

Tools for Wise Leadership

A programme of TWR-Africa, produced by TWR-Zimbabwe, presented by Rev Dr Roy Musasiwa

Series 11: Levels of Leadership

Talk 01: The Position Level of Leadership

Welcome to the programme TOOLS FOR WISE LEADERSHIP. We have so far discussed various important aspects of leadership style of Jesus. But here is a question: how did all these leadership styles shape Jesus to be the leader he became? In order to answer this question we turn to leadership guru, John Maxwell who talks about the five levels of leadership¹. One level leads to the next level like different steps on a ladder.

What are these levels? Well, here they are:

Level 1: Position level

Level 2: Permission level

Level 3: Production level

Level 4: People development level

Level 5: Personhood level.

As we discuss each of them you will see how the various leadership styles of Jesus contributed towards making Jesus the kind of effective and world transforming leader that he became.

Firstly, let us talk about Level 1: The position level. This is the bottom most level of leadership. At this level people follow you because they have to. Authority comes only from your title. In other words having a position and a title to go with it can influence followers to follow you out of respect or fear. Followers feel the psychological pressure to follow the leader whose wishes are backed up by the titles. Is that not why many leaders in the world and in church are clamouring for titles? Idi Amin granted himself a number of titles like “His Excellency, President for Life, Field Marshal Al Hadji Doctor Idi Amin Dada, VC, DSO, MC, CBE.”

Oh, by the way, just in case you did not know: When he called himself CBE he took it to mean “Conqueror of the British Empire” and he even called himself “King of Scotland.”

A leader like Amin would rely on the ability to reward or punish – the carrot and stick approach to leadership. The Carrot and Stick Approach is an idiom that refers to a policy of offering a combination of rewards and punishment to induce the behaviour desired by the leader. It is named in reference to a cart driver dangling a carrot in front of a mule and holding a stick behind it. The mule would move towards the carrot because it wants the reward of food, while also moving away from the stick behind it, since it does not want the punishment of pain. As the mule runs after the ever moving carrot it would be drawing the cart. If the mule gets tired of chasing the carrot the cart driver would apply the stick to force the mule to keep moving. Such is the leadership method which heavily depends on rewards and punishments to get things done. To be able to do this, the leader uses his position, and the title that goes with it.

Within the church people also love to have titles. The titles “prophet”, “apostle” and “president” have become the latest titles to be popularized in the church. But although position can get things done, it only provides for what is called extrinsic motivation. Under this source of authority people follow you because they have to, not because they want to. They follow only to get the reward or to

¹ The line of thinking followed in this series is based John Maxwell (1993), *Developing the leader within you* published by Thomas Nelson.

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avoid the punishment. This level of leadership only works while the carrot and the stick are there. Take away the carrot and the stick and people will stop following the leader. This leadership style therefore has no lasting transformational effect.

Now how does Jesus fit into this leadership style? Well, Jesus had the highest possible position and the titles that go with his position. At the same time he shunned that which he was entitled to. Let us examine these two truths.

Firstly, Jesus had the highest position possible. After all he was the Son of God, and in very nature God. This gave Jesus the right to enforce obedience. And yet the Bible says that Jesus did not count equality with God something to be grasped or clung on to. He chose to empty himself of this authority of position and to become a servant leader. How different Jesus was from a leader like Idi Amin who relied on titles! Jesus shunned the authority of position, even though he was entitled to it. Jesus knew that the authority of position is the lowest level of influence for a leader.

Rehoboam is a good biblical example of a leader who failed because he relied too much on the authority of position. His story is told in 1. Kings 12:7-15. There we are told that Rehoboam was very power hungry. When his father Solomon died he took over the throne. A delegation of people came from the 10 Northern tribes of Israel to ask that the new king should lighten the burden of taxes and hard labour that they had suffered under his father Solomon. In response the king sent them away to give himself a chance to consult others over the most appropriate response to give to these tribes. The elders advised him to accept the request of these tribes. They said, "If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favourable answer, they will always be your servants." But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. The young men replied, "Tell these people, My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions." Being power hungry, this was the advice Rehoboam accepted. The result is that the 10 tribes of the North rebelled against Rehoboam and formed a separate state called Israel while Rehoboam remained with only the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah. From that time the nation became divided into 2 separate countries, Israel and Judah. No wonder Maxwell would say that position gives you the lowest level of influence over others though it is the most sought after.

What about Jesus as a contrast to Rehoboam? We have already said that Jesus being the Son of God deserved to exercise the highest position, power and privileges. Yet of him we are told in Philippians 2:5-12,

"The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had: He always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God. Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant. He became like a human being and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death -- his death on the cross. For this reason God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name. And so, in honour of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

So what is this telling us about the "position" level of leadership? Jesus had the position that is higher than any other. But while he was on this earth he preferred to exercise his leadership through servanthood rather than through making his power felt. Rather than calling himself a king, he preferred to just call himself the Son of Man. And he says, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

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So dear leader, keep your position but let that not be your source of security and effectiveness. It is your service, not your position that can transform the lives of others.

So much for the “position” level of leadership. Next time we meet again on this programme we will concentrate on the “Permission” level of leadership. So let’s make a date. Meanwhile why don’t you exercise these tools for wise leadership. God bless you.

Discussion Questions for: Series 11 - Talk 1 - The Position Level of Leadership

For this series of *Levels of Leadership* you can use the following study questions to guide you in deepening the impact of this series:

Study Question 1: for Personal reflection

What does this episode mean to you personally as a leader?

Study Question 2: for Group Discussion

What does this topic mean you as a group of leaders?

Study Question 3: for applying the topic

What can you apply from this topic in your role as a leader?

Summary:

The five levels of leadership are like the rungs of a ladder towards transformational leadership. The levels grow from the Position level, to Permission, Production, People development and finally to the Personhood level.

Discussion Questions:

Study Question 1: Personal reflection

How do you respond to people when they follow you only because of your position and title?

Study Question 2: Group Discussion

Leadership often comes with privileges. Jesus had access to significant power and resources. How can Christian leaders not only misuse privileges, but even dismiss their privileges?

Study Question 3: Applying the topic

What can you do practically to help people to want to follow you from their own persuasion?

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