

"Timeless best practices"

Merrill Oster, Founder, Pinnacle Forum

LEAD & SUCCEED



How to **INSPIRE** and **INFLUENCE** with **CONFIDENCE**
in an **EVER-CHANGING BUSINESS WORLD**

SARA MOULTON REGER

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PREFACE

For years as a Christian and a management consultant, I have noticed leadership lessons in the Bible. Often, while grappling with the best way to approach a client's issue, I prayed and sought answers in the Bible.

Not only have I found those answers, but I have also been amazed at how the Bible demonstrates the best business practices, some of which business experts have only recently come to acknowledge.

For example, knowledge management experts say that people learn effectively through stories and other visual images. If we look to the master communicator—Jesus—we see His teaching style included extensive use of parables and other stories. In fact, the Bible itself contains many stories, and its truths are woven into them.

Also, experts promote the use of questions as a tool for gaining understanding and properly engaging others. God used this technique as early as the third and fourth chapters of Genesis as He dealt with the sins of Adam, Eve, and Cain—and the use of questions continues throughout the Bible. So many of the best practices for today's business environment have been available to us for thousands of years, yet in my experience some are not widely practiced.

Photography is one of my hobbies. I especially enjoy going to places in the southwestern United States to photograph the scenery. The pictures later remind me of my favorite places, and the best ones eventually find their way onto the walls of our home. Part of this process is to select the frame and matting for the picture. These seemingly minor, and even peripheral, items can cause your eye to see different aspects of the picture and draw your attention in particular ways. That is the goal of this book: to put a business frame and matting around the words in the Bible so business leaders can effectively see, understand, and use them to propel success in business—good success for all involved, including the employees, customers, and owners/shareholders of the

business.

Certainly it is humbling to offer these truths to others—to run the risk of coming across as having some special wisdom to offer. If you find things worthy of praise in this book, please recognize it as God’s accomplishment. This book simply shines a spotlight on how you can apply biblical truths in business.

Also, if you disagree with anything, I hope you’ll accept it as my best effort. The only book without error is the Bible, and I readily acknowledge this book isn’t perfect.

Pastor and Bible teacher Dr. Creflo A. Dollar taught a series about progressive elements applicable to using Bible wisdom at work. It emphasizes the importance of words and character. He teaches:

Words are the foundation to our
Thoughts, which lead to our
Decisions, which direct our
Actions, which form our
Habits, which build our
Character, which determines our
Destination in life.¹

This process works in both positive and negative ways. By seeking to put the Bible’s words into your life, your thoughts will be turned toward its wisdom. That wisdom will then impact your daily choices and actions. Eventually—and perhaps even rapidly—the outcomes in your life will reflect the positive influence of a foundation on the Bible’s words.

There are a number of published works on Christian leadership principles. These are sources of excellent material to illuminate Bible concepts for business, but it can be difficult to remember and readily access these lessons when you need them. This book attempts to fill that gap and be a ready “how-to” reference for business leaders who want to apply biblical principles at work.

To be a ready reference, this book includes selected Bible passages along with information to frame the lessons for key leadership activities. If you are a new or aspiring leader, you may want to read

this book straight through to get a broad view of leadership topics. If you want to enhance your capabilities or are facing a particular challenge, you may want to target specific chapters on those topics. In either case, I encourage you to return to this book again and again while you plan how to address the issues and opportunities in your work environment.

As you'll see in the table of contents, this book is organized by key leadership activities in the context of business. Each chapter contains a series of short sections about concepts directly applicable to effective leadership. Each section contains the following elements:

Context—Because the sections are organized by topic and not by Bible sequence, a brief context opens each section to give background on the passage you are about to read.

Bible passage—Several key verses are listed. For longer passages, there are references pointing you to the full story in the Bible. Be sure to take the time to read the suggested passages from your Bible. Or go online to www.biblegateway.com or www.biblestudytools.net, where you can choose from over twenty different translations and paraphrases.

Discussion—A brief discussion identifies the key elements of the passage and highlights how you can apply the learning in business.

Application (Live It)—A series of steps are recommended to help you to apply the truths of the Bible passage to business leadership.

Current business example (See It)—A short story from current business demonstrates these concepts—either how they were demonstrated positively or how their absence caused problems.

