

Delegating authority

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Perhaps the single biggest source of headaches and heartaches for pastors lies in the ways authority is shared. As a leader pursues his dreams and purposes, he soon finds he needs to partner with people who can help him see those dreams realized. Even more important, the genuine “servant leader” – one who serves not to validate his leadership, but simply to serve- strives to see *others’ dreams fulfilled*. In this process of partnering he soon finds it necessary to pass off responsibilities to others whom he feels can adequately move the church’s objectives along. This is the process of **delegation**. The leader knows he cannot do it all himself, so he *delegates* responsibility to others. Unless this process of delegation is handled wisely, all sorts of things can go awry. Staff members can feel that they have been given responsibility but no authority. Leaders can feel that associates aren’t carrying out their vision. Co-workers can feel undervalued by a leader, sensing that his only value is in what he can produce for that leader. The leader, on the other hand, can sometimes feel that a co-worker is using him to carve out his own vision. Problems like this go on and on in a variety of forms. All of this goes back to a mishandling of authority.

If our objective is to glorify God, and if glorifying God means giving the headship of everything we do to Christ, then how we delegate authority needs to reflect those Biblical principles which underscore a kingdom ethos. In other words, the process will

- (1) make for Christ's present and active oversight;
- (2) foster a greater intimacy with Christ for all involved;
- (3) engender genuine mutuality and interdependence which accurately reflects the priesthood of all believers;
- (4) stimulate growth by building relationships rather than just implementing a vision.

We want Jesus to be the Lord; therefore we want to delegate authority in a way that “leans into His lordship.” How do we do that? If we want Jesus to direct the way we delegate authority, I suggest it all boils down to the question we come back to again and again. ***Where ought we to release control?*** This question is answered in two different ways from two widely diverse vantage points. From the leader's view, relinquishing control necessitates *sharing authority*. The question for him is whether or not he is willing to ultimately walk in accountable peer relationships within the vineyard he tends. It is a matter of letting go one's need for place, the security of one's following, the sense of affirmation derived from position, the willingness to allow others to shape vision.

Sharing authority means that the original leader in a work will undergo substantial changes in his role, and in the way direction is given to the flock or organization. For example, a pastor, in the early days of a given work, determined what was to be preached and simply preached it. Once authority is shared the teaching ministry should reflect some measure of participation by a group of elders. This suggestion is not meant to handcuff the pastor; nor am I suggesting that a vote be taken as to what should be preached before every service. I'm simply saying that in a *college* of leaders, the pastor needs to process what he is sensing as to the teaching direction of the church with the

other leaders so that they can respond and give added input, and thus provide a much richer menu for the body of people under their care. The authority the leader gives away is the *right to control his vision*.

Before going any further, it is important to recognize an essential reality. It is right to move toward the ideal of shared leadership and shared vision. But there are aspects of a fathering/founding role which cannot be held in common. Though it is right that authority is ultimately shared, *it must not be handled in such a way as to dishonor the “father”*; nor does the idea of shared authority abrogate the necessity of a “leader among leaders.” The Corinthian correspondence gives us some insight here. In Paul’s third letter to the church at Corinth (our 1 Corinthians), he chides the church concerning its factionalism – the “I am of Paul, I am of Apollos syndrome.” (1) In one sense Paul, in this letter, was asserting his place of leadership in that community. (2) But it gave Paul the occasion to speak to the issues of disunity and multiple giftings. Speaking of Apollos and himself, he states that it was he who planted, while Apollos watered; but he stresses that *God* gave the increase. He goes on to say that neither the planter or the waterer meant anything, but only God who makes things grow (3:7). Each gift has one purpose, but each has a specific sphere of labor (3:8).

Paul was the planter; that was a reality that could not change. Apollos was equally valuable as a waterer, but his sphere was different. Why is the distinction necessary here? Their rewards and personal fulfillment were wrapped up in their calling. For Apollos to claim “planter” status, he would have usurped not just Paul’s place, but would have unintentionally taken part of Paul’s reward, which is, in part, how we assess our

obedience before God. The same could be said of Paul had he tried to play the part of the “waterer”. Part of life’s satisfaction is knowing that we have “hit the mark” in our calling. If another tries to take what we have been called to, it can strike at the very heart of our identity in God. Of course, Apollos wasn’t grasping for this; some of the believers were. Still, this has relevance for us. ***With each gifting, there is appropriate honor*** – this is part of our reward in God. We must be careful that as authority is shared in greater measure that the unique contributions of each are not minimized. The “father” of a work is the “father” no matter how strong or weak his skills might be. ***Shared authority does not mean shared calling.*** In the factory of shaping God’s children, every laborer on the assembly line is equally essential though different.

