

## “Rare Leadership”

### Four Uncommon Habits For Increasing Trust, Joy, and Engagement in the People You Lead

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Why are there so many leaders out there that are really tough to trust and follow? Honestly, I think it has to do with their lack of being emotionally healthy.

“What am I to do?” as opposed to “who am I to be?”

Most boards evaluate their leaders based on performance and results.

We need RARE leadership:

- 1) **R**emain relational
- 2) **A**ct like yourself
- 3) **R**eturn to joy
- 4) **E**ndure hardship

Success in leadership has so much more to do with EQ than IQ.

Isn't it amazing how many dysfunctional people can become the boss or team leader?

But according to a ton of new research, performance success in leadership is one-third IQ and two-thirds EQ. Most of these leadership challenges have less to do with strategic planning than the ability to handle difficult relationships and upsetting emotions. Too often leaders are chosen simply on gifting, education, and experience. We give lip service to the idea of maturity. Do we have a clear strategy for helping people grow in maturity?

#### REMAIN RELATIONAL

The idea that the relationship is more important than the problem took a long time for me to believe, and I still haven't mastered it. Learning to remain relational is a key factor in creating high-performing teams and building healthy churches and organizations.

## ACT LIKE YOURSELF

## RETURN TO JOY

How productive are you when you are stuck in one of the six unpleasant emotions hardwired into our brains: 1) fear, 2) anger, 3) disgust, 4) shame, 5) sadness, 6) hopelessness?

## ENDURE HARDSHIP

learning to suffer well. If we don't learn how to do this we will avoid suffering or spread our suffering to our team.

## **CHAPTER 1** Leadership at the Speed of Joy.

Mistaking management for leadership.

## ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS VS. PEOPLE SKILLS

The term “lead” has come to mean organizational skills rather than people skills. Leadership, for many pastors, is exercised from a platform whilst holding onto a microphone. There was no real interest in people as individuals, aside from the way they fit into or furthered the leader's personal projects. I was disappointed as a student (and later as a member of faculty) to notice how uninterested many professors were in the lives of their students. Leaders influence more through who they are than by what they do.

We have observed that leaders often believe that understanding an idea is sufficient to make that idea a reality in their own lives. Many leadership failures can be traced to declining joy levels in leadership teams, marriages, and families. Leadership that neglects joy rapidly becomes management instead of leadership.

As leaders manage increasingly larger workloads and focus energy on better productivity, objectives, and results, they easily miss the decline in joy levels in their lives, families, and work teams. Low joy involves a failed training strategy in how we learn to deal relationally with unpleasant emotions.

The call to leadership for us, then, would seem to be a call to walk with a group of people, as we strive to make our relationship with God visible

## R—REMAIN RELATIONAL.

Common leaders value results and solutions more than relationships.

## A—ACT LIKE YOURSELF.

RARE leaders have a consistency of character anchored in a positive core identity.

R—RETURN TO JOY.

E—ENDURE HARDSHIP WELL.

Focus on building management systems, and leadership is left to chance. Focus on building leadership systems, and you will always improve management. To be a good leader you require a diversity of good habits in both fast (leadership) and slow (management) systems. This book is about developing habits in the fast-track system because that will optimize the slow-track habits as well. Have you looked at this as an issue of community identity and belonging rather than programming?" When people prove hard to lead we tend to start managing people instead of leading them.

RARE leaders use difficulties as opportunities to focus on improving relational skills before improving task management. Working is about getting a job done and there is certainly some of that in leadership. However, leading is primarily about guiding the group that does the work. Loss of trust by others happens all the time to leaders who fixate on problem-solving at the cost of relational skills.

Leaders often solve problems and get results but frustrate people along the way. Burnout is typical of organizations led by results-oriented, problem-solving leaders. These leaders have a well-trained management brain, but often lack a well-trained relational brain, generating a fear-based culture where people are afraid to admit failure or expose weakness.

## **CHAPTER 2** The Difference Between RARE Leaders and Sandbox Leaders.

At a time when we need solid, grounded leadership more than ever, we seem to be in short supply of adults who act like, well ... like adults.

Sandbox leaders are grown-ups in positions of responsibility whose lack of emotional maturity creates catastrophic consequences for their unsuspecting followers. The higher a person rises in leadership circles, the more devastating the impact of sandbox leadership can be. All of these crises and more can be traced back to leaders who are competent and charismatic but lack emotional maturity. Fast-track skills, as we noted in chapter 1, are the relational habits in the brain that run faster than we can follow consciously. Sandbox leaders become children under pressure. The number one lid on most leaders is emotional immaturity.

