

## CHAPTER TWO: DEFINING YOUR GOVERNING VALUES

**(From the book *So Many Leaders, So Little Leadership*  
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In chapter one, I stated that leadership starts from within a man or woman. It's a heart matter. As I've studied successful leaders, I've seen that they have often developed an inner set of values, whether they are aware that they have or not. Each one has a set of guidelines that help them make decisions, small or great. Some have written down these values and carry them in a notebook or planner; others carry them on the "tablets of their heart." Most often these values were developed and defined from:

- Family examples, both positive and negative
- Mentoring relationships
- Religious teachings
- Life failures
- Suffering through tough times
- Watching other leaders whom they admired
- Watching other leaders whom they did *not* admire

For instance, some who were taken advantage of have vowed never to do the same, and others, out of the same situation, decided to take advantage of as many people as possible. Both have developed values that guide their decisions and develop their leadership style. Others have felt the pain of domineering leadership and decided to perpetuate that style; some hold the value not to rule with an iron fist, but rather with an open hand. Both have developed values. And without realizing it, you have developed some values, too.

Robert Greenleaf, in his book, *On Becoming a Servant Leader*, stated "This is the ultimate test: what values govern one's life – at the end of it?" He poses an interesting question, don't you think?

Are you developing a set of values that adjust over your lifetime as your leadership grows and matures? You shouldn't wait until you're a leader to try to define these values, for by then you may not see the importance of such a task ("I'm already a leader; why sweat the small stuff now when big decisions await?"). If you wait too long to reflect on your values, you may find that you've already given your energy to values that weren't worth the effort you gave them.

As most successful leaders, the Apostle Paul had a set of values that guided his ministry and ministry decisions:

1. Not taking financial support from the churches he was starting
2. Not working where someone had already labored to start a church
3. Always visiting the synagogue first when arriving in an area
4. Traveling in the company of a team
5. Not insisting on a Jewish lifestyle as he visited diverse cultures and people.

Paul's success wasn't a matter of chance. At least part of his success came from the fact that he had a set of values that served to guide his life and work decisions. He didn't impose these values on others, for they belonged to him, having been shaped by his own experience and understanding of what God wanted him to do.

I'm grateful to the Franklin Covey Company for helping me develop my values. While studying to become a certified time management facilitator through that company, their instructor directed all those being trained to write out our values. He told us there weren't a maximum or minimum number, and he encouraged us to write them in a positive style that related to the present ("I am"), and not the future ("I will"). Then he asked that we attempt to prioritize those values and from that point forward carry them with us for regular review and adjustment.

The company's objective was to allow us to see our values and allow them to better guide our decisions, decisions we would be making as leaders. In fact, they called these values our *governing* values, since they do, sometimes without realizing it, govern our life and decisions. I have to say that this has been a most rewarding experience. I now regularly work with other leaders and potential leaders to help them develop a set of values that will guide (or are guiding) their life and leadership.

I offer my own values as an example of how this can be done, not as a model list of values to be held. I developed mine by identifying my favorite passages from the Bible. I then did what Franklin Covey asked me to do: Put some narrative explanation to each value and prioritize them.

Developing values, however, isn't a science with rigid rules and procedures; rather it's an art. At the end of my list, I'll make some further recommendations of how to develop your list of governing values. Keep in mind that mine are based on a Christian life and worldview; they aren't offered with anything in mind except to give you a better understanding of my leadership style and what updated, prioritized governing values can look like.

## **GOVERNING VALUES - John W. Stanko** **(Updated October 8, 2006)**

### **1. I do the will of God.**

I prayed one time that I would be like Timothy, not fully realizing what I was praying. I saw Timothy in a whole new light as I read Philippians 2:19-23:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests and not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.

The will of God, as I understand it, is to put other's interests before my own and to *serve* in furthering the gospel as the Holy Spirit and my oversight so direct. That also involves a vibrant and diligent prayer and study life that seeks to find the will of God and do it.

### **2. I walk in faith.**

The writer of Hebrews wrote, "[Without faith it is impossible to please God.](#)" I want to please the Lord by exercising faith in Him concerning my purpose, family, finances, future, and relationships. The second part of that verse completes the thought when it says, "[because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him](#)" (Hebrews 11:6).

My faith will have practical expression through my giving habits as I'm generous with my time, knowledge, wisdom, and money.