Leadership is an extremely important responsibility. In a speech delivered at the Sorbonne in Paris, France, on April 23, 1910, Theodore Roosevelt put this responsibility into context by saying,

“The stream will not permanently rise higher than the main source; and the main source of national power and national greatness is found in the average citizenship of the nation. Therefore it behooves us to do our best to see that the standard of the average citizen is kept high; and the average cannot be kept high unless the standard of the leaders is very much higher.”² These words refer to national leaders, but they are also important for business leaders who need to set a high standard to draw their organizations, and the people in them, to a higher level.

At these pivotal times, it is crucial for people who put their faith and trust in God to stand up and take their place. God bless you as you work to enhance your leadership capabilities and impact on those you touch in your daily life.

CHAPTER 1: BE LEADER-READY

Prepare your life for successful leadership

Business leaders can never go wrong by building their foundation on godly principles. The fundamentals in this chapter are the underpinnings of our thinking, so they precede effective decisions, actions, and habits. Just as it is a good idea to check the foundation of your home periodically to ensure it is sound, you may want to return to this chapter periodically to review these important Bible fundamentals for business leadership.

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT LEADERS ARE CHOSEN BY GOD

The apostle Paul wrote the following passage at a time when Rome ruled the world. One of Rome's emperors would eventually order Paul's death.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.
For there is no authority except from God, and the
authorities that exist are appointed by God.

—ROMANS 13:1

Perhaps the most important leadership fundamental is understanding that God establishes leadership and authority. Notice that Paul tells Christians to respect the civil authority not because it is good or right, but because *all* authority is derived from God. This is true even when it casts itself in opposition to Him, as the Roman government did. If we understand this first and foremost, it is easier to keep our leadership positions and the associated authority in proper perspective. Also, we are less likely to see leadership as a privilege or as something we deserve due to our own effort and re-

sults. Leadership is a significant responsibility—one established by God. This important truth needs to guide us in both our positions as leaders and in the many areas where we are followers of other leaders in our lives.

Live It

Remember that leadership is a responsibility established by God.

Recognize you have a specific God-given purpose in your leadership position—one you need to continually seek and strive to better understand and fulfill.

Seek to readily recognize the leadership positions others hold and your relationship and responsibility to those leaders.

Ensure you are also a good follower and model respect for authority.

See It

Since 1988, my work has required extensive travel. On one flight, after reading my pocket Bible during most of the flight, I unbuckled my seat belt while we were taxiing into the gate area. The nearby flight attendant asked me to rebuckle it. I must admit, sheepishly, I failed to do it. Afterward I felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Shortly before this flight, I had read the book *Spiritual Authority* by Watchman Nee. I knew in this circumstance the flight attendant was the authority. I needed to repent, and I did. Although many years have passed since this situation, it still reminds me of the importance of identifying and acknowledging authority in all situations.

LEAD BY YOUR PRINCIPLES

David was the second king in Israel, and he was a great warrior both before and during his reign as king. This story of his leadership in battle was recounted at the time of his death.

David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. And David said with longing, “Oh, that someone would give me a drink of the water from the well of Bethlehem,

which is by the gate!” So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, drew water from the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless he would not drink it, but poured it out to the LORD. And he said, “Far be it from me, O LORD, that I should do this! Is this not the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?” Therefore he would not drink it.

These things were done by the three mighty men.

—2 SAMUEL 23:14–17

David was principled. He prioritized what was best for the people and would not do something that could lead others to risk their lives, especially if it was only for his comfort. If David accepted the water and drank it, others may have been motivated to repeat the feat—or something similarly risky. David lived by an understanding that his actions as a leader had great impact on others, and he used his principles to quickly know what he needed to do.

Live It

Document your own personal principles and how you desire to conduct business and your leadership responsibilities; it will be easier to recall them when you need them to help you.

Watch your words; remember that others are listening and are likely to respond to what you say.

Think through the long-term consequences of your actions and how they may motivate people to respond in the future.

Communicate the reasons for your decisions so people can understand your principles and how they impact your actions.