It is a mark of unbrokenness if leaders cannot appreciate their gifts as well as their boundaries. To honor the father or founder of a work is right in God. To honor those who rise to leadership in “watering” roles is equally essential. In God’s economy, one doesn’t take precedence over the other; but honoring God by recognizing His *sequencing* of those gifts is vital.

The “co-worker/follower” has to answer this question of control in an entirely different way. From his standpoint, is he willing to serve a leader without an agenda? Can he relinquish his need to find place or position? Can he trust God that He will direct his paths and, like Joseph, will most certainly fulfill his personal destiny? The authority he gives away is ***the right to control his future.***

If both the leader and the one being led come at this issue from their respective concerns with open hands, it allows Jesus to actively govern the delegation process.

That authority ought to be shared and ministries ought to be led by teams of mature leaders, as we see in the church at Antioch, is not in question. ***But how authority is given away is extremely important!*** There is a pathway which must be explored that allows the leader and the follower to both follow Jesus in what can be a very sensitive process. If authority is given away too soon, the follower/co-worker may not have cultivated the full depth of spiritual brokenness and humility which will make him a mature team player later on. If authority is given away too late, or not at all, the leader may ultimately succumb to the seduction of power, which will compromise his character, and set in motion destructive behavioral patterns which will damage his home, abuse his relationships, and ultimately undermine his own call.

As we have seen, one of the basic tenets of the kingdom – which is the manifested authority of Jesus – is that ***relationships are the primary arena in which Christ's lordship is expressed.*** This is so because relationships is that arena that we are least likely to control. So, when it comes to this issue of delegation, that's where we need to start. In fact, I suggest that there are three stages in the delegation process.

The first phase is what I would call the ***relationship phase.*** This is the season in which a potential co-worker, be it a future elder or future Sunday school teacher, is ***called to a leader.*** For example, let's say that a pastor wants to appoint elders. As he prays and seeks God, the Lord begins to show him one or two who show some aptitude for this particular role. Most likely these would be people who have been in the fellowship for awhile and have already given some indication that they possess leadership giftings. What steps should the pastor take?

First, the leader should call those potential elders to simply walk with him, to “come alongside” for no other purpose than to build friendship. In this period, these relationships should not be driven by any church agenda. Those budding elders are not yet being called to lead the church fellowship, so they shouldn’t be concerned with church issues. They are simply there to allow the Holy Spirit to build a rich relationship between them and the pastor. Some might balk at this because the idea of being “called to a leader” seems to contradict the Biblical principle of the priesthood of all believers. It seems to set one individual over others in an inappropriate way, making them vulnerable to leadership abuses. Yet, there are scriptural patterns that suggest this is in fact an important phase through which disciples must walk. Joshua, for example, was called to serve Moses for what turned out to be a fairly lengthy time. Elisha was called to serve Elijah. Timothy was called to serve Paul. The idea of being called to simply serve a leader has strong biblical precedent. Perhaps, it is because the Father knows that this process cultivates a deep and abiding humility in us. Yet as we shall see, this should only be a phase, not a permanent situation.

During this time of relationship building, several dynamics should happen.

(1) The leader needs to patiently assess the follower’s character.

During this time, it is essential for the leader to carefully articulate the marks of spiritual brokenness and humility. Humility, of course, is the fountain head of all other character graces. A failure to cultivate humility renders us vulnerable to subtle inroads of pride later on. True brokenness has little to do with sorrow, or collapsing under the weight of discouragement. It has everything to do with being controlled by the Spirit of

God. Holding one's tongue when criticized, rejoicing when a competitor succeeds, rejecting the urge to vindicate oneself, leaving one's defense in the hands of the Lord, not playing "the opportunist". These are some of the marks of real brokenness.

