

**THE LEADER 'WASHING THE FEET' OF TEAM MEMBERS****By Sergio Fortes**

For a moment, imagine a top executive calling a special meeting and after bringing in a wash basin and towels, proceeding to wash the feet of his or her staff members. Such a scene in the corporate world would be considered very strange at best, if not unbelievable. Nevertheless, as we read accounts of the life of Jesus Christ in the Bible, this is exactly what He did. And it was as shocking then as it would be today.

Jesus had led His group of 12 disciples for three years. They did not know it at the time, but His work on earth was coming to a close. He determined to give them a very clear, if startling, object lesson. Taking a basin, towel, and water, Jesus began to wash the feet of His followers, as described in John 13:4-17. The washing of one's feet was common in those days, since the roads people traveled were dusty or muddy, but the task was always performed by lowly servants, not the leader of an enterprise.

Can you picture this scene? An uncomfortable silence filling the hall, and frightened, incredulous looks exchanged by Jesus' disciples. Finally, one of them, Peter, who was known for his short temper, put his shock into words of humble defiance: "No, You shall never wash my feet!" (John 13:8). To which Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me." Jesus' purpose was to provide an indelible example of how true leaders should serve those they lead.

In today's business world, we often observe a frightening change as people climb the corporate ladder. Individuals who once were good-natured, considerate, and flexible undergo a radical transformation as they ascend the hierarchical ranks. They become ill-mannered, rude, arrogant, and inaccessible, forgetting the co-laborers they have left behind. They begin to see only what they want and who they want.

At what point in the climb does this "metamorphosis" take place? Mountain climbers are often afflicted with "altitude sickness," the effects of which are devastating. In rarefied air, the limited oxygen can create serious mental problems, sometimes irreversible. Might there be a counterpart on the corporate ladder?

Causes for such radical changes exhibited by rising executives may be attributed to one of the three most common weaknesses that afflict leaders: POWER. The other weaknesses many authorities have written about are money and sex, but they would be subjects for another time. For now, let us look at Power, describing it as the ability to exercise authority deliberately and sometimes, arbitrarily.

Leaders intoxicated with prestige and the power at their disposal take the approach of 'Command and Obey.' They provide no opportunities for discussion, debate, or dispute. At their worst, these leaders succumb to a temptation that dates to the garden of Eden, as described in

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the first chapter of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. “You will be like God,” the Tempter told Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:5).

Rulers, politicians, bureaucrats, chairmen, CEOs, managers – all can be enticed by this perpetual grab for power. This is why one of the last actions of Jesus of Nazareth before His betrayal and crucifixion was to wash the feet of those He led, even including Judas, the one who would betray Him soon afterward.

Can you imagine a scene such as this – or an equivalent action – taking place where you work? If you are in a leadership position, would you be able to perform it earnestly and sincerely? Proverbs 22:4 gives us a perspective worth considering: “Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life.” Sincere humility and willingness to serve those we lead – the power to inspire a team to excellence!

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### Reflection/Discussion Questions Challenge

1. Were you familiar with the story of Jesus Christ washing the feet of His followers? Knowing this custom was typically performed by humble servants, how do you envision the followers responding?
2. Have you ever witnessed a leader in the workplace doing something similar – if not actual foot-washing, some demonstration that he or she was serving in a selfless manner? If so, describe the situation and the reaction that resulted.
3. The writer describes how some people, as they ascend the corporate ladder or organizational hierarchy, take on a very different attitude toward the people they once worked with. Have you ever observed this? Do you think it is justified? Why or why not?
4. What do you think is the effect of a leader who demonstrates genuine humility and concern toward those for whom he or she is responsible? Which seems more effective – a ‘command and obey’ approach, or a humble attitude of serving others? Explain your answer.

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages: Proverbs 11:2, 15:33, 16:18, 21:24, 28:2; Mark 10:42-45; Philipians 2:3-4

### Challenge

Cultivating a genuine spirit of humility and developing an others-first attitude can be difficult. If this is something you would desire to do having the support of others could be very beneficial. Who can you team with in this endeavor, one or more people you know well and trust that you can ask to encourage you – and in turn be encouraged by you? How can you get started today?

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