For Christian leaders it is especially insightful that these discoveries in brain science are confirming lessons the Bible has taught for years. New facts did little to change how people think. We needed a change of viewpoint. The idea is that if you give people good information, they can make good choices and change their lives. Most preaching and most discipleship programs are built around this philosophy. Nearly all discipleship and leadership training we provide our pastors and corporate managers is based on accountability. What, then, runs in the fast track that has executive control?

The answer is identity. Who we are determines what we will do and identity operates faster and more powerfully than choices.

R – Remain relational (belonging) A – Act like yourself (identity) R – Return to joy (being glad to be together) E – Endure hardships well (using hard times to bring us closer)

When accountability groups work, most of the time it is a byproduct of good group leadership.

Lasting transformation takes place when a person's identity changes and that person becomes comfortable in living out of their new identity. The coaches, pastors, teachers, managers, and leaders are the ones who instill a clear sense of identity into their group and help people understand "This is who we are and this is how it is like us to act."

I remember one coach stopped me and gave some great advice. He said lead through your relationships. Instead of making changes out of fear of what others will think or say or do, I make changes because of who I am. Isolation, distrust, and fear of a powerful, very successful pastor created a toxic leadership environment.

Whereas an accountability group asks people to get together and be honest about their behavior and whether they are living up to their commitments, an identity group is focused on helping people remember who they are and how it is like them to act—how God created them to act.

It is not an accountability group in that we do not evaluate each other's behavior or urge faithfulness to a set of promises. Rather, it is a place where we can talk about our struggles and be honest about our issues. We don't try to fix each other.

This type of intimacy with God is a hallmark of emotionally mature leaders who pay attention to their fast-track habits. What generally passes for strength is actually based in insecurity and fear. Strength is often a cluster of management skills employed to manage our own image. Changing the fuel of our fast-track thinking from fear to belonging can create transformation. Relationships stay more important than problems.

## **CHAPTER 3 The Elevator in Your Brain.**

I was asked to begin with a personal mission statement.

Energy, motivation, and engagement are the output of a smoothly running fast track with a solid and joyful identity. The ability to lead is learned and can be optimized. The conclusion of this new science is that relational joy is the natural means for growing a strong, resilient mind. Building a group identity based on joy is the optimal path for leadership. The attachment center is all about relationships. Its greatest pleasure is joyful attachment. Its greatest pain is relational loss. Once fear becomes the dominant motivator, nearly everything in life becomes a problem to be solved. When our thoughts get in sync with God's thoughts, we feel a sense of shalom.

Learning to synchronize with people and attune to their feelings is an important relational skill. Without this skill, we will feel isolated even in a crowd. Most of the trouble we see comes from defects on the third floor (where we learn to sync relationally).

Market opportunities, team building, motivation, and training all depend upon a leader's response to weakness. We can actually train the fast track to be protective rather than predatory. We propose that this training is not only possible but is what makes a good leader. What is needed is a strong sense of how I and my kind of people respond to the naked, poor, lost, confused, and otherwise vulnerable people we see. When fear becomes the dominant motivation in any group, that group will become toxic.

When fear is the primary motivation for a leader, that leader will burn out and spread dysfunction to his group in the process. Will we solve them relationally, creatively, as a group, and with the best part of ourselves engaged in what we're doing? Or, will we solve problems in isolation, avoiding shame and any perception of failure, while hiding behind a mask that makes us look stronger than we really are? The good news is, habits that make for a RARE and wonderful life can be learned.

## **CHAPTER 4 When the Fast Track Needs Fixing.**

Giving up all control is freedom. When leaders begin to be swayed by who is going to get upset, they are surrendering their guidance to the most emotionally unstable person in their group.

Procrastination is a motivation pattern generated by avoiding the most impending negative outcome. In the long term, motivation through avoiding bad feelings is hard to sustain. Too much leadership emphasizes power, not relationship. The untrained fast track operates in isolation—which is directly related to fear. We need think no further than church fights, church splits, and an organization's loss of a sense of its mission to see the damage a focus on "problems" can cause.

## **CHAPTER 5 Don't Take Your Eye Off the Fast Track.**

He had made a perfect shot, but at the wrong target. We contend that leaders must keep target #2 as second priority and aim first at target #1: Building group identity. When we know who we are, we get our kind of results. When we make results our primary target, we create a fear-based motivation. Leaders with high emotional maturity will always be community builders.

RARE leaders call out what is best in people and remind them how to act like themselves when problems become a serious challenge. Groups with a healthy identity shine brightest in times of trouble. I had to make the shift in engaging with my team at a heartfelt level rather than results-based outcomes. It puts a primacy on formation and not mere information, maximizing whole-person growth rather than short-term performance,

We understand an essential aspect of child flourishing as being the ability to handle emotional distress well. We generally are not a good fit for parents whose metric for child flourishing is different than ours. Helping board members explain a fast-track school to a slow-track world. Most parents do not even faintly understand how to make relational repairs to the fast track.