(2) It is paramount that the leader imparts both his vision and the methods by which the desires to accomplish that vision.

Now, justifiable questions arise at this point. The true servant leader wants that potential co-worker to be released in the fullness of his gifts and callings. A genuine servant leader knows that he doesn't have all the vision nor does he have a handle on all the methods to accomplish the vision. Nevertheless, in this relationship building phase, it is important for the pastor to impart what he knows and what he has. Of course, a potential co-worker may see areas of substantial weakness or deficiency. He may see areas in the church structure and systems which could use immediate improvement. But his place at this juncture is not to fret about what may be wrong with the church; he is simply called to understand the leader's vision. There is a dynamic tension here: the leader wants a co-worker to help him carry out the vision God has given him; the co-worker wants to be released in his gifts and calling. Somewhere the two have to meet. It is the co-worker's part to pray his leaders vision into his heart; it is the leader's part to think through how he can help that co-worker fulfill his call. All of this takes time.

(3) Ample opportunity should be given so that the co-worker's giftings and aptitudes can be demonstrated and assessed.

The leader should, in this period of time, ascertain the co-worker's particular style of leadership, his preferences for detail, the way he thinks, the way he relates to people, and so on.

(4) It is paramount that the leader mentors the potential co-worker in basic ministry skills, especially those skills which the leader knows will be important in the role to which the co-worker is aspiring.

These skills can include the following:

- ~how to identify and resolve conflict between people;
- ~how to provide basic counsel for common emotional needs such as discouragement, anxiety, or low self-esteem;
- ~how to discern demonic activity in a person's life, when they are being harassed or depressed by demonic spirits, and how to minister deliverance to them;
- ~how to relate to unbelievers in ways that can endear them to Christ;
- ~how to help others identify their giftings and callings.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. It is simply meant to draw attention to the fact that this is the season in which ministry skills such as these need to be cultivated.

(5) it is important that before a co-worker is released into a specialized area of ministry (i.e., music, cell leading, etc.) he should show that he is capable of discipling others.

This call to disciple is not a specialized one, but one in which every believer is to engage. One of the great mistakes we make is to secure a church member's involvement

by slotting him into a ministry as soon as possible. After all, we reason, someone who feels like he is contributing to the vision will most likely stay committed to the church. But over time, this compromises character. Pretty soon, people begin to idolize their ministries, ministries are perceived more as steps to securing one's identity rather than simple responses of humility to Jesus. To avoid this, it is wise to train everyone how to disciple another person. Insisting on this will etch forever the priority of people over visions in our ministry culture.

(6) There must be substantial agreement between the leader and the potential co-worker on the issue of submission and authority.

In fact, it is understanding this interplay to which we will shortly turn. There can be much room for differences of opinion in many areas, but disagreement here can spell disaster in the relationship later on. Better not to work together than attempt it while divided on this issue. Yes, there can be oneness of spirit, deep respect and loyalty between leaders of different vineyards who disagree. But when it comes to working side by side, a tighter degree of harmony is required.

The second phase in the delegation process is the ***responsibility phase***. Here is where a subtle distinction between responsibility and authority needs to be made. Some management consultants would see responsibility and authority as fairly synonymous. In fact, they would say that one of the great problems in corporate systems occurs when people are given responsibility, but no authority to carry that responsibility out. This

betrays a certain confusion between the two concepts which further invites tension between leaders and co-workers. I would suggest that responsibility means “*the right to respond*”, authority, “*the right to author*”. It is when we confuse these two that problems emerge. For example, when one is given responsibility, that merely gives him the right to “respond” to his or her supervisor’s oversight. Applying this to our scenario of a pastor mentoring a potential elder, we can draw this conclusion: this is the season in which the potential co-worker is called to be an *extension of the leader*. Again, the one being trained is not called to take upon himself the concerns of the church as a whole. This is the season in which he has the opportunity of carrying out certain functions related to his leader’s vision. Several things need to transpire during this season.

(1) This is the period of time in which real trust and loyalty between the leader and the co-worker can be engendered.

