

# Balancing Two Major Dimensions of Leadership: Initiation of Structure and Consideration

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An aspect of church ministry where balance is especially important involves leadership. A crucial area of leadership where balance is greatly needed is with regard to leader behaviors in the educational ministries of the church, and that will be the focus of this essay; however, what is said below applies to all other church work as well.

In the administration literature a distinction is made between management and leadership. In general the latter is looked upon as doing the right things and the former, doing things right.<sup>1</sup> Management is involved largely with matters such as organizing an institution's mission, vision, and strategic plan, while leadership is involved more with people and engages such administrative processes as staffing, directing, and evaluating. Leaders influence others who follow them; unless a person has one or more who follow him or her, he or she is not a leader. Nevertheless, in the social science literature the research on leadership generally applies to all who exercise leadership in any manner, which can include managers.

Research on leadership in the last 75 years has focused heavily on the specific actions of leaders, which many see as a more useful indicator of what leadership involves than a focus on their traits or characteristics. Social scientists focusing on the behaviors of leaders, both positive and negative (i.e., those actions that produce effective results and those that are counterproductive to the accomplishment of objectives), have sorted their findings in several categories. In my review of the literature and in my own doctoral research, I have found that all these categories can be grouped in two major classifications that are referred to in the leadership literature as the initiation of structure and consideration.<sup>2</sup>

Initiation of structure refers to those behaviors that institutions, including churches, require of managers and leaders (often the same person who must do both) that are objective and measurable. They are largely organizational. Such actions include planning (e.g., needs analysis, establishing objectives, identifying and selecting subject matters, identifying and selecting curriculum); organizing (e.g., defining tasks and parameters, establishing leader qualifications and job descriptions, constructing relationships and the organizational chart); staffing (e.g., selecting leaders, orienting new personnel, in-service teaching and providing continuing education opportunities);

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<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Anthony and James Estep, Jr. (Eds.), *Management Essentials for Christian Ministries*, (Broadman & Holman, 2005), p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> Edward D. Seely, "Behaviors of Peer Leaders, Adult Leaders, Mothers and Fathers as Perceived by Young People Fourteen through Eighteen Years of Age" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, College of Education, Michigan State University, 1980), pp. 10-12, 26-35.

directing (e.g., introducing and effectively producing change, facilitating motivation, delegating); evaluating (e.g., determining the effectiveness of programs and staff); managing their own time, publicizing, and facilitating conflict resolution.

Consideration refers to those leader behaviors that are subjective and involve expressions of love and caring. They are largely personal. Such actions include expressions of friendliness (e.g., learning and using people's names; showing interest in how they and their loved ones are doing; spending time with them); trust (e.g., acting in ways that earn and model credibility for oneself and giving information and resources to others with the expectation that they will not misuse what has been given); respect (e.g., careful listening, openness to new ideas, affirming the behaviors of others, never putting people down, avoiding manipulation, and putting others ahead of him or herself); warmth (e.g., demonstrating accessibility, being easy to talk to, engaging, showing fondness and compassion for others, graciousness, and a sense of humor); understanding (e.g., comprehending even though not necessarily condoning and responding with statements that reflect the other person's feelings); and helping (e.g., praying with and for someone, showing concern for others, providing resources for people, taking action to meet a need directly or through others).

What might be an example of a church leader keeping these two key dimensions of leadership in balance? We look first to the Lord Jesus Christ. Though the most important aspect of Christ's work was to make possible our access to the presence of God, Jesus also modeled the life and leadership to which he calls his people. Notice how Jesus balanced initiation of structure and consideration in relating to the Canaanite woman. (Matthew 15:21-28) Knowing he had only a brief amount of time on earth to accomplish his task of proclaiming the Gospel to "the lost sheep of Israel," the covenant people through whom God had been working to redeem his creation, and to completing the Gospel, he kept on task and did not permit distractions to sidetrack his ministry. To allow such a deviation would undermine the fulfillment and implementation of God's plan. Thus, he at first refused to grant the request of the foreign Canaanite woman. Yet, at the same time the core of Christ's being is love, and when she implored him with great faith, he made an exception to his principle of staying on task (initiation of structure) and out of love (in consideration) he granted the woman's request and healed her daughter of the demon possession that afflicted her. In so doing Jesus demonstrated to the disciples and to us how to balance these two main aspects of leadership, the structural orientation to completing an assigned task (verse 24) while at the same time attending to the considerate caring for people as appropriate.

