

Good leaders in business and church possess some of the same qualities

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By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

The same leadership skills that make many of the best business leaders successful also can enable church leaders to fulfill their potential, some Christian business experts note.

"In both worlds, ... leaders go first. Leaders set the culture," said Craig Howard, a human resources executive with Coca-Cola and former bivocational pastor.

Whether in the corporate world or in congregational life, the facilitative leadership model brings out the best in other people, said Howard, a layman at Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., who has worked as a leadership consultant with churches and associations of churches.



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“Facilitative leaders establish strategic direction and then let go of control of the vision,” Howard said. “It takes team-building skills and the ability to articulate a vision.”

A facilitative leader must be “comfortable enough in his leadership skin that he can let go of control,” he said.

When church workers—paid or volunteer—fail to find a good “fit” and end up performing below expectations, Christian leaders have the responsibility to model a redemptive leadership style that seeks the best for all parties involved, said Mitchell Neubert, who holds the Chavanne Chair of Christian ethics in business at Baylor University’s Hankamer School of Business.

“Clarity grows from two-way discussions where both parties come to know what is expected,” he said.

“Grace allows for growth and learning, and it means seeing if, over time, the fit improves. But if it doesn’t, then through loving, constructive dialogue, the leader may come to the point of saying, ‘We both realize this is not a good fit, but we want to support you in trying to find a different position, either here or somewhere else.’”

Neubert believes true servant leaders possess great strength of character.

“It takes a stronger constitution to be a servant leader than it does to give people orders,” he said.

While some iron-fisted CEOs who followed the hierarchical top-down style of management certainly have succeeded, Neubert believes a growing number of business leaders are beginning to recognize the value in the servant-leadership model.

For example, in *Good to Great*, Jim Collins identifies what he calls a “level-5 leader” as crediting other people for their success and possessing enough self-confidence so they can focus on helping other people in the organization succeed, he noted.

“It’s not the charismatic leader who says, ‘I have a great vision; follow me.’ Rather, it’s the strong servant leader who says, ‘We have a great mission,’” Neubert said. “The servant leader focuses on developing others and demonstrates a concern for other people’s growth.”

The best church leaders operate within the sphere of grace, faith and a surrendered life that does not seek to grasp power, said Chris Stull, executive pastor at First Baptist Church in McKinney.

“If grace is one of our core values, then leaders will give people a second chance—and maybe sometimes a third chance—to succeed,” Stull said. “The leader’s role is to teach, guide and attempt to restore.”

Business should be able to look to the church for models of successful leadership, said Stull, who holds a master of business administration degree from the University of Oklahoma.

"The best leaders ought to be at church because we have the benefit of biblical principles and the Holy Spirit guiding us," he said. "The church should offer the greatest models of leadership."

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