It is a time for the leader to more intimately assess the co-worker’s skills in the laboratory of ministry. Many things factor in to the development of loyalty:

- ~how the leader reacts to the potential co-worker’s failures;
- ~how the co-worker responds to his leader’s correction;
- ~how a leader reacts when the co-worker begins to show areas of expertise and success in arenas which could threaten the leader’s position;
- ~how the co-worker can appropriately keep his leader’s vision in front of those within the sphere of ministry over which he is responsible.

One of the marks of brokenness is being “easily correctable”. This is a knack which the potential co-worker does well to cultivate. Another mark of brokenness is being more enthused about another’s success than one’s own. This is something the leader needs to cultivate. If both are walking in genuine brokenness, then loyalty will be more easily fostered.

(2) During this season the procedures by which skills and gifts are measured need to be put into place.

By this I mean that both the leader and the co-worker need to have a good grasp as to how the co-worker’s fruitfulness is to be assessed and determined. Time needs to be given to this. If not, the leader can often navigate only by his intuition, evaluating his co-worker’s productivity merely by what he feels that co-worker is or is not doing to contribute to his vision. This can set in motion some real tensions. For example, let’s say that the leader senses some developing problems with his co-worker. Without measurement systems in place, the leader might either “shoot from the hip” and risk damaging relationship; or he might withdraw, knowing he has little evidence for his hunches, but feeling apprehensive about continued interaction. An undercurrent of uneasiness develops. The co-worker can either feel misunderstood, or become tentative in his role. Both find themselves in a sort of “no man’s land”, neutralized by the inability to objectively identify the issues and jointly pursue the appropriate remedies . For

constructive assessment to work, we have to take the *subjectivity* out of the evaluation process. Time must be given to draw up a criterion to which both agree.

Now, it is at this juncture that the most critical challenge arises. What does the leader do when relationship and loyalty has been engendered, and responsibilities given have been carried out in a manner that is both skillful and spiritually mature? At this point the leader must take the third and final step which is the *authority phase*.

This is the phase in which the co-worker is no longer called to the leader as a superior, no longer called to be an extension of that leader implementing his vision. Now that person is being invited to join the leader in overseeing the flock in his or her particular gifting and capacity. Now before we go further the following things need to be mentioned. First, not everyone will feel called to mutually exercise authority with the leader. Some feel quite at home “lifting their leader’s hands”, carrying out responsibilities on behalf of that leader which lightens his load and frees him to pursue his mandate. But those who feel this will sense they are *called by God to fulfill this role*.

Second, and this is vital to understand, authority has nothing to do with position. Authority has everything to do with understanding one’s measure and boundaries, and functioning in those God-given boundaries in ways that result in maximum fruitfulness to the glory of Jesus. For example, one potential co-worker may go through these three phases, to be released, eventually as a second grade Sunday school teacher. In this third and final stage, he has been given authority to function in that sphere. If I as the leader, then, enter his sphere of authority and attempt to direct certain things without reference to his authority, I significantly undermine the dignity of that co-worker’s place. This is a

classic power play. It is a violation of authority. When entering his sphere, I become no more than an equal; in fact in many cases, the leader finds himself in a “mentoree relationship” with respect to that co-worker’s expertise in that particular field.

Now, peoples’ measures can be different sizes. One leader may be given a flock of two thousand to shepherd and steward; another leader may be given a second grade Sunday school class of fifty children. But when they stand before God each will have risen to an equal place in authority, if they have stewarded their spheres wisely. From God’s point of view, the pastor over two thousand has no more authority than the second grade Sunday school teacher over fifty. Remember the parable of the talents? The one given five doubled his to ten, the one given two doubled his to four. The amount is irrelevant- the fact that both made 100% on their investments suggests an equality of authority. (It should be mentioned that because leaders will be given different spheres, it is important that they reference to the *domain* of each, and thus develop an accurate read of their respective boundaries. For example, as inappropriate as it would be for a pastor to infringe on the ministry of that second-grade Sunday School teacher – once that person has been given authority – it is equally inappropriate for that teacher to feel he/she has comparable input regarding the entire church body. But their *mutual respect* should be tilled continually, if they have God’s perspective on *the concept of authority*.)

Developing leaders by intentionally moving through these stages will enable us to avoid some of the frictions that usually arise. If this sequence is upset, all kinds of hiccups can occur. Let’s consider some scenarios.