See It

A new store manager introduced himself to his new staff by explaining his philosophy. “My job is to keep you healthy, happy, and having fun. If I do that, you’ll take great care of our customers—and our owners will be ecstatic.” At first, he was met with disbelief and

some resistance. The previous store manager had run the place like a commander, with lots of rules and close supervision—and some of the supervisors also believed strongly in this approach to leading the staff. However, morale was low and the store had struggled, which led to the change in leadership. The new manager wanted to quickly communicate he had a completely different approach. At first, he had to work hard to promote his philosophy because some of the supervisors had not bought into it. When he made it clear that his approach would not change, some supervisors chose to leave the business. However, within a short time, the climate of the store began to turn around. After three months, business was booming. People were having fun, and it showed. They provided great service to customers, and not only were the regulars visiting more frequently, but the store also gained a reputation that drew new customers. Leading by his principles, the store manager had a great impact on both the business and on the people who were in it.

PASS THE LEADERSHIP TEST

Peter was one of the twelve apostles and one of the three chosen by Jesus to be present during some special events, such as when the Father spoke to Jesus during the event called the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–9). Peter continued his leadership role after Jesus's ascension and wrote a letter to the early Christians, perhaps shortly before his death.

Tend (nurture, guard, guide, and fold) the flock of God that is [your responsibility], not by coercion or constraint, but willingly; not dishonorably motivated by the advantages and profits [belonging to the office], but eagerly and cheerfully; not domineering [as arrogant, dictatorial, and overbearing persons] over those in your charge, but being examples (patterns and models of Christian living) to the flock (the congregation). And [then] when the Chief Shepherd is revealed, you will win the conqueror's crown of glory.

—1 PETER 5:2–4, AMP

Peter lays out some key tests for leaders in the church—tests that apply equally well in business. First, we need to hold our leadership

positions willingly. Our mind-set should not be for what we can gain but rather for what we can add in serving others. We also need to guard against taking actions that relieve others from their responsibilities. We need to be overseers and not overdoers. Finally, we should focus on being a continual example, knowing we need to demonstrate the highest standard for ourselves. When we pass these tests, we receive true rewards from God.

Live It

Discern your responsibilities and those of others; fulfill your responsibilities and help others fulfill theirs.

Guard against focusing too much on WIIFM (what's in it for me); it's a natural tendency that will stunt your leadership results.

Frequently evaluate your willingness to do what it takes to be a successful leader—and one who follows biblical principles—given your situation.

Consider making a voluntary change if you find your willingness waning due to changes in direction, philosophy, policy, or personnel.

Critically evaluate the degree to which you want others to follow your example—and ensure you hold the highest standard for yourself.

Seek to be the leader others appreciate for effort and compassion as well as results.

Seek to please God and to obtain His rewards, including the peace and joy that accompany passing these tests.

See It

Shortly into a new year, a series of events occurred that led to senior leader changes within my part of the business. At first, I was neutral about the changes, but soon the new leader ordered a series of actions I found myself wrestling with. I did not believe they were good business decisions, and they were difficult to implement while maintaining my group's performance from prior years. After thinking and praying about the changes, I realized I did not agree with many of them or with the underlying philosophy. I had to be

honest with myself that my attitude was deteriorating, and I knew it would eventually become apparent and rub off on others. After praying and considering my options, I made the decision to transfer into another group even though I had to give up financial and career benefits to do it. It was a difficult decision but far easier than trying to “fake it.” Eventually the changes were sorted out for the group, and I was on to a new phase of my career that would not have happened otherwise.

GUARD YOUR TRUST

The Passover commemorates the deliverance of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Throughout His life, Jesus’s custom was to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover.

But when He was in Jerusalem during the Passover Feast, many believed in His name [identified themselves with His party] after seeing His signs (wonders, miracles) which He was doing. But Jesus [for His part] did not trust Himself to them, because He knew all [men]; and He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man [needed no evidence from anyone about men], for He Himself knew what was in human nature. [He could read men’s hearts.]

—JOHN 2:23–25, AMP

Jesus was held in high regard at this time in His ministry. He had many friends. But He knew better than to open up to all His new friends—a caution to all of us who want to follow His wisdom. There are people who are friends for a reason, others for a season, and still others for a lifetime. There are also others who may appear to be friends but may actually be focused on advancing or protecting themselves. Jesus was careful about whom He trusted and shows us we can be helpful to others and guard our trust at the same time.

Live It

Recognize the importance of guarding confidences about yourself and your business endeavors; not everyone will be supportive.

Pray and seek God’s wisdom about how to obtain coun-

sel—and from whom—and when to open confidences to others.

Seek relationships with fellow believers in God, and realize that God may also expect you to build trusting relationships with others as well.

