

Leadership Intangibles...Dan Reiland

Why do some leaders consistently seem to be a step ahead of others? More specific than that, why do some leaders of similar intelligence and dedication to God appear land leadership better than others? Have you noticed that working hard, sound strategy and even great vision doesn't always work? What is in play that makes the difference?

It is something I call "leadership intangibles." They don't normally find their way into a book, seminar or mentoring session but make up the critical difference in leadership. The reason I call them "intangibles" is because they are difficult to describe, they change according to situation and are complicated to evaluate. They are more art than science. But they are all doable. It's like choosing the right color, name, or birthday card, it's often difficult, but definitely doable.

I love connecting with great leaders and I've been taking notes. What is it that makes them stand out that is not on the typical list of "what a leader does?" What a leader does and how she does it is important, but these intangibles seem to create the tipping point. Now, here's my wild idea. I believe that if these things don't come to you naturally, you can learn them. You may never become a rock star, but you can lift your own leadership lid enough to make a big difference in your life and in the lives of those you lead. Here are five intangibles to strengthen your leadership:

ENERGY: I'm writing this on a Sunday afternoon. Shannon Whaples (Next Gen Pastor at 12Stone) and I drove from Atlanta to Anderson, South Carolina to connect with some colleagues and friends on the staff of New Spring Church. Perry Noble is the pastor at New Spring but wasn't delivering the message. The guest speaker was Perry's friend, Steven Furtick, Lead Pastor of Elevation Church. (North Carolina) Both New Spring and Elevation are fast-growing mega-churches. Both churches have leaders that love Jesus and teach an uncompromised gospel message.

I've known Perry for awhile now, and I greatly appreciate his leadership, but just had the opportunity to meet Steven today. The first thing that jumped out about both of them this morning was their energy. These guys bring energy into the room. I'm not talking about only on the platform, but where ever they are they bring energy to the mix. Energy draws people, stirs people, and enlivens people. Its no accident that Perry's church is full of leaders with energy. Jason Wilson is a key leader on Perry's staff, one of the best leaders with people I've ever met. Jason brings people energy where ever he is. People like Jason and want to follow him.

Leading with energy doesn't mean you walk into a room and try to act large and in charge. It means you show up 100% engaged and in the game. You translate the leadership passion in your heart to the people in the room for the sake of the mission, regardless of the size of the room or how many people are in it. This is more about intensity as a leader rather than being an intense leader. No one likes an intense person, but everyone loves intensity for the mission.

INTUITION: I've got good news for all you scientists, this is not as mystical as it sounds. And I've good news for you touchy-feelys, this is more concrete than you think. First let me say that I distinguish between discernment and intuition. My intuition is high but my discernment is often low. It's a fine line, but hang with me. When I meet someone for the first time I can't tell you if they were an axe-murderer or some other evil thing earlier in life. In the more classic sense, I probably can't tell you about their spiritual standing either. But I will "intuit" the room very accurately. I will get the feel, connection, vibe and be able to interpret the person(s) in context with others in the room and what is happening in the moment. (Or supposed to be happening.) That's the difference for me. The discerners primary focus is on one person at a time. The intuitive leader senses what's going on "in the room" in the larger context of mission and people.

Intuition is internal and can't be put on a diagram. It's like trying to put the relative value of poem on a chart. You can't do it, or more accurately, you shouldn't try. But intuition is also about things you can lean into. Leaders who are high in intuition pay attention. They are observant and understand how to connect the dots. They are good students of human nature and can read the vibe of a room. They are the opposite of clueless. They know what is going on and rarely miss much. Intuitive leaders can interpret behavior (which is not that difficult if you watch behavior for years and begin to understand the patterns of people). Intuition isn't magic. Intuition is in everyone. It's up to you to cultivate it.

PRESENCE: I will admit that this one is complicated. When you say "He is larger than life", you know that person when you see them, but try to explain that to someone. If you really want to have fun, try to explain that to someone from another country who doesn't speak English. Yes, I tried that while teaching a leadership lesson in

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Ukraine. Now that was fun!