We are learning to put a primacy on relational dynamics. The influence and power of a leader can ignite or douse the fire in one's heart. Emotional and relational maturity is required to fan the flame of a team member's passions and strengths. RARE leaders understand that results matter, but they don't fix their sights on results. By building a team with a great group identity, RARE leaders give their teams the best chance of getting results. The real goal is the creation of a transformative community built on belonging and identity.

## **CHAPTER 6 Where You Start: Imitation, Identity, Intimacy.**

A leader showed me that I had a lot of fear that was at the source of my problems, With his encouragement, I began to say no to many of the requests for my time.

### **IMITATION EXERCISES**

We admit our own weaknesses and pay attention to people who have skills we lack. If you are committed to building the fast-track habits you need in order to become a rare leader, it is important to identify which skills you are lacking—which requires a measure of humility—and find people in your circle who have those skills. Spiritually mature people of all ages have built a habit of intimacy with God that Tozer calls “Spiritual Receptivity.” It is the practice of paying attention to what God is whispering to our hearts.

As leaders it is crucial that we develop our “Spiritual Receptivity” by learning to practice the presence of God. In general, listening is a difficult art for leaders to master. Listening to God is not primarily about listening for words. It is about sensing His voice with the fast-track part of our brain.

Here are some practical steps that can help us grow our ability to recognize God's voice and improve our Spiritual Receptivity.

1. Quiet
2. Scripture Reading
3. Appreciation
4. Writing
5. Sharing

It is dangerous to rely solely on your own judgment. Being part of a group brings an intrinsic motivation with it. For any real transformation to take place, you are going to need a team that is committed to a common goal. We have been calling this team your “identity group.” They aren't there to evaluate you. They are there to call out what is best in you. We generally don't need people to beat us up when we fail. Most of us are pretty good at doing that to ourselves. Throughout these chapters, we will make reference to the importance of imitation exercises, the pursuit of intimacy with God, and participation in identity groups.

Leaders are often in a hurry for change, which is understandable, but some things can't be rushed and shortcuts cause problems.

RARE leaders are the ones who find relational ways to solve problems and thus, keep relationships bigger than problems, don't let problems get bigger than relationships. They deal with problems in a relational way. Their goal is to solve problems in a way that makes relationships stronger when they are finished. For example, connecting with my wife at an emotional level, not just a problem-solving level.

When your relational circuits are on, your curiosity about life and people kicks in. When your circuits are off, you stop thinking relationally and only see problems. Emotionally mature leaders will always be grateful people. They excel at finding what is praiseworthy in every situation.

As Steve Brunkhorst says, "Feeling appreciated is one of the most important needs that people have. When you share with someone your appreciation and gratitude, they will not forget you. Appreciation will return to you many times." Shared joy is perhaps the most powerful relational experience that exists. You put the meat of the "problem" between the two slices of "relational" bread. This is about making the relationship bigger than the problem.

"How do I remain relational and act like myself in spite of the problems I am facing and the pain that I feel?" I don't want to lose my sense of God's presence in the midst of any problems or hardship. A well-developed group identity reflects back who we are, what we care about, and what kinds of things upset us. Everything we need to "be like" Christ is already inside those of us who belong to Him. Much of it is dormant and needs to be awakened.

Identity sounds like an individual reality, but the truth is your identity always comes from belonging to a group. Your core identity flows out of your answer to the question, "Who are my people?" Understanding which group we belong to helps us to remember who we are and how it is like us to act.

Predators frequently scan the environment for signs of weakness that can be exploited for personal gain. The essence of narcissistic leadership is its lack of tenderness toward weakness. Without training, we are all natural predators. We also have possum leaders who tend to disappear in times of crisis.

Treating weakness with tenderness isn't exactly a classic leadership theme. If we don't admit weakness, we can't grow. Protector leaders are simply emotionally mature leaders. They keep relationships bigger than problems. A protector leader will do such things as join in joy, share all distress, and, this is especially important; encourage the weak and point out weaknesses in the strong—including the leader. How many leaders do you know who encourage that? Triggers and masks. We get triggered when our buttons are pushed and we turn into somebody we are not. We wear masks to make ourselves look stronger.

## TRIGGERS

Avoiding upset emotions is not a recipe for success, however. At some point, we have to lift the lid and take a look inside the powder keg. You know you have been triggered in several ways:

- You shut down relationally
- You blow up relationally
- You feel like running away
- You feel like punching something
- You overreact to the situation

In most cases, we aren't simply reacting to what has happened in the present. We bring all the stored-up emotions from past pain into the present.

