

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A BOSS AND A LEADER

By Robert J. Tamasy

Over my working career I have had numerous people I would sometimes refer to as “boss.” They were the people I reported to, who had hired me, and – if I did not do my job satisfactorily – had the authority to fire me. Thankfully, in most cases my “bosses” also were good leaders. But in the business and professional world, that is not always the case.

What’s the difference? Speaker, author, and consultant Tim Kight summed it up when he described how the perspective of a “boss” differs from that of a true leader. He said the mindset of a boss is, “The people I lead work for me. It is their responsibility to do what I tell them to do.” However, Kight stated, the mindset of a genuine leader is, “I work for the people I lead. It is my responsibility to provide them with the support they need so they can achieve great things.”

This reminds me of the classic business book, *Good to Great*, by Jim Collins. The book centered on studies he and his research team did of the highest-performing companies. What they discovered was that in most cases, the top corporations were not headed by well-known, charismatic personalities, but by humble individuals whose passions for excellence and success were balanced by great humility.

Looking over the research, Collins observed, “The good-to-great leaders never wanted to become larger-than-life heroes. They never aspired to be put on a pedestal or become unreachable icons. They were seemingly ordinary people quietly producing extraordinary results.”

Reading through the Bible we find similar individuals. Joseph, Moses, David, Nehemiah, and others in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament the apostles Paul and Peter, and most notably Jesus Christ, all were leaders who, using Kight’s terms, saw it as their responsibility to provide the people they were leading with the support they needed to achieve great things. Here are just a few of many examples:

**Casting a unifying vision.** One of the best ways to lead is to present a vision for work that can inspire everyone involved. Nehemiah did this after inspecting the ruins of ancient Jerusalem. “Then I said [to everyone who would be involved in the work], ‘You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.’ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me.... So, they began this good work” (Nehemiah 2:17-18). It was completed over a remarkably short span of time.

**Being willing to be of service to others.** If anyone had a right to insist that everyone defer to Him, it was Jesus Christ, God incarnate. Yet He remained true to His mission, to become the atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind and offer everyone who would follow Him a new life.

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“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Rather than concentrating on what people can do to advance their own goals, the best leaders strive to find ways for encouraging and challenging those reporting to them to flourish in using their God-given gifts, skills, and talents. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

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### Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Do you think that being a “boss” (or whatever term you prefer) is necessarily the same as being a good, effective leader? Why or why not?
2. Think of someone you consider to be a true leader. What are his or her qualities that seem to stand out, that inspire others to want to follow them?
3. Why do you think some individuals, whether business and professional executives or politicians, receive so much attention even when they do not seem to possess genuine leadership traits and qualities?
4. Considering the life of Jesus Christ, whose influence is still being felt very strongly today, 2,000 years later, what are some of the things that made Him such an effective leader?

### Challenge for This Week

You may be in a position of top leadership in your organization, or you might have a role with only limited opportunities for leading others. In either case, take some time to assess your own leadership strengths and weaknesses.

You might even seek out a trusted friend or two to give you honest feedback about your leadership capabilities. Then consider steps you might begin taking to become an even more effective leader who puts the needs and interests of others first.

#### NOTE:

For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages:

Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 28:2,16; Matthew 7:9-12; 1 Corinthians 10:31-33; Ephesians 6:5-9

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