

# Leadership Development

By John Purcell

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The effectiveness of our organizations, churches, non-profits, governments, and businesses alike is directly related to the quality of the leaders of those organizations. We probably know of few of those that are not in great need of more and better leaders. And with the Baby Boom generation retiring and being phased out, Peter Drucker said repeatedly over the last few years of his life that this demographic shift would certainly take this need to “crisis of leadership” proportions.



So, we need to develop leaders, more leaders and good leaders. When I facilitate a church through Ministry and Strategic Planning, they usually come up with “developing leaders” as a key goal, if not the number one goal for their future effectiveness. Then comes the great question, “But, how do we do this? How does any organization develop leaders?”

## How Do You Develop Leaders?

There are hundreds and hundreds of books at our bookstores on the subject of leadership, but there is little on HOW leaders are developed. The implication is that if we read books on how someone else led, whether it be Lincoln or Genghis Kahn, and on lists of leadership practices, then we will be able to extract from the examples and the lists the things we need to do as leaders, and we will somehow be able to become leaders and to grow in our leadership effectiveness. Does that make sense? Compare that to becoming an accomplished golfer. If we read books about great golfers and about how to perfect a swing and putting and course management, will we be able to play better and better golf? In fact, trying to apply a new swing that I read about will make me a *worse* golfer. There’s something called a “performance dip” that occurs whenever we apply a new approach to any skill, and I’m not likely to stick to it long enough to get out of the dip, let alone become better than when I started.

Well, then, how do we develop leaders? To start with, we have to define the target. How are we defining a leader and what kind of leader do we need for specific roles? Without going into the whole discussion here of various definitions of leadership, my favorite definition that boils it down to the basics is that leadership is “influence.” By this definition, we are all leaders to some extent in any role we have and we should all strive to grow as leaders.

Then we have to ask about the kind of leader we need for a given role. We should define the role and then identify the attributes needed and the process needed to fulfill

that role well. Then we can go about the task of comparing the person to the attributes and process and design *experiences* that will help him or her to grow where they fall short.

Here is where we have to resist many of our past practices and what our culture would assume that we need to, which is to merely “train” the leader or leadership candidate.

### Four Key Principles

In fact, here are four key principles of growth that we can apply. The first two principles I call the “who you are” of leadership development. First, select carefully the person in whom you will invest, as one who has the *foundational values and maturity* required for the position. In the church, for instance, select people with the required



level of *spiritual maturity* for the leadership roles, because then they will have the necessary Christian values and ability to base their leadership decisions and judgments on Biblical principles. In other types of organizations, select people that totally endorse and exemplify the core values of those organizations.

Secondly, select people who are *teachable*. Why? Because you will be investing leadership development effort and resources in them, and you want it to pay off. Also, you want leaders who will continue to grow and develop and become more valuable to the organization and who will strive to grow and develop others as they lead them. But what does it take to be “teachable?” When I was pursuing a sabbatical study on the subject of “leadership development in the church,” I interviewed a master level life coach who told me, “John, in my experience as a coach, I find that only about 35% of people are coachable.” Wow! Why would that be? Well, my assessment is that teachability or coachability is dependent on people having two character traits that usually don’t occur in the same person – humility and drive. This is the humility to realize that there is a gap between where they are and what they can grow to become and the humility to allow others to help them get there. And it is the drive to do the hard work that it will take to change and grow, to discard old habits and put on new ones, to endure the “performance dip” and stay the course until the new habits become permanent ones.

So, we select those with the “who you are” of leadership development – *having the foundational values and maturity and being teachable*.

The next two principles I call the “how you grow” of leadership development. To uncover the first one, I ask you to fill in the blanks of these two well-known sayings. “\_\_\_\_\_ is the best teacher” and “You can’t teach \_\_\_\_\_ new tricks.” But how can

experience is the best teacher if you can't you teach old dogs new tricks, because old dogs have the most experience? That's because it turns out that it has to be a very special kind of experience to really be the best teacher, and that is "evaluated" experience. We can learn from experience, but only if we take the time and effort to objectively evaluate what happened, why, what we did, what others did, what worked, what didn't work, what else we could have done, etc. etc. And the major challenge here is that I am the least objective person about myself and therefore not effective at evaluating my own experiences alone.

That leads us to the fourth principle, which is *intentional relationship*. I need someone objective in my life to help me with the evaluation of my experiences in order to learn. Let's take that example of becoming a better golfer. I can read about it and I can play and hit thousands of balls on the driving range. But I need a coach to evaluate my swing, stance, pace, etc., and I need to apply that with practice, get reevaluated, and so on, in order to become much of a better golfer.

We can summarize these two "how you grow" principles in one statement, *we grow from evaluating our experiences through intentional relationships*.

We can test these principles by applying them to sports, which have athletic coaches, or to the skilled trades, which have had an apprentice approach for years, and we see that the principles do apply. What had perhaps not been as evident to us is that leadership is actually also a skill or set of skills. It is something we *do*, not just knowledge in our heads. Why would leadership development not work the same way?

### **Applying the Principles**

Now comes the double application of these principles in the realm of developing leaders in the church. If the first principle is to select people with the requisite level of spiritual maturity, then how do we develop those people? The answer is to apply these same growth principles to help them grow spiritually, and we call that Life on Life Discipleship. A Discippler provides the intentional relationship that helps others to evaluate their experiences or, better yet, a Discipleship Group can do this with each other, under the supervision of a Discipleship Leader. The Discippler also helps others to grow in their leadership.

Another application for the intentional relationship role is the Leadership Coach. This is a person who engages with a leader or aspiring leader to help them evaluate their leadership experiences and grow in specific areas. If we want our leaders to continue to grow, then we can continue to provide them with a Coach to facilitate growth through relationship.

And a third application is the Mentor, who has experience and wisdom to speak into the leader's life and experiences.

An ideal culture in any organization would be one where all the people are growing all the time. Based on these principles for growth, that would mean lots of intentional relationships such as Coaches, Mentors, and Disciplers.

So, leadership development must go far beyond books, far beyond classes, and far beyond self-development. It must go all the way to values, humility, drive, and intentional relationship. As we learn to understand and apply those principles, we will be able to develop the leaders our organizations need and to develop the leadership potential that God put in each of us.

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