



Jesus the Level-Five Leader

Catholic educators seek a model for leadership whose talents are valid not only for secular institutions but also for Catholic institutions for whom “good” and “great” have more transcendent meanings

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Leadership can be considered from the perspectives suggested by two questions. Who is in CHARGE? And WHO is in charge? The first focuses on the skills of leadership—what leaders need to know or be able to do; the other focuses on the person of the leader, the attributes of temperament and personality and the human qualities leaders need to be successful.

In recent years, studies on leadership have focused on the skills. This has provided valuable research data and added significantly to our knowledge and understanding of the leadership skills needed to organize, administer and efficiently carry out the daily and long-term operations of a company or a school, or to bring

about productive change within these institutions.

Valuable as these studies are, they also reveal that there are other key factors involved in moving an organization from “good” to “great” (Collins, 2001). These factors are the human qualities that distinguish the outstanding CEO—the WHO of WHO is in charge. Two new studies on leadership, one by Jim Collins and the other by Stephen Covey, especially are useful in helping us understand and profit from research-based ideas on the personality of the CEO as a level-five leader, one “who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will” (Collins, p. 21).

Collins cites three attributes of these effective leaders: passion, a clear vision and the ability to identify

and cherish good people who can accomplish the work. The effective leader must have, as Collins suggests, “The right people on the bus.” In other words, the level-five leader needs passion, a plan and a people.

Covey tells us that taking initiative as leaders “requires getting your heart and your passions into it” (p. 40). Because passion “Comes from the heart and is manifest as optimism, excitement, emotional connection and determination” (p. 75), it is clearly an attribute that must come from deep within the person. We have recognized for a long time the importance of energy and focus in leaders we admire. We seem to know instinctively that they get up in the morning thinking about their work and looking forward to it.

Jesus as a Model

As Catholic education leaders, we also seek a model for leadership whose talents are valid not only for secular institutions that seek to move from good to great, but also for our Catholic institutions for whom “good” and “great” have more transcendent meanings. I suggest that Jesus is our best model and our ideal level-five leader. He demonstrated passion, vision and a plan, and he recruited, and continues to recruit, the right people for the work.

He was clear about his passion for his mission and goals: to be about his Father’s business; to be the way, the light and the truth; to lead people to seek a kingdom not of this world. The central message is clear and simple: Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus set out a program for accomplishing the goals. To carry out this plan he communicated his vision of love, hope and redemption in ways familiar to good teachers: He used direct instruction, parable, dialogue and discovery, and he

taught by example. He let the program unfold in a natural, sequenced way.

As a leader, he knew how to prioritize: Seek first the kingdom of God and all else will follow. And he knew how to compromise on the non-essentials when he told his followers to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

He certainly knew how to recruit people. Starting with Peter, James and John, his "Come, follow me," consistently was effective. He also took some chances and reached outside the box with Nicodemus, Zaccheus and Mary Magdalene, and he had the disloyal Judas even in the inner circle. As he expanded membership, he gave clear expectations before persons came aboard, or chose not to come aboard, like the rich young man unwilling to commit himself.

Jesus had a solid sense of organization. He identified an inner staff of 12, giving them special responsibilities, and then expanded the group. He worked well with his chosen staff, meeting with them frequently, spending time with them and continually seeking to know where they were coming from and what their suggestions might be.

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Inducted Gradually

Through his teaching and modeling, Jesus inducted them gradually into his beliefs and his life. He knew the psychology of those he was trying to influence. He demonstrated that he understood Maslow's hierarchy of needs: First you had to feed the multitude before you could expect them to reach the performance standard he would ultimately expect. He provided clear incentives—a life of meaning and eternal life. He encouraged and supported his people by reminding them that they were valued by a God who knew the number of hairs on each of their heads.

As a leader with passion and energy, Jesus also managed to lead a balanced life. He made time for prayer, he had friends with whom he visited, he went out to dinners, and he got his exercise walking over the hills of Galilee and from city to city and town to town. He was active in the life of his community and performed works of mercy in person and in parables: The blind man, the lepers, the centurion's daughter, the woman who touched his cloak and Peter's mother-in-law were healed. Lazarus and the widow's son were raised from the dead. He encouraged, empowered, guided, instructed, tested and rewarded his "people on the bus."

As Catholic educators today, then, we have the benefit of excellent research and examples from Collins and Covey of best practices in business to guide us. And as Catholic leaders, we have the transcendent example in Jesus of one who led with passion, who had vision and a plan, a leader who continues to invite us to have—and to be—the right people on the bus.

References

- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Covey, S. (2004). *The 8th habit: From effectiveness to greatness*. New York: Free Press. ■

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