Gain a mutual agreement with people; trust should go both ways.

Be quick to receive and act on any “checks” you get in your spirit (discomfort that causes you to be uncertain or concerned); remember that the Holy Spirit always knows more than you do.

Recognize the importance of evaluating relationships over time and as circumstances change; for instance, if you are promoted, some of your close relationships may need to change to reflect your new level of authority.

Be sure you consistently demonstrate the characteristic of trustworthiness.

See It

“I just need to vent.” A recently named general manager of a real estate company had called a family member to talk about a problem at the office. The “big boss” had just visited and made several comments that caused quite a stir among the staff. The general manager was concerned and a little angry. He started to say something to another person at the office but stopped himself. He wanted to sort out his thoughts and feelings, but in his new position, he just didn’t know yet whom he could trust. So rather than risk making a bad decision in his new role, he reached out to someone he could trust—someone he knew wouldn’t discuss it with anyone at the office. They chatted for a few minutes, and even though he knew she didn’t understand the issue well, he felt better and was able to get back to work without feeling anxious.

A couple days later, they chatted again. “So, how do things look today?” The general manager was relieved to say everything was back to normal. The issues had died down, and he thanked her for being there when he needed a sounding board. He also thought to himself, “I’m sure glad I held my horses and didn’t vent to someone on the staff. That could have been a real mess.” The general man-

ager had successfully guarded his trust in a new position and a vulnerable moment.

PRACTICE FLEXIBLE FOCUS

The Gospels indicate two instances where Jesus raised a person from the dead. This first episode happened at a time when many people knew of Jesus's power to heal, so crowds often followed Him as He traveled.

One day, a synagogue ruler named Jarius came to Jesus, begging Him to heal his daughter, who was at the point of death—and did die before Jesus reached her. But while Jesus was on His way, He was interrupted by someone else who needed healing.

Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment; for she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well." Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction. And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?"

But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."

. . . Wherever He entered, into villages, cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well.

Read the rest of the story in Mark 5:35–43.

Jesus was on His way to heal a gravely ill child—clearly an important task for His charter. (See Acts 10:38.) Time was of the essence, so it was necessary to focus on the task. When the “distraction” of the woman’s healing happened, Jesus could have simply allowed her to get her healing and continue on His way. But instead, Jesus stopped and capitalized on the “distraction.”

Focus is essential to be successful in business, but so is the art of knowing which “distractions” deserve immediate attention. To know when a “distraction” is really an opportunity that could be easily missed, you can use your mission or charter. And, of course, it is always valuable to listen to the still, small voice, which is frequently God speaking to us about what to do. Undoubtedly there were many other distractions in this crowd thronging Jesus. He was flexible to take the time to leverage the one distraction that provided a foundation for lasting value, as indicated a few verses later when others sought to touch His garment for healing.

Live It

Prioritize your activities so you are spending your time and effort on what is most important.

Beware of the trap of “urgent”; often urgent issues are not important, but they can consume much time and attention.

Recognize that important, valuable opportunities may present themselves at inopportune times.

Seek God about how to engage these opportunities; He responds even to quick prayers, especially if we stay connected to Him in prayer on a regular basis.

Consider what outcome would be beneficial and how much time is appropriate to devote to the “distraction” before returning to your focus task; notice Jesus sought for people to understand that it was her faith that made the woman well, knowing this vital truth would impact the thinking of others.

See It

I was “buried”—you know, the time when there are so many activities going on it is hard to know which one to work on next. And just then, an important opportunity presented itself. I was asked to do another training session on IBM’s new Tangible Culture approach for consultants in Europe. The materials had been in place for two years, and the capabilities had advanced fairly significantly in some areas. The training in Europe would be with a fairly small team and in a country where I could not be sure we would gain a lot of market opportunity. Should I add to my own plate at a difficult time and update the materials? Or should I “slide by” with what we had and do my best to communicate the updated thinking in my course delivery? I chose to bite the bullet and make the updates, knowing I might be the only person who would really appreciate it.

Events rapidly proved it was a good decision—both for the company and for me personally. Two months after I delivered the new materials in Europe and found them to be far superior in helping people “get it,” I was asked to take a new role at the company that would preclude me from doing future training. Others would need to shoulder the responsibility going forward. With the new materials in place, the transition to the new “teach team” was relatively quick and painless. I was able to move on to my new responsibilities without dragging some of my old responsibilities with me or feeling guilty that I had not left the work in the best condition for others to use.

