

CHAPTER THREE: DEVELOPING A LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY

**(from the book *So Many Leaders, So Little Leadership*;
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I've already mentioned King David in chapter one. Life wasn't always good or fair to David. After he was anointed as the successor to King Saul, he was

- Ridiculed by his brothers
- Taken advantage of by those he worked for
- Threatened and pursued by the one he was to replace
- A fugitive, wrongly accused of disloyalty
- Leader to a band of outlaws and outcasts.

Out of all this, David had a lot of time to decide what kind of leader he was going to be. Would he be like Saul, who was making his life miserable? Would he bide his time, and then seize the opportunity to be an arrogant leader full of ambition and insecurity like his predecessor? Somewhere in David's journey, and we don't know where or when, he made up his mind *not* to be like King Saul.

He didn't wait until he *became* a leader to decide how he would lead. Instead he decided beforehand, and when he became king, he was a gracious, kind, and well-loved leader. He wasn't perfect and he made mistakes, but his leadership philosophy carried him through, and today he's still a model leader for those who will study him.

Perhaps no story better reveals King David leadership philosophy than the one found in Second Samuel, chapter 9:

David asked, "Is there anyone still left in the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Ziba. They called him to appear before David, and the king said to him,

“Are you Ziba?” “Your servant,” he replied. The king asked, “Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God’s kindness?” Ziba answered the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet” (2 Samuel 9:1-4).

The king had this remaining son brought to him.

“Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table” (2 Samuel 9:7).

This story tells me that David had the values of loyalty, covenant-keeping, and kindness firmly in his heart and at the center of his leadership philosophy. David had suffered much at the hands of this man’s grandfather, King Saul. It would have been easy to go on and ignore this remaining heir in light of all that had happened.

But King David had made a covenant, an agreement with Mephibosheth’s father, Jonathan. That agreement was for friendship and goodwill. And even though Saul and Jonathan were dead, David’s leadership philosophy was very much alive. He was now exercising that philosophy by doing good to someone who didn’t even know him.

I also developed a leadership philosophy in my years before I ever led anything. Coming from my purpose and values, I decided what kind of leader I wanted to be. I present this philosophy to you for your consideration and encourage you to write your own, whether you are or will be a leader.

I was born to lead. But I must continue to work hard to be the best leader that I can possibly be. At the same time, I want to exercise a team approach to leadership that will value the input and worth of every individual. As a leader, I’ll share finances, success and credit with all those who contribute. I’ll also serve others so that they can become all that God wants them to be.

My leadership philosophy tells you a lot about me and my conclusions about leadership. First, I think leaders are born *and* made. Everyone can *learn* leadership skills

because everyone will lead something, some time in their life. But leaders are *born* to accomplish certain things. This birth doesn't lead them to easy street, but to a life of discipline and hard work.

I believe that no one leader can make the difference alone. It takes a lot of people around the leader to make it all happen. Warren Bennis in his book *Co-Leaders: The Power of Great Partnerships* has this to say about the strong, one-person leader scenario:

This book reflects our conviction that you must look beyond the Bill Gateses of the world to understand what will make organizations succeed in the new millennium. In this first comprehensive study of co-leaders and their often quiet power, we challenge the time-honored notion that all great institutions are the lengthened shadows of a Great Man or Woman. It is a fallacy that dies hard. But if you believe, as we do, that the genius of our age is truly collaborative, you must abandon the notion that the credit for any significant achievement is solely attributable to the person at the top. We have long worshiped the imperial leader at the cost of ignoring the countless other contributors to any worthwhile enterprise. In our hearts we know that the world is more complex than ever and that we need teams of talent – leaders and co-leaders working together – to get important things done. The old corporate monotheism is finally giving way to a more realistic view that acknowledges leaders not as organizational gods but as the first among contributors. In this new view of the organization, co-leaders finally come into their own and begin to receive the credit they so richly deserve.

I want to draw out and acknowledge *all* those who are around me when I lead, and I want to value, even celebrate, their contributions and input. I don't want to fall into the trap that I have or need to have all the answers.

How can I do this? By being a good listener, by fostering dialogue, by creating situations where people can speak openly and honestly, without fear of reprisal, to name a few. But I can also put some dollars in people's pockets when they do a good job. And I can publicly acknowledge others and their contributions. All of these things can create a team and tell people they are valued, respected and needed.

Finally, my philosophy tells you that I've learned something about leadership and service. That's why Robert Greenleaf's writings on those two topics have touched me so deeply. It's not up to those *under* a leader to serve, but for leaders themselves to serve those who are around, no matter where they stand on the hierarchical chart. I must use my power in leadership to help others achieve their place and leadership power. More on that later.

How about you? Take some time and think about your leadership style. If you are leading, how would you define your leadership style and approach? If not, how do you want to be perceived when you eventually do lead? It doesn't have to be long or involved; it should simply incorporate a summary of what's important to you as a leader.

No philosophy is going to prepare you for everything that you'll face once you're a leader. Thinking about driving a car and driving a car are two different things. But before you ever drive a car, you can make certain decisions, develop certain values that you'll be able to apply no matter what you encounter. From that, you simply need experience.

It's the same with leadership. Give some thought to it now, even if you've been leading for quite a few years. It's not too late to adjust, and it's never too early to begin preparation. Spell out your leadership philosophy. Once you've done that, you're ready to move on from the private work of being a leader to the public role, whenever that takes place.

Review

Let's review some assignments that you've been given out of this first section concerning the inward work of being a leader.

1. **Identify your purpose.** If you haven't already, begin the journey to find a phrase that explains the essence of who you are. Be as specific as possible. Listen to your inner voice for confirmation and direction. Also listen to what people are telling you about yourself. What situations consistently come to you without having to look or work for them? All these things are very often clues to finding and describing who you are.
2. **Define your values.** Take time to list and explain those things in life that are important to you. Evaluate what you have. Is being wealthy a value? It certainly can be. If it's on your list, is it truly a value worth pursuing? If you want to give large sums of money away (another value) to the poor or to certain causes (representing more values such as the environment, missionary groups, or college scholarship funds), then being wealthy is probably a legitimate value for you. If it's an end unto itself, then you may need to evaluate the legitimacy of a life given to that value. Work your way through what's important to you by defining the values that are probably already directing your decisions.
3. **Develop your leadership philosophy.** Can you find a few phrases that summarize your leadership style? If you can, then you have a leadership philosophy. If not, then you have work to do. My philosophy was pretty much set by the time I found myself in leadership positions. It was formed by watching leaders and carefully thinking through who I was and wasn't. I also read as much as I could read about leaders, both past and present. My philosophy is very comfortable to me. It fits like a tailored suit of clothes. And yours should, too. Don't settle for a collection of trite phrases that

tell what others say you should be. Rather work to find your own identity and leadership style.