principle exemplified by Jesus Christ, whom the Bible describes as fully God and fully man. As God in the flesh, He did not lack knowledge. Yet He showed His followers a willingness to learn

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from them. For instance, Jesus inquired of His disciples, *“Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13)*.

He did not need to ask this question, but was eager to hear what His followers had to say. Predictably, they offered a variety of responses. Then Jesus asked a second question, “But what about you? Who do you say that I am?” One of them, Peter, soon replied, *“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:15-16)*. Jesus not only wanted to know their answers, but also desired to encourage them to think through the most important question of all time.

The same applies to the realm of the workplace. No matter the enterprise in which we are involved, the truth that good leaders are good learners – leader/learners – never fails. In fact, it is timeless. The Bible gives much insight into this, including the book of Proverbs. Here are just two examples:

Maintain an openness to learning new things. It has been said, “Not one of us is as smart as all of us.” It may require humility to recognize it, but we each can learn from people even at the lowest professional levels. They can give perspectives and approaches we might not have considered. *“Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge” (Proverbs 23:12)*.

Pursue truth and understanding. Followers of Jesus Christ pray for God’s wisdom and guidance. Often He supplies that through other people. We are wise to consider what they are thinking before making key decisions. *“Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding” (Proverbs 23:23)*.

© 2018. Robert J. Tamasy has written *Business at Its Best: Timeless Wisdom from Proverbs for Today’s Workplace; Tufting Legacies*; coauthored with David A. Stoddard, *The Heart of Mentoring*, and edited numerous other books, including *Advancing Through Adversity* by Mike Landry. Bob’s biweekly blog is: www.bobtamasy.blogspot.com.

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. Do you agree that good learners also are good learners? Why or why not? Can you cite some examples?
2. Can you think of a time when you learned from someone who held a position of lesser status and influence in your organization? What did you learn – and did you find it difficult to be open to considering what the other person had to say?
3. What does it mean to be a leader/learner? What downsides, if any, can you think of in acknowledging you don't have all the answers?
4. Some people describe themselves as “lifetime learners.” Do you consider yourself one of those? If so, what kinds of things do you enjoy learning?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

1 Samuel 3:9-10; Proverbs 11:12, 15:2,7, 16:21-23, 17:27, 20:12, 25:12

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