CONSIDER YOUR ROLE

Jesus frequently taught crowds of people, and often Pharisees and Sadducees were in the crowds. Sometimes these Jewish religious leaders were there for genuine reasons, and other times they were seeking to accuse Him. In this case, Jesus was eating at the house of a prominent Pharisee, and He used this opportunity to teach important lessons to those present.

When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, “Give place to this man,” and then you begin with shame to take

the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, “Friend, go up higher.” Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

—LUKE 14:8–11

In many business conference rooms, there are chairs at the table and around the perimeter of the room. When you attend a large meeting with many leaders, selecting the appropriate seat can be difficult. Higher position is typically the reason to select a seat at the table, but effective leaders will think beyond their position to their role in the meeting. If a junior person has a more active role, it shows both humility and a deep regard for the effectiveness of the outcome when you yield a seat at the table. This principle of considering your role, of course, goes beyond seats at meetings. It may actually be more important for your role on projects, teams, committees, and the like. The best leaders understand their roles are different in each of these situations and act accordingly.

Live It

Recognize you hold a position and that you also fulfill a series of roles, all of which come with differing levels and types of authority.

Seek to understand who the authority is in each situation and how your role relates to the roles of others.

Be sure to act appropriately with regard to the authority level you hold for particular roles, being careful not to equate position with role in all situations.

See It

Although I have held leader roles for a number of years, I have always relished doing the “real” work of culture transformation, organizational change management, and governance consulting. On several occasions, a person within my department has “hired” me to work as a subject matter expert or adviser on a project.

On one such occasion after working as an adviser for a few

weeks, the project manager who “hired” me took me aside. She pointed out I was not consistently prompt to join team meetings, and it was disruptive to the team. She was right. I had let other priorities take precedence over my agreement to the team. In that setting, my role was to be a team member—not the boss. I apologized and amended my ways. And I learned an important lesson I have taught to others. As business becomes more complex, jobs are becoming more of a collection of roles than a singular position. The leaders who are quick to recognize their role and act accordingly will find the greatest success in an increasingly complex business environment.

CONCLUSION

Leadership is overall an awesome responsibility, not a privilege. To be a successful leader in business, each of us needs a lifestyle to build and maintain the right foundation for success. Although this takes time and effort, it is not only well worth it, but it is also pleasing to God as we seek His ways for our lives.

CHAPTER 10: CORRECT PEOPLE COMPASSIONATELY

Address failures with a balance on relationships and results

Correcting people is a necessary, although difficult, requirement for leaders. Correcting people the right way can increase productivity and morale. Correcting them the wrong way, however, can lead to ongoing issues with both relationships and results. The Bible shows leaders how to be both firm and merciful at the same time. Follow these examples, and you will be neither a wimp nor a tyrant in how you handle people when they need correction.

CORRECT WITH AN EYE ON THE FUTURE

Hebrews is a letter written to New Testament Jewish believers. Chapter 12 of Hebrews covers the important topic of giving and receiving correction.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.”

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they in-

deed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

—HEBREWS 12:5–11

It is difficult to correct others and natural to want to avoid confrontation and its backlash. Certainly, no one enjoys being corrected, and many people respond by becoming defensive, hostile, sullen, or depressed. But leaders need to put this into proper perspective. If we fail to give a deserved correction to someone due to fear of a negative reaction, then we are dodging a key responsibility of leadership. Conversely, we should always be ready to accept correction by those in authority over us. Choose to see correction—both giving and receiving it—as a necessary part of business life and a way for you to show respect for people and their long-term capabilities.

Live It

Acknowledge correcting people is an ongoing responsibility of leadership.

Check your motivation, and if you are correcting without genuine concern for a person's future, you need to examine what you are doing and why.

Check your emotions, and if you are overly emotional (for example, angry), use prayer to get yourself under control before taking action.

Acknowledge that giving correction is uncomfortable, and resist the temptation to wait, thinking it will be easier later.

Select the appropriate time to give correction—looking for a time when the recipient is most ready to receive it and has a chance to work through his or her own reactions.

Choose the place for correction, preferably somewhere

private, and remember to remove distractions by turning off your phone, closing your door, and making sure you won't be disturbed.

