



Church SmartTM

Strategic ministry tools for church leaders

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Knocking Over the Leadership Ladder

By Paul Ford

For twelve years I have been watching the evangelical Christian subculture in the United States from an unusual vantage point. Three or four times a year, I travel to any of eight different cultures in places like Russia, Kazakhstan, Korea, Malaysia and Zimbabwe. Consider me an observant ping-pong ball: back and forth, back and forth, and back and forth. After several years of coming home from my trips overseas, I observed a number of unmistakable lifestyle patterns developing in the West that concerned me and I found myself weeping at what I observed.

I identified four distinct myths that encouraged an upwardly mobile movement in Christian approaches to life and ministry as related to leadership.

Myth # 1

The Christian Leadership Myth

The prevalence of business world principles and Christian books on the subject of leadership has created an innate desire for many pastors to imitate the leaders and models they read about. Indeed, much of the literature on the subject seems to imply that anyone can be a leader, if only you follow the steps described in this book or that book.

But the biblical calling is not to leadership. Leadership is referenced but twice in the New Testament, and actually is a part of a broader principle of equipping and releasing. Some have the gift of leadership, while others lead powerfully using a combination of other equipping gifts. The purpose of any of these gifts, though, is not to make the leader great, but rather to equip and release the saints for the work of ministry.

Myth # 2

The Individualism Myth

This myth is all about building “ME” versus building community. In the Western world, the search for community is both real and pervasive. But while there is a strong desire for community, our approaches often fail. Too often, our church communities cannot move beyond the wants, needs, or task fulfillment of the individual — thus, it is extremely difficult to build depth and lasting unity in relationships. Put simply, it is difficult to find the communion of the Holy Spirit when the spotlight is on the self.

Myth # 3

The Ladder Myth

Simply stated, people want to build themselves up rather than live the biblical reality of stewardship. If we put together myth number one (that everyone should be a leader) and myth number two (that it’s all about me), the natural result is that I should climb the ladder as high as I can. What makes me so confident that there is a ladder to climb? Over the past fifteen years, I have had hundreds of conversations with pastors, missionaries and Christian leaders. Seldom have I found people who are content with where they are and what they are doing. The desire is always to “move up,” whatever that means for them. I am still waiting to hear of the Christian who felt that God led him/her to a smaller house!

God desires that we be His Kingdom builders, committed to the task of stewardship of what he has prepared in our lives and those he entrusts to us. The desire for earthling kingdom climbing pervades our culture, but

God has designed a different model through his grace.

Myth # 4

The Sarcasm Myth

The biblical reality of encouragement is often lost due to our ladder climbing. Positioning ourselves on the ladder can be done two ways: either we climb higher, or we pull others down. Few things are more effective at pulling people down than sarcasm. Many will defend sarcasm as being nothing more than a joke or a way of endearing ourselves to each other. But sarcasm always interferes with community in a team setting.

Sarcasm very subtly builds small callouses that block deeper intimacy and community in team relationships. I long to see an American Christian team that errs on the side of affirmation. It just does not happen.

Conclusion

Leadership is understood properly when seen in context of community and body life shared ministry. It is lived out more powerfully when the biblical imperatives of stewardship, equipping, and releasing are given full sway.

For me personally, I highlight four areas that have been life-changing:

- Kingdom breakthrough happens when I am a good steward of who I am in Christ with those relationships that God has already prepared for me.
- Working where I am powerfully gifted and freeing others to help me in my areas of weakness.
- Romans 12: 3-6 talks about making a sober estimate of who we are. It is essential for understanding God’s economy and how He works among us.
- Who I am affects who we are.

We have the opportunity to knock over the leadership ladder!