

Leadership Made Simple

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Posted by admin

For years I have been collecting definitions of leadership. I'm fascinated by seeing how writers, thinkers, educators, pastors, Christian leaders, etc. understand and describe what leadership is. In recent months I have come across author Marcus Buckingham. I have seen some of his articles in various publications, heard him speak and just finished the last of three books he has written. I find his understanding of what a leader is and does resonating with me. He, along with many others, created his own definition of a leader.

“A leader is a person who rallies others to a better future”

I really like this. I have been sharing it with the pastors I coach, as well as within the context of the teams I work with here in Seattle. For quite a while I have been teaching the who, where and what of leadership: who the leader is, where the leader is going and what the leader does to bring others along on the journey. Marcus explicitly mentions two of the three and is probably assuming the third. The What is Rally; the where is a better future and the who is assumed. That is to say he is assuming that this “leader” is the kind of person who has the ability to see a better future and has the ability to rally others to it because of some personal traits and gifts he possesses. Now, I have no idea if Marcus Buckingham is a Christian, but nevertheless think he captures the essence of Christian leadership in his definition. If he is missing anything, it would be who this leader is in his core. His Character, his walk with the Lord. Perhaps no short combination of words in defining leadership will be perfect and include everything.

I do definitely believe that a Christian leader in any context must first see a better future for whatever endeavor he is involved in, and then have some God-given ability to rally people toward that future.

Let's take the two phrases and go a bit deeper:

A better future:

For the leader and his people to go there, the future he is envisioning must be perceived as better than the present they are now experiencing; or why else would they want to go there? This is the heart of vision: seeing into the future and being captivated by something that is better than what is. It is having a God-given vision that is stretching and exhilarating; but, at the same time, realistic and doable. It was retired baseball manager Sparky Anderson that quipped, “I've got my faults, but living in the past isn't one of them. There ain't no future in it.” A real leader doesn't live in the past but lives in the present with an eye toward the future. Marcus Buckingham in “The One Thing You Need To Know,” in which his leadership definition is found says, “What defines a leader is his

preoccupation with the future. Leaders are fascinated with the future. You are never satisfied with the present, because in your head you can see a better future.”

A little girl was sailing with her father from Long Beach, California to Catalina Island. It was an unusually clear day. In her excitement she exclaimed, “Daddy, I can look further than I can see.” Leaders often see before others see and more than others see. They are visionaries at heart.

Rally:

Last week I was on the phone with one of my clients in New York. We were talking about what was pulsating in his heart and where he saw his church going. He then said, “But what if they don’t want to go where I want to go?” That is always the question at stake in taking people to a better future. As a leader, I have to have both confidence that my picture of the future is God-given and doable and, at the same time, be able to trust God working through me, using me, to “rally” people. There are a lot of activities that go into that one word, rally: Persuade, motivate, guide, equip, develop, shepherd and catalyzed to name a few. I first need to rally the key influencers among my people and then allow them to rally others toward our better, preferred future.

I truly believe that leadership is simple to understand. It takes a lot to pull it off, but understanding exactly what’s involved is not overly complicated—at least not to my way of thinking. It was Steven Covey who came up with the brilliant statement “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” Two simple but profound main things in leadership are

1. Seeing a better future
2. Rallying your people to that better future

Here are four closing observations:

- If you don’t see something better, you are not a leader
- If you can’t rally people to something that you see that is better, you are not a leader
- If you personally see a better future, are going there yourself, but can’t rally others to join you, you are taking a walk by yourself and you are not a leader
- Leadership is all about the future: going there and taking others with you

As always, your comments, opinions and insights are welcomed