Identify the problem and ask questions to give the person ample opportunity to give their perspective on what happened and why—and be willing to change your perspective about the situation if warranted.

Ask the person to repeat back your expectations—being sure to listen carefully and to clarify any misunderstandings.

Often during correction, people fail to listen effectively due to emotions, so be patient and repeat your expectations several times if necessary.

Set a time to follow up and review performance—being available to support the person's progress but avoiding the temptation to be too active in the work he or she must do.

Set a good example by constructively handling situations where you need to accept correction; it will increase your credibility and compassion.

See It

Early in my career, I was brought in to lead an intact department. Soon I discovered a member of the team who produced significantly more errors than others. In dealing with the situation, I followed most of the “live it” steps but failed in one of them. By focusing too strongly on the needed performance and ensuring he had the needed knowledge and skills, I neglected to ask questions to uncover his thinking about the work and the errors he made. Only much later in a long, difficult process did I come to realize we had different mind-sets about the importance of accuracy. Had I opened a dialogue through questions to get his perspective, I believe the situation could have been easier and more successful for both of us.

SURFACE CONFESSIONS ABOUT FAILURES AND MISTAKES

Genesis opens with God's creation of the heavens and earth and His initial dealings with humankind. Adam and Eve lived in the idyllic Garden of Eden where there were only a few rules to follow—one of which they broke. Genesis 3 tells the story of their failure and how God dealt with it.

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." . . .

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." . . .

To the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” . . .

Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them. . . .

Therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.

—GENESIS 2:15–17; 3:6–13, 16–19, 21, 23

Ever wonder why the all-knowing God questioned Adam and Eve about their transgression? He *knew* what had happened, so why didn't He just tell them what was *going* to happen as a result? He chose instead to ask questions to begin the process of accountability, consequences, and restoration.

When problems arise, leaders should begin with questions to solicit input and confessions from those involved. When you hand out consequences based on admissions of guilt, they are more likely to be accepted as appropriate. Also note Adam and Eve received different consequences. Discipline needs to be appropriate to a person's particular part in the problem or failure. Follow God's example, and experience more effective results when you must correct someone.

Live It

Establish clear “dos” and “don'ts” for each situation—and for important requirements, identify the consequences for noncompliance in advance.

Stay close enough to be aware of changes in how people

respond to you; it may signal a problem.

When noncompliance is evident, use questions to ensure your understanding of the problem and identify people's specific involvement.

Allow each person to admit what he or she did to enhance your knowledge of the situation, and help them accept the consequences.

Assign consequences based on what each person did.

Consider whether some negative aspects should be mitigated for both the sake of relationships and for how others will perceive the situation; for example, the tunic God made for Adam and Eve reduced some negative aspects of their punishment yet kept the punishment intact.

Adopt a long-term view of the situation and ensure your actions address both the immediate problem and any likely future implications.

See It

A senior executive faced a particularly sticky issue with an heir apparent for one of his organizations. The man had just publicly displayed insubordination toward that organization's current manager—someone the senior executive intended to remove shortly. His first inclination was to move forward with his plan and promote the offender. However, the executive realized this action would “reward,” or at least ignore, the unacceptable behavior. If he moved ahead with the promotion, it might encourage others to follow suit. So the executive met with the offender and used questions to uncover the man's view of the situation. He admitted his actions were wrong but felt they were justified given the manager's incompetence. The executive then announced his decision: he was going to transfer the man to an unfavorable department, and he would also be ineligible for the soon-to-be-open top position. However, the transfer would be only for one year, and additional promotion opportunities were expected after he returned. The consequences were severe yet measured in terms of the man's long-term career with the company. By his decision, and the way he handled the interaction, the senior executive sent a strong message to the organization about his expectations.

ADDRESS UNACKNOWLEDGED FAILURES AND MISTAKES

Adam and Eve had children after they were banished from the Garden of Eden. Two of their sons, Cain and Abel, were participants in the world's first murder.

And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth." And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me." And the LORD said to him, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him.

Then Cain went out from the presence of the

LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden.

