

LOOKING BEYOND APPEARANCES**By Rick Boxx**

The executive certainly looked the part. He was tall, athletic, radiating with a charisma that drew people to himself. What an impression he made on people when he met them, and especially when he spoke in public. So, everyone was stunned when he was fired for inappropriate use of company resources. It caused people to question not only the executive, but the company's values. How could they have chosen such a person to carry such leadership responsibilities?

Sadly, this is not a rare occurrence. All too often we hear or read about a prominent leader, one who was well-known and widely admired, falling into some form of moral or ethical disgrace. What we see is not always what we get. How does this happen? How can appearances be so deceiving?

We find an insightful example in the Bible's Old Testament. It is the account of how the king was chosen to succeed Israel's first and very fallible king, Saul. God had instructed the prophet Samuel to anoint the new king, which He said would be selected from the sons of a man named Jesse. Once Jesse's sons had gathered, Samuel looked at each one and thought one or two seemed like royal material. However, God was not fooled by external appearances. He told Samuel to look beyond the beyond the surface, beyond superficial characteristics when seeking to identify the man to succeed Saul.

"But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'" (1 Samuel 16:7). The passage does not offer specifics about why Jesse's other sons were not chosen, but it was clear the youngest son – a lowly shepherd boy named David – possessed the qualities God was looking for to lead His chosen people, Israel.

The truth of this biblical example is clear: Integrity is lived out deep within us, regardless of what the outside looks like. Unfortunately, because we do not have sight that penetrates a person's heart – their character – we tend to evaluate people according to how they present themselves: how they talk, dress, non-verbal communications, and behavioral cues. Sometimes outward appearances and inward traits line up, but many times they do not. How do we discern whether someone we are intending to hire, or someone we are considering working with, is genuine? Here are some criteria from book of Proverbs:

Teachability. It is dangerous to assign important responsibilities to someone who thinks he or she knows it all and is not open to correction and advice. "A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength; for waging war you need guidance and for victory many advisors" (Proverbs 24:5-6).

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Faithfulness. We need to find people who are dependable regardless of the circumstances. “Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?” (Proverbs 20:6).

Humility. When people think too highly of themselves, having inflated egos, problems usually arise. “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2).

Control of emotions. A person prone to outbursts of anger and other negative emotions can prove destructive to team morale and harmony. “A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered” (Proverbs 17:27).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been deceived by a person’s outward appearance, thinking they were one thing only to later discover they were very different from what you originally perceived? Explain what that situation was like.
2. What are some of the consequences of focusing primarily on outward appearances in making hiring decisions, assigning greater responsibilities, entering a business partnership, or even in choosing friends?
3. We cannot “look at the heart” in the same way God does, as described in 1 Samuel 16:7, but what other ways can we utilize in trying to discover who the inner person really is?
4. Besides teachability, faithfulness, integrity and control of emotions, what are some other non-external qualities that are important to consider?

Challenge for This Week

During the coming week, evaluate how you respond to people when you first encounter them. Are you a good judge of character, or are you inclined to make quick judgments about people based on how they appear and act outwardly?

It might be helpful to talk about this with a mentor, trusted advisors, a close friend, your CBMC team or an accountability group. How can you – and they – become better at judging who people really are, rather than who they appear to be?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:
1 Chronicles 28:9; Proverbs 21:2; Jeremiah 17:10; Matthew 23:27-28; Acts 13:22

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