

What can a leader do or not do?

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Posted by admin

I struggle from time to time trying to ascertain what my part is and what God's part is in my leadership role. When do I lean or attempt to persuade? When do I back off and give space and time, trusting the Lord to do what I cannot? A year or so ago, I ran across a new paraphrase of a familiar verse: Zechariah 4:6, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord." As a leader, I understand that I can't convert anybody, I can't convince anybody, I can't change anybody. It's a matter God doing it through me. In The Message the verse reads,

"You can't force these things. They only come about through My Spirit."

How many times have I gone beyond what is my responsibility and tried to accomplish that which is God's responsibility—and only God's? Sorting it all out is a life-long process. When do I run, when do I walk? When do I listen, when do I talk? When do I give advice? When do I just weep and identify? There are some things I can do and some things I just cannot do.

One of my heroes recently shared some thoughts that are helping me know what I can and cannot do. Most of us have heroes in the faith. Some are biblical heroes. Some are people we have known who have ministered significantly to us, modeled the life of Christ for us, or excelled in some area that has caused us to reach higher to realize more of our true potential. One of my heroes is Lorne Sanny who, for 30 years, was president of The Navigators. Lorne is now 82 years of age. Recently I was in Colorado for some training and Lorne showed up to share with us for about an hour. During that hour, Lorne shared some thoughts along the lines of "What I can and can't do." I was deeply impacted and am using this opportunity to pass these thoughts along to you. Lorne credited Charles Swindoll for the ideas. Out of my own experience, I have elaborated on them.

I CAN'T

1. Live in the past

I want to use the past as a guidepost, not a hitching post. I certainly want to learn from the past but not live there. It seems to me that I waste a lot of energy and time regretting yesterday and fearing tomorrow so that I don't have what I need to live in the moment

2. Control or explain most things

I am at the place in my life where I don't feel I need to control people or circumstances. Thinking I am in control is simply an illusion. In addition, I have flat out given up trying to understand everything. God is sovereign and in that I need to learn to rest.

3. Change or fix people

This is a big one for me. I love to solve problems and try to make things/people better. I shouldn't be surprised that people don't want to be fixed, they want to be loved. Many guys think that when someone comes to share a problem it's because they want it fixed. Why else would someone share a problem? I am learning that many don't want their problems/lives fixed, but they do want to be listened to, taken seriously. (My kids have been telling me that for years! I am finally paying attention.)

4. Meet most people's expectations

I have spent a lot of years trying to meet people's expectations...my family, my friends, my boss, etc. Sometimes it works, but most times it doesn't—at least not for me. I'm finding I need to concentrate on obeying God and being true to how He has made me—not trying to be what everybody wants me to be. Only the Lord can truly satisfy someone's expectations...certainly not me. Bill Cosby once said, "I don't know what the secret to success is, but I know what the secret to failure is and it's trying to keep everybody happy!"

5. Help people who don't want my help

I am discovering that some people just don't appreciate who I am or what I have to offer. This is tough. I like to be liked, to be needed. I'm discovering that He is the Lord of the doors (Revelation 3:7-8). He opens doors of opportunity for me as a leader and He closes doors of perceived opportunity. I need to respect closed doors and not try to pick the lock or go after it with a battering ram. Once again, it brings me back to His sovereignty!

6. Avoid the tough things in life

God is more interested in my growth than my comfort. I do a lot of things in life to avoid pain, like brushing my teeth, getting the oil changed in the car, paying my taxes on time. But pain is part of life and God will use the tough things to grow me. I love James 1:2-3 in the Phillips translation: "When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realise that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance."

I CAN...

1. Face reality

Author Max Dupree states, “The first task of a leader is to define reality.” It is healthy not only to be able to define it, but to accept it and live in it rather than living in denial or wishing the circumstance or situation was something other than it really is. This is a key to emotional, mental and spiritual health for the leader and for the followers

2. Choose to do what is right

I am learning to ask if something is the right thing to do, before asking if it is the easy thing to do, or even if it is possible to do. God is in the business of doing what seems utterly impossible. The Bible is full of story after story of God doing what seemed out of the question– the crossing of the Red Sea, the delivery of the Jewish people in the book of Esther, or the saving of Daniel from the lions. Sometimes the right thing looks impossible; but if it is a God-idea, GOD can make it happen!

3. Take responsibility for what is mine

I often reflect on the statement displayed on President Harry S. Truman’s desk, “The buck stops here!” A leader is one who takes responsibility for mistakes, poor decisions and sub-par performance. As someone has humorously observed, It is not whether you win or lose, but how you place the blame!

NCAA football coach Bear Bryant said, “I’m just a plow hand from Arkansas, but I’ve learned how to hold a team together, how to lift up some men, how to calm down others, until finally they’ve got one heartbeat together—a team. There are just three things I’d ever say:

- 1. If anything goes bad, I did it,**
- 2. If anything goes semi-good, then we did it,**
- 3. If anything goes good, then you did it.**

That’s all it takes to get people to win football games for you!”

These Can’s and Cant’s are helping me be a better leader! Hopefully, they will help you as well! As always, your thoughts and comments are welcomed and appreciated.