—GENESIS 4:3–16

Cain and Abel both knew how to make an offering. Otherwise, God would have instructed Cain rather than remind him to follow the proper method. But Cain chose not to do what he knew was right. When a person deliberately does not do what is required, it is often evidenced by a growing pattern. For this reason, it is best to address the first failure firmly—even if seems to be a small one—because it may prevent more serious problems. Cain’s first failure, not following a known procedure, led to a very serious sin: murder. In confronting Cain, God used questions to seek an admission of guilt—then clarified the wrongdoing and assigned an appropriate consequence despite Cain’s lack of confession. He also demonstrated the way to mitigate the negative aspects of a punishment without changing the punishment itself. It is easy to regret taking difficult actions with people, and this causes some leaders to later remove the punishment. Choose to be a leader who knows how to show firmness yet compassion by keeping the consequence intact and appropriately mitigating some of the negative aspects.

Live It

Ensure the requirements of each assignment are clear and understood.

Look for early warning signs, such as discontent and avoidance, and talk with the person to understand the issue and prevent future problems.

When noncompliance is evident, use questions to explore the person’s understanding of what he or she did wrong—and give the person a chance to admit the wrong.

If the person will not admit it—and you know you have the facts straight—don’t hesitate to take action, carefully communicating the failure and its consequences.

Listen to the person’s response, but avoid the temptation to minimize the failure or reduce appropriate conse-

quences.

If you learn new facts during the conversation, independently confirm the facts and decide if the consequences need to be modified.

Consider the long-term impact of the consequence and mitigate negative fallout if appropriate.

See It

One company found out the hard way the result of dealing with failures too harshly. Over the years, an inappropriate “zero defects” philosophy had morphed into a style of leadership that handled even innocent mistakes with serious, visible reprimands and consequences. When one employee discovered a serious mistake, she was panic-stricken and sought to hide her mistake. But it only cost the company more, ultimately resulting in a loss of approximately \$40,000 for the small company. The employee was fired, and more fear was created. The leaders realized they needed to change their approach. A policy was communicated: employees who immediately brought their honest mistakes to management would not be fired. Their resolve was quickly tested. Another costly mistake was soon made, but this time the employee brought it to their attention as soon as it was discovered. The leaders had to resist the urge to fire the employee, but in doing so, they initiated a new, less fearful environment within the company.

BE ALERT FOR INCORRECT MIND-SETS

This incident occurred after Jesus’s disciples had significant and repeated experiences with His powerful teaching and miracles. By this time, Jesus expected a greater level of understanding than His disciples displayed.

And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. Then He charged them, saying, “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have no bread.” But Jesus, being aware

of it, said to them, “Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.” “And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?” And they said, “Seven.” So He said to them, “How is it you do not understand?”

—MARK 8:13–21

The disciples should have had a better understanding than they demonstrated in this situation. Jesus corrected them, but He did it expressly so they would have improved understanding in the future. Rather than simply telling them what they should have already understood, He used pointed questions to get their attention and direct them to what they were missing. Engaging them in this manner got their attention and made it more likely they would retain the necessary lesson.

Live It

Recognize the importance of mind-sets and how thinking impacts action.

Address incorrect thoughts with the same passion as incorrect actions.

Evaluate the level of understanding that should be expected.

If the person is relatively new to the responsibilities, point out the differences between correct and incorrect thinking.

If the person is growing in knowledge and ability, use open questions (for example, beginning with “what if” and “when”) to direct the person’s thinking toward areas of needed change.

If the person has had adequate time and support to understand, ask pointed questions to get attention

and indicate areas needing correction.

Focus on the person's long-term learning and overall success as your primary goals.

See It

One army unit was conducting a “paper exercise”—which involves detailed plans but no actual troops in the field. As each group submitted their plans, one of the headquarters leaders discovered a plan destined for failure. He started to alert the group to their error, but the colonel stopped him. “We’ll shoot their helicopters down, and they will learn. Let them make this mistake when it doesn’t cost any lives.” The other leader had an incorrect mind-set about the paper exercises and what they were designed to do. Ensuring he understood the purpose of these exercises and handled them correctly would be vital to the overall effectiveness, and safety, of the unit in live combat.

CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF A PUBLIC CORRECTION

This New Testament passage comes from a letter Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy. In it, Paul gives the young man instructions for church leadership.

Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all,
that the rest also may fear.

—1 TIMOTHY 5:20

In general, leaders should talk to people one-on-one to discuss performance shortfalls. However, this passage refers to the motivational value of “learning another’s lesson.” If a problem is out in the open, it may be appropriate to correct publicly to ensure others are warned from the same path. If intentions were good and the person is noticeably aware of their shortfall, a private or mild open correction may be sufficient. Be sure to think beyond the immediate needs to the resulting impact on others before deciding the best course of action.