### **3. I love my family.**

The Lord has given me three wonderful gifts: Kathy, John, and Deborah. The Apostle Paul commanded husbands to love their wives

just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies (Ephesians 5:25-28).

I want to love my wife and see her released to her purpose as a joint heir with me of the gracious gift of life (1 Peter 3:7).

He also told fathers not to "embitter your children, or they will become discouraged" (Colossians 3:21). I want to be a friend and encourager to my children and release them to their God-given purpose.

### **4. I am a servant-leader.**

Because I am a man of purpose, I have a desire to express my purpose by serving the world in some capacity. Since my childhood, I've also found myself in leadership positions. Thus I want to combine those two roles—servant and leader—to be a servant-leader from a biblical perspective. I want to lead and serve according to God's will and implement my decisions in the right spirit and attitude. Peter wrote,

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2-3).

I want to lead in the tradition of Jesus, Moses, Joseph, David, Solomon, and Daniel. I want to grow in my understanding of servant leadership, learning to listen well and to influence, not control others. I also want to be a leader of integrity and courage.

### **5. I am a communicator.**

Jesus was a great communicator. Mark reported that "the large crowd listened to him [Jesus] with delight" (Mark 12:37). That came from His insight into the Word, His love for people, and His effective speaking style. I want to follow in His footsteps. Jesus also said, "The Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it" (John 12:49).

I want to have something to say and then know how to present it with clarity, humor, and conviction, whether speaking, writing books and articles or communicating through other media. I also want to study and effectively utilize humor to enhance my ability to

communicate with others. I acknowledge too that I have a sense of humor that is God-given and I am committed to use it to the glory of God.

#### **6. I am energetic.**

“I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power” (Ephesians 3:7).

Paul accomplished his life purpose “through the working of his [God’s] power.” The Greek word for “working” is *energeo*. I want to have and use this same *energeo* in my life and not be found working in my own strength. I will maintain this energy by staying focused on my purpose, eating healthy food, exercising, and getting appropriate rest. I will use this energy to produce more than I consume and to engage in activities that will bring increase and glory to God.

When I work, I work and walk in the truth of what Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me (1 Corinthians 15:10 NASU).

#### **7. I am a learner.**

Because the world is changing so rapidly, I can't afford to "crystallize" in my work habits or thinking. That means that I must continue to learn and grow in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:10). My primary focus must be the word of God and my prayer is "open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Psalm 119:18). Paul wrote, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16).

I'll read, study, take classes, attend seminars, learn from role models, and master new techniques and technology that will enable me to learn until my strength fails or I die.

#### **8. I am a reconciler.**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only answer to society's problems and that includes racism. I offer myself to work with people of color and of various cultures to model relationships that will help reconcile people to God and then to one another. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20,

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the

message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

I want to mentor young men and women to equip them to be all that they can be in God and affirm their beauty and worth in God's eyes.

### 9. I am a team player.

I've been an avid sports fan since my youth. I now realize that this was simply a love for the team concept that's so vital to, yet so absent from, much of management and ministry today. I want to help others identify their life's purpose and then train and coach them to work with other people of purpose. I'll try to pursue the synergy that comes from teamwork when everyone has a chance to communicate and share their creativity in an open atmosphere as free from authoritarian techniques as possible.

The Apostle Paul almost always traveled in a team and was released into ministry from the context of "team" in Acts 13:1-3:

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

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I realize that stating these values in the "I am" style may seem a bit presumptuous or arrogant. I'm *not* everything that I've written above. But I'm striving to embody those values, and that keeps me humble and ever seeking, two traits often missing in some leaders. I can never say I've arrived; that could cause me to take shortcuts or expect certain privileges that could lead to defective leadership.

Now how about you? Are you ready to spell out your governing values? Here are some other sample values that I've borrowed from Franklin Covey to help you get started.

- I seek excellence.
- I am competent.
- I serve others.

- I am frugal.
- I am generous.
- I seek truth.
- I am self-sufficient.
- I am innovative.

If you're ready, then follow these simple steps:

1. Set aside two hours.
2. Identify phrases that represent values that have directed your life up to this point.
3. Identify phrases that represent values you wish to incorporate in your life from this point forward.
4. Clarify those phrases and give them definition.
5. Are any of your values harmful to you or others? Do they represent selfish or selfless behavior? You may want to eliminate any that are inconsistent with a lifestyle of love and service (more on this later).
6. Set them in order of priority. Relax! There's no wrong way to do this.
7. Carry them with you. Review them every six months and change as needed.