Leadership presence isn't entirely about stature and God-given gifts. We can't deny those realities, but there's more to it than persona.

First, there is confidence. There are many highly gifted people who have a negative presence. They take energy and life out of a room when they walk in. They are emotionally needy or simply narcissistic and require everyone's attention. You can be an average to above average leader with great confidence and your presence will rise dramatically. Confidence comes from a number of things, but primarily from listening to God and putting to practice what He tells you. I like to call that divine experience! It's all about doing the right thing, in the right way, at the right time for the right reason. Do that over and over again and your confidence will soar.

Second, you can tap into relational charisma. I talk about this a lot. Here it is again. When you walk into a room and you intentionally endeavor to cause everyone in the room to feel better about who they are; rather than try to make them feel better about who you are -- you just gave a major boost to your relational charisma. And that is a primary factor in personal presence.

Third, there is something about just showing up and preparation. These are two important components. Showing up is the first. I never thought I would see the day when leaders gained favor merely because they showed up. But time compression is real and leaders can't be everywhere at once. What you choose to show up to matters. Your presence counts. It may be a funeral, a party, an optional meeting or just Starbucks with a friend - don't underestimate your presence. Second, being prepared is huge. Sometimes there is no preparation required, just showing up with your heart engaged. Other times you need to do your homework. I've seen some average leaders show up very well prepared and their presence was noticed in a big way!!

THOUGHT: Leaders think differently than non-leaders and their life reflects it. The average person doesn't come to the end of a year and spend time reflecting on lessons learned and how to make the greatest impact in the following year. If you take the time to write out your thoughts, what you learned, the mistakes you made, and what you want to achieve in the year ahead, you have just separated yourself from the pack.

What you think about matters. What makes you wonder? What captures your imagination? What do you dream about? What makes you angry? What do you want to change? These are the kinds of things leaders think about. To miss these practices is to be a doer. There is nothing wrong with being a good doer, the world needs them, but they don't lead.

Don't spend your time fussing about little things that don't matter. That makes you a picky and petty person. People don't want to follow a picky and petty leader. People don't want to follow negative people. They follow positive people with ideas of how to make life better.

Think in terms of ideas and how to make them happen. You may not believe you are a creative person. but most people are more creative than they think. Keep in mind that if you have just a few well-timed and good ideas a year, you are way ahead of the game.

Belief is a leadership intangible that could be listed on its own, but can also be combined under thought, so I'll place it here. What do you believe about leadership, God, and people? What you believe about these things matters. What you believe, in many ways, is the result of thoughts you have landed. Belief is a product of your thinking. Belief is also about faith. Faith and thought are highly interrelated.

Belief shapes your values, convictions and how you know the mind of God. As Christian leaders we don't like to say that God is intangible, but He is. That doesn't make Him less real or powerful, it's more about our finite human limitations on fully knowing the mind of God. The beauty of the mystery is that we have full access. It's up to us to pursue God's invitation to His presence and power.

DESIRE: Here's the last one on my list of leadership intangibles. Let me put it in the form of a question. What do you want? Too many leaders don't know what they want. You need to know. They often know what they are supposed to want, but it comes out sounding like the beauty pageant answer of "world peace."

You will never lead well if you don't know what you want. Yup, I said never. You can't. If you don't know what you want, you don't know where you are going and you therefore lack the passion to get there. (Let alone a plan.)

Don't let this point make you uncomfortable. Lean into the freedom it gives you. Don't let this become loaded with the pressure of another thing on your to do list. "Monday morning. . . figure out what I want." This is oxygen to a

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leader. You know what you want, you just need to give your self permission to say it out loud and find the courage to actually do it.

It's never too late. What do you want? How is God calling you to make a difference? What do you see that needs to be changed? How would you like to do that? Don't worry about all the strategic plans just yet. There is time for that. And definitely don't focus on all the reasons why it won't work. Others will do that for you. Know what you want and set out on your path to get there.

As you think about these five leadership intangibles, where are you strong? What do you need to improve? Tackle one at a time, becoming a better leader is a lifetime process.

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