Ask God what got triggered. Ask God for a new perspective. Share what you learn with your identity partners. Isolation kills growth.

## MASKS AND KILLING JOY

Masks we wear to hide our weaknesses and make us look strong to others are strategies we develop in order to solve problems. All masks slowly kill joy, even when they work. Do people truly appreciate us or just what we can do for them? In our individualized, Western way of looking at life, we have tended to take Paul's instructions almost entirely as rules for personal improvement rather than corporate engagement. We all need people in our lives who know us well enough to recognize when we are starting to slip behind our masks and who can comfort us when we get triggered. My identity was not found in ministry (one of the lessons God was teaching me in that season of my life) but in being the person God had made me to be. It is exhausting trying to be somebody you're not.

The slow track always focuses on problems just as the fast track always focuses on relationship.

The Greek word translated as "rule" is probably better translated "referee." The most important predictor of a group's emotional health is its ability to return to joy from upsetting emotions.

Emotions were like riding a wave. If you let the wave break, there is a lot of intensity for a very short period of time, then you end up with a gentle ribbon of sea foam gently lapping against the shore. On the other hand, if you use all of your power to keep the wave from breaking, you become very tired and remain out at sea in the choppy, rolling water. To return to joy from anger is not to get rid of anger, but to remain relational and act like myself even when I get angry. Mature leaders (and parents) are able to quiet themselves and elevate the relationship above the problem.



There was a clear sign that my relational circuits had shut down and that I had left the fast track in my brain and moved to slow-track problem solving. Normally, when fear gets triggered, people stop being concerned for others and think only of their own predicament. I was able to stay true to myself, be relaxed and authentic as I preached. Who we were and whose we were at such times of fear. When people feel understood, they tend to be far more open to whatever explanation or correction you may have to offer.

Skipping validation is a classic blunder made by people who are used to problems being more important than relationships. Most of us just want to fix the problem and make the emotions go away. We do this because we are not used to keeping relationships big. Leaders who can't do this for themselves won't be able to do it for their groups. RARE leaders deal with their group's emotions, they know much of our lives are redirected by unhappy emotions?

Which of the big six negative emotions (anger, fear, sadness, shame, disgust, and despair) is your biggest challenge? Suffering and unpleasant emotions can't be avoided. We all have to deal with them at some level. Those who learn to deal with them well become mature. Their capacity to suffer well is one of the hallmarks that makes them RARE leaders. It is clear that mature people handle suffering better than others. Emotional capacity refers to the amount of stress you can handle before things blow up or melt down. When your emotional capacity gets overwhelmed, trauma occurs and your ability to suffer well gets stunted. You don't have to be abused to have some pretty big holes in your maturity development. We are all "unfinished" people.

Many of the issues leaders face are directly related to the lack of emotional capacity they have developed because of unresolved trauma. Paul was telling the Corinthians that they lacked mature leaders who established significant relationships with their spiritual children.

The church today is in dire need of fathers, mothers, and elders—people with the life experience and walk with God to act like themselves. Keep relationships bigger than problems, and model an intimate walk with God in the midst of hardship. You can be in your seventies and still have the emotional capacity and relational skills of an infant.

What they are not terribly good at is remaining relational when they are problem solving. Mature adults know how to keep relationships bigger than problems, act like themselves in a group, and take care of the needs of two people at the same time.

Most of our churches are not lacking for talented or gifted people. Yet they are starving for leaders with the maturity to love well even in the face of the many problems any community will face. "Practice doesn't make perfect. Practice makes permanent."

The more time you spend in a state of appreciation, the more your capacity for joy will grow. In order to suffer well, you have to develop your capacity for appreciation. Part of being humble is recognizing our limits. If your joy account is always low, you will constantly be bouncing emotional checks. We tend to turn to joy substitutes, better known as addictions.

Instead of joy, our approach to leadership is producing tired visionaries, staff without emotional competence, and immature workers. Nothing is more predictive of leadership effectiveness than personal maturity. When it comes to leadership, it turns out that emotional maturity may just be the most important assessment we can make.

The four core qualities of emotional maturity

Remaining Relational. Making people choose sides is a problem-solving move, not a relationship-building strategy.

Acting Like Yourself. You may act like a possum or a predator instead of the protector God put it in your heart to be

Returning to Joy

Enduring Hardship Well

The skills that create RARE leaders get lost as we focus on results and management as the primary target. We have seen that leadership is not the same as management but that many of us fall back to management when problems arise. RARE leaders remain relational, act like themselves, return to joy, and endure hardships well.