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Choose Your Leaders Carefully



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Every organization wants to have good leaders. Soon our nation will elect a new president and other officials. The question is what makes a good leader? How can the church or any organization choose wisely and carefully in selecting the individuals it does? In his book *Staff Your Church for Growth*, Gary McIntosh writes, “One of the toughest roles in the church today is recruiting a compatible staff who are people of character and competent in their skills.” (Page 51)

Not surprising, the Bible has some guidance on this very question. A story in Exodus 18:13-23 involves God’s chosen leader Moses. Moses is sitting from morning until night giving guidance on the questions and disputes of the people. His father-in-law Jethro notices that Moses was wearing himself out and says, “What you are doing is not good for you or the people. Get some help.”

He wisely instructs Moses on what kinds of persons he ought to choose to help him in leadership of the people. “You should look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers...” In those simple, direct instructions, we learn three valuable, timeless insights on how to choose persons who would be effective leaders. These are in ascending order of importance.

First, choose persons who are **COMPETENT**. That is what Jethro meant when he said “able.” Any one being considered for a position of leadership must have the skill set to perform the duties of that position. Competence for a person in a pastoral staff leadership includes at minimum knowledge of church polity and scripture, counseling and relational skills, equipping and supervising skills, the ability to listen and discern, the ability to hold all confidences inviolate, administrative and communication skills, and the ability to reflect theologically.

Competent people are those who perform their duties well. They know how to do their job. They have the skills necessary to effectively complete a task. Competent people can be very productive people, if they have a mind to work.

That leads to the second dimension of a good leader. A person under consideration for leadership must also be **COMMITTED**. A person may be very competent, but unless he or she is committed to the cause or task, it is better to find someone else to lead.

Anyone who would be a leader in his family must love his family. Anyone who would be a leader in his company must be committed to the company. All who would be leaders in their church must be committed to and love their church. In biblical imagery, all who would serve Jesus

must be so radically committed that they are willing to take up their cross and follow him daily.

Competence is important for leaders. Commitment is even more important. You can develop competence to go with commitment. The third quality of those who would lead is the most critical of all. It is **CHARACTER**. Adolf Hitler was skilled in communication, motivation and other dimensions of leadership. He was passionately committed to the cause of the Third Reich. But he lacked the critical element of character, of integrity, of moral strength.

Jethro told Moses, “You should look among the people for those who are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain.” (18:21) This mandate is in my denominational *Book of Discipline*, “Members of the church council or alternative structure shall be persons of genuine Christian character... are morally disciplined...are loyal to the ethical standards of The United Methodist Church as set forth in the Social Principles.”

We see all too often in our society the consequences that the lack of character can bring. A recent newspaper headline read, “Former Executive Sentenced To Prison For Embezzling \$1 Million.” The 35-year-old former health care executive was obviously a competent accountant and was committed to his work enough to achieve an executive level position in one of the state’s largest independent physicians groups. But there was a character defect, an integrity deficiency that led this young man to evade taxes, launder money and defraud the doctors who employed him. He did plead guilty and will serve at least a portion of his eight-year federal prison sentence.

Sometimes the leaders of God stumble. History is replete with examples of leadership failure. King David, a man after God’s own heart, committed adultery and murder and tried to cover it up. But when the king was confronted by the prophet of God, he confessed his sin. He pleaded mightily in Psalm 51 for God’s forgiveness. He received that healing forgiveness. He changed his ways.

Later we read of the life and legacy of David’s rule in Psalm 78. Beginning in verse 70, “God chose his servant David, and took him from the sheepfolds...he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel, his inheritance. With upright heart David tended them, and guided them with skillful hand.”

David the adulterer and murderer was transformed into David the man of integrity, the shepherd with an upright heart and a skillful hand. David led the people with character and competence. Competence and commitment are crucial, but without character – integrity and uprightness of heart - they do not matter.

Jesus warns in Mark 13:5, “Beware of those who would lead you astray.” Leaders with competence, commitment and character will not lead us astray, but into the presence of God who is our ultimate leader.