1. **The pastor desperately needs a worship leader. Finding that someone who has recently been attending is gifted in music, he quickly moves to fill that need. He puts that person into that particular place of ministry with a modicum of input. After all, covering this base is essential to crafting appetizing church services, so the sooner he can plug this hole the better. Besides, that pastor has so many other visions to pursue. He just cannot afford to implement the comprehensive delegation process I've just described. So, he delegates the worship-leading responsibilities to an individual whom he knows well enough to be comfortable with his talent, but not well enough to weather the conflicts which will most certainly emerge. One can easily see what will happen. Tensions will develop, and visions collide because the foundation of relationship was not laid.**

2. **A pastor identifies the person with potential leadership giftings and calls that person to begin walking with him. They walk through the relational phase and move into the *responsibility phase* where the potential co-worker displays his aptitudes. However, the pastor fails to move into the *authority phase*. What will happen? A certain centralization of power in that leader alone, which creates a climate in which others are not fully released in their ministries. Some leaders would love to have scores of lackeys just carrying out their vision and doing their bidding. Again it**

doesn't take much to see the potential for abuse in this scenario. A genuine servant leader will always invite people to share in authority.

- 3. A leader, failing to recognize the subtle distinction between responsibility and authority, gives a potential co-worker authority, but in reality only gives him responsibility. The co-worker, feeling like he has authority, begins to lead out only to be challenged and curtailed by the leader. This makes the co-worker feel demeaned. Offended, the worker begins to display certain signs of disloyalty; such as not contributing in leadership team meetings, not communicating in a positive, timely manner, becoming sullen in his attitude. The leader views this as insubordination, failing to recognize that he inadvertently caused these responses. The leader feels betrayed, the co-worker feels judged. An impasse develops which is really the leader's fault.**
- 4. The co-worker, failing to understand how vital it is that he walks through these stages patiently and deliberately, becomes restless with the process. He might decide to abandon the whole process; or simply endure the process in order to achieve position, rather than embracing the process as a shaper of his character. He will ever be susceptible to the temptation of deriving his significance and value from his role and ministry – leaving**

him vulnerable to the tendency of becoming disloyal. If the co-worker does emerge into a place of authority without the commensurate appetite for brokenness, he will not be able to manage conflict well. Unless the co-worker can *embrace* this process, trust won't be developed between him and the leader.

Violation of delegation principles can be so damaging to a flock. If these simple truths are applied, a strong foundation can be built. Having said all of this, the leader must be secure enough to allow and encourage ministries to emerge. This is a mark of a good leader. In fact, *the emerging of ministries in the body is proportionate to the security or insecurity of the leader*. The more secure the leader is in God, the more ministries God can trust him to oversee. The converse is true, too: an insecure leader will not see very many ministries develop in his congregation. If a pastor is secure, he will be open to the emergence of a person with whom he may have natural personality conflicts. On the other hand, an insecure leader can use these principals of delegation to stifle another if he isn't compatible with him. The true servant leader is to be a doorway that allows the release of multi-faceted gifts.

Why these guidelines? Because they are consistent with three basis tenants of the Kingdom: it is relational, it is organic, and it glorifies the King. The institutional approach to delegation produces pride in a leader who takes satisfaction in the "staff" he puts together; it causes insecurity and alienation in the flock because ministry release is determined by productivity and not by call and relationship; and it ultimately

stifles life and thereby becomes a system that has to be sustained! There is a difference between that which is organic and that which is institutional. What is organic is self-perpetuating, needing only to be tended, not injected with constant doses of energy from those in leadership.

What do we do if we recognize that we have not walked this through cleanly? I suggest going back to the stage where the problems emerged and picking it up from there. If, for example, a leader sees that he gave authority away too soon, perhaps the leadership team could back up a little and re-lay a foundation of friendship by walking through the first stage of *relationship*. Such a step might be awkward, at first, but if everyone on the team has this three-phased process in view, they can constructively move forward with the goal of appropriately sharing authority when the time is right.

Footnotes

- (1) See Gordon Fee's *The First Epistle To The Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987). Other commentators see this letter as the *second* in the series. See F. W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle To The Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953)
- (2) See Fee commentary, pg. 7