Live It

Realize that people generally know the performance of

others.

Evaluate whether the performance failure was due to inexperience, honest mistakes, or if the person knew better and is capable of more.

Choose the best way to address the situation, balancing the needs to correct the individual and send a clear message about your expectations.

Give a private, mild correction if the person is aware and sorry for his or her failure.

Give a private correction followed by a broader message about your expectations if others may be inclined to make the same mistake.

Give an open correction if the failure was open and serious.

See It

One organization found itself in the awkward place of having to try again to implement changes to its IT processes and procedures. Several previous attempts had failed, yet the improvements were necessary. When the new attempt was announced, many openly scoffed, but most people simply ignored the message. To get attention, the project team implemented an open measurement system. The key requirements were identified along with expected standards and timing for completion. Project members met regularly with leaders of the organization to go over their group's performance against expectations, and all were repeatedly alerted that results would be openly published in an upcoming meeting. The meeting came and went, and the inadequate performance of several groups was known to all—as was the superior performance of others. By the next meeting, all results were at or above expectations, and soon the effort was well on its way to success.

ENSURE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES ARE FIRM

Moses is the person speaking to God in this passage. This episode happened shortly before his death. Moses was not permitted to enter the Promised Land due to a serious sin he committed. (See Numbers 20:2–13.)

Then I pleaded with the LORD at that time, saying: “O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like Your works and Your mighty deeds? I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon.” But the LORD was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me. So the LORD said to me: “Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter. Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. But command Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see.”

—DEUTERONOMY 3:23–28

It is important to hold fast to decisions where you have applied negative consequences—especially when strong messages or principles are at stake. Moses had failed to follow God fully in one respect—striking the rock rather than speaking to it as He had commanded. God required complete obedience from Moses to relay the proper message to His people, so His punishment was severe and irrevocable.

Before his death, Moses reminded the people of his own situation and the effects of obedience and disobedience. (See Deuteronomy 4:1–40.) He was a credible source because he was suffering the effects of his own actions. People want equity in what happens to leaders and employees. If God had been lenient on Moses, His message would have been diluted—and worse, He would have shown more respect for Moses, which goes against His character. (See Acts 10:34.) God expects much from those who have been given much (Luke 12:48), and this should cause us to continually evaluate our motives and conduct.

Live It

Think carefully before applying negative consequences;

don't make them so onerous you are tempted to change them in the future.

Realize the difference between changing your mind on a negative consequence and mitigating some of the negative implications of the consequence.

Allowing Moses to enter the Promised Land would have discounted the importance of being fully obedient.

Letting Moses see the Promised Land helped to mitigate the negative impact to some extent, yet continued to reinforce the importance of obedience.

More than fourteen hundred years later, God fulfilled Moses's dream by allowing him to return to Earth and enter the Promised Land to meet with Elijah and Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. (See Matthew 17:1–3.)

Allow people to speak with you about the situation because it will enable you to reinforce your expectations and keep communications flowing to help repair any damaged relationships.

Resist the temptation to let appeals go on for too long and give false hopes of a change in your decision.

Reinforce your expectations (for example, Moses was to support the transition of leadership to Joshua) because it is easy for people to be distracted or disheartened while enduring negative consequences.

See It

During her first year, a talented new employee hired out of graduate school had met or exceeded all of her performance goals. Half-way through her second year, however, she began struggling. Her performance was slipping quickly, and it appeared her attitude was behind it. Her supervisor needed to take action, so a probationary period was established. The two agreed to the specific performance goals she needed to meet to successfully complete the probation.

During the three-month probation, she failed to meet any of her goals. Her supervisor realized no amount of talent could make up

for lack of heart, so he reluctantly terminated her employment. He needed to show to the employee, and the organization, that performance was critical. He also wanted to show compassion for the employee involved, so he paid for career counseling and then helped her land a coveted job with another international corporation. In addition, he carefully identified how he could improve his department's screening process for evaluating all future potential employees.

CONCLUSION

As a leader, you will never get away from the need to correct people. The Bible provides a number of examples to help you take the needed action with confidence, knowing you are applying ancient wisdom and techniques that work.

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