

# MOTIVATIONAL VISIONARY TRUSTWORTHY

## STRENGTHENING LEADERS

How can you become a more effective leader this year?

By Dan Bolin

**GOD CREATED ALL OF US TO LEAD.** Deep within our spiritual DNA is a leadership gene. The mysterious dialogue within the Godhead recorded in Genesis 1:26-27 concludes, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule. ...” We are designed to express the image of God as we rule, direct, and lead the areas he entrusts to us. God made each of us to lead but in ways that are uniquely ours. That being said, all leaders are not created equal.

### CAPACITY

Some people’s leadership capacity is greater than others. The world requires only a few global leaders; many more lead in local or regional contexts and almost everyone plays a leadership role in their home, school, church, or workplace. The question is not *if* we will lead; rather it is *how* we will lead.

Each of us has a unique leadership style that results from the melding of several personal elements. Strengths, interests, backgrounds, spiritual gifts, personality, temperament, experience,

# VARIATION CAPACITY RTHINESS

and many other factors blend to form a highly personalized approach to leadership. Some aspects of our leadership mix are rather inelastic, some may be changed by significant life traumas, while other areas grow and expand with training, challenge, and evaluated experience.

One key factor that determines our leadership capacity is personality. Personality and temperament tend to be fixed; by the teenage years most people are who they are. Years ago, Warren Bennis in his book *Leaders* (HarperBusiness, 2007) demonstrated that high capacity leadership could emerge from any personality style. Diverse challenges and opportunities enable people with varying social styles and personality types to express their leadership in unique ways.

An old football axiom states: “You can’t coach speed.” In leadership, you can’t coach intelligence. Some people are born with superior intelligence, and that helps. And like personality, intelligence is rather inelastic. But its cousin, knowledge, can grow significantly. Discipline and a commitment to read, study, discuss, train, and remain teachable will greatly expand one’s capacity for knowledge.

Energy is another key factor in the leadership mix. We all burn different types of fuel and we all have limits to our energy reserves. Some burn jet fuel — hot, fast, and with sudden bursts

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of power. Others run on diesel — slow, steady, and consistently strong. Some individuals have large tanks with seemingly endless energy reserves, while others have smaller tanks and need time to recharge and restore with greater frequency.

Emotional Intelligence, creativity, spiritual gifts, and many other characteristics play into our unique leadership mix. But each of us is designed to lead, and each of us needs to stretch our capacities as much as possible to better reflect the image and likeness of God as we lead on whatever stage we find ourselves.

## TRUSTWORTHINESS

The glue that bonds all human relationships is trust. Leaders cannot force followers to trust them; they can only be trustworthy and create the context within which others feel safe extending trust. Trust is never given, only loaned, and it can be recalled by followers at any time: If a friend returns the

lawn mower I loaned him there is a good chance I will loan it to him again — and maybe my leaf blower, too. But if it comes back late and broken I may not be as likely to help him a second time.

Leaders create a context in which trust can grow by demonstrating both high quality character and effectiveness in their areas of responsibility. The longer a leader exhibits these two foundations of trustworthiness, character, and competence, the more likely it will be that followers will extend their trust.

The fruit of the Spirit is a simple and profound description of godly character. The evidence of God's Spirit working in the lives of leaders (and followers) should be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Noble character is essential in the life of a leader who is worthy of a follower's allegiance.

Competence in managing time, money, people, and specific areas of responsibility is also essential if a leader wants to establish a context in which trust can flourish. Followers are reluctant to trust people who make poor decisions, squander resources, or fail to fulfill their obligations.

Trust is very dynamic. Followers extend or withdraw their willing support depending on their perception of the leader's character and competence. Leaders must realize that every decision, action, and attitude is being viewed by followers and is influencing the fragile dynamic that builds or destroys trust.

## VISION

Effective leaders are going somewhere. They are able to imagine a world that is better than it is today; or at least, less bad than it might be tomorrow.

Leaders — like sailors setting out for the open water — have two concerns: First, what is the condition of the ship? And, second, what is the weather report? They are always analyzing the condition of their setting or institution. Whether they lead their family, church, business, ministry, or nation, they want to learn as much as possible about its internal strengths and weaknesses. How effective are the governance, staff, technology, products, programs, communication, facilities, finances, and operating systems?

Successful leaders are willing to take a hard look at their areas of responsibility and address them with a clear sense of reality. They are able to identify areas of strength and build upon them, and they are willing to identify areas of weakness and shoulder the difficult task of repairing those concerns.

Leaders who desire to be successful also look outside their confines and track external issues. What winds are blowing that could swamp the boat? Is the tide rising or falling? Are there blue skies and a steady breeze in the forecast? Economic issues, political changes, demographic shifts, environmental challenges, and morphing values are all issues beyond a leader's control that must be identified, monitored, and addressed.

Achieving the vision for a brighter future requires change — and change is not always easy. Too much radical change runs the risk of putting excessive torque on the organization and tearing it apart. A vision with too little change runs the risk of losing momentum, excitement, and passion.

Effective leaders understand the axiom: The past plus the future equals the present. They understand the influences that shaped the past and also articulate their preferred future.

Controlling these factors permits leaders to make wise, real-time decisions as they employ their limited resources to achieve their desired results.

## MOTIVATION

Effective leaders know how to motivate their followers. In reality, leadership is merely theoretical until someone follows. But how do leaders engage others to join them in their quest for a better future? At least five factors are critical for leaders to consider as they engage their followers: embodiment, communication, courage, enthusiasm, and the legitimate use of power.

When a leader's life embodies his or her message, it motivates others to join the cause. The congruency between a leader's behavior and stated commitments is critical in motivating followers. Leaders inspire followers when their lives embody the mission of their movement. Conversely, they undercut their ability to motivate others when their actions do not support what they avow. An obese person would have a difficult time motivating others in a fitness program. A vegetarian would have a hard time leading a cattle raisers association. A chain smoker would not inspire a cancer awareness group.

Communication is a key component of motivation as well. Depending on the leader's capacities, communication may inspire the masses or impart information in a one-to-one context. Verbal, written, and artistic communication can be used to motivate others. Increasingly, social media is a communication style that motivates followers to action.

A friend of mine says two things are contagious — fear and courage. Effective leaders face challenges with courage and do not shrink from hard choices; obstacles are overcome and threats are addressed.

Enthusiasm is also contagious. A leader's excitement ripples through the ranks of followers and replicates itself in their lives. The infectious passion of the leader impacts those who follow.

The legitimate use of power is essential for the leader who seeks to motivate followers to help achieve the desired vision. Combining the power of an office, role, or authorized position with the ability to influence others is a key determinant of leadership effectiveness.

We are all leaders, and we are all influencing the next generation of leaders. Whether we do it well or poorly, accidentally or intentionally, on a large scale or individually, institutionally or personally, we should all strive to become better leaders and help others move toward greater effectiveness. This means each of us should understand and expand our capacity to lead, develop our trustworthiness, clarify our vision, and improve our motivation. As we do this personally and help others, we will reflect God's image and likeness and become the leaders he designed each of us to be. ●

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**CLA ANAHEIM 2013:** Dan Bolin will co-lead with Mike Bates, Vice President for Advancement, Corban University, an ITI entitled "Unleashing Authentic Leaders" and lead a workshop entitled "Using Performance Reviews to Develop People." Register to attend (CLAConference.org)