What might be an example of a church leader today keeping these two key dimensions of leadership in balance? A clear illustration is seen in youth ministry, but it also occurs in adult education and the other ministries of the church as well. A not uncommon experience is where a youth leader (let's say "Sue") is walking down the hall toward a classroom where 25 people are waiting for her class to begin. She is carrying a fairly heavy load of resources, including her laptop computer, five books, and a stack of

documents, that she intends to use in teaching the lesson and only has three minutes before the class is to begin. Just as she turns right around the corner from the classroom a young person approaches her with tears streaming down her face and begins pouring out her heart about her boyfriend, who just the evening before broke their relationship. What should Sue do?

If Sue is oriented toward the initiation of structure, what will she likely do? She might say, “That’s too bad, but I have this class I have to teach. It’ll be OK; these things typically work out well. Don’t worry. Best wishes!” Then she heads into the classroom.

If Sue is oriented toward consideration, what will she likely do? She might stand there and listen to the person describe her sad situation in extended and passionate detail for a long time, forgetting that a room full of people, who also have felt and unmet needs to hear what she has to say, and whose time is precious to them, are waiting for her. Some may even begin leaving! Sue needs to keep in mind that the person pouring out her problems is not thinking about Sue’s class waiting for her; but Sue needs to remember them.

What would Sue do if she has a healthy balance between these two key leader behaviors, the initiation of structure and consideration? She might say, “Jane, I sense you feel terrible, and understandably so. I want to hear all you wish to tell me, but I have a class full of people who are waiting for me right now. Can we meet after class (or at 3:00 this afternoon) when I can give you my undivided attention?” If the church is a larger one, sometimes another staff member is available (with whom the young person would be willing to meet) who can help right then and who will accept a referral at that time. From my experience, most people will respond very positively to this approach, and the needs of both the individual and the class are met.

Good structure produces a planned schedule that makes time for unplanned appearances of people who need us. If we plan our time well, don’t crowd our calendars with too many activities and responsibilities we’ve taken on, and work ahead, avoiding last minute catching up, we’ll have more time for people who have problems about which they want to talk with us and who need our assistance in other matters.

Another way attention to structure is helpful is that it can facilitate balance in many areas. To illustrate, structure is an important factor that helps keep young people involved in a youth ministry. Sometimes young people become “turned off” and drop out of programs that lack structure and good organization, for example, where they perceive an unplanned redundancy: One teenager told me “All our youth meetings are evangelistic. We never get beyond the need to be saved. It’s all milk and no meat!” In theological terms more than justification is required; the young people need our help to grow in sanctification so they may honor, glorify, and serve the Lord more effectively in their vocation.

Especially since administration is a gift of the Holy Spirit, it is important that we see it as a ministry. Whether one has or doesn't have the gift of administration, he or she still has to accomplish a multitude of administrative tasks. Many in educational ministry could avoid burn out over the large amount of paper work and other managerial matters that discourage them if they would see the people beyond the paper! All the paperwork is actually structuring plans and the necessary help for others in supportive roles who are coming together to produce events that will meet needs and provide joy for many.

### **For Reflection**

1. What else could Sue have done?
2. In what other areas of educational ministry is it important to keep initiation of structure and consideration in balance?
3. Select an aspect of your ministry (or anticipated ministry) that you find (or expect you will find) difficult to keep these two aspects of leadership in balance, and identify steps you will take to maintain that balance. Invite the group to give you feedback.