Tools for Wise Leadership

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

Series 11: Levels of Leadership
Talk 02: The Permission Level of Leadership

Welcome to the programme "Tools for Wise Leadership". We are discussing Maxwell's leadership levels and how they relate to the kind of leader Jesus was. In the last programme we discussed the first level of leadership, which is the position level. We noted that this level yields the lowest in terms of leadership influence. That is why Jesus, despite having the position that is higher than any other, preferred to exercise his leadership through servanthood rather than through making his power felt. Rather than calling himself a king, he preferred to just call himself the Son of Man. And he says, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." In other words, Jesus did not validate his leadership through position and titles as many leaders do.

So we move on to consider the second level on the ladder of leadership. That is the **permission** level of leadership. The permission level yields a much higher level of influence than the position level. Influence has to do with attracting a following. Why do people follow you as a leader? If it is because you have a position then they are following you because they have to. However if your influence grows to the level of permission, then people follow you because they want to. It is as if in their hearts they have given you permission to lead them; they have accepted you as their leader and you are not an imposition on them. People will follow you beyond your stated authority. This level allows work and ministry to be fun and joyful. Leadership begins to get fun because People begin to like you.

Jesus had huge influence through building relationships, meeting needs and offering hope. His authority came from God and the life He lived, not from an assigned position or title.

But how do you reach this permission level? Well people accept you because you have reached out to them. They find you caring and likable. You must be able to get along with people, learn to interact with people, smile, listen, and know what they cry, smile and sing about. You see, in order to add value to people you must value them first. You must also be a caring person. In leadership we say that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. So you must ask yourself how much you care for other people.

I came across the following modern Parable to illustrate this point. A man fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out. A subjective person came along and said, "I feel for you down there." An objective person walked by and said, "It's logical that someone would fall down there." A Pharisee said, "Only bad people fall into pits." A mathematician calculated how deep the pit was. A self-pitying person said, "You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit." A Christian Scientist observed, "The pit is just in your mind." A psychologist noted, "Your mother and father are to blame for your being in that pit." A self-esteem therapist said, "Believe in yourself and you can get out of that pit." An optimist said, "Things could have been worse." A pessimist claimed, "Things will get worse." Jesus, however, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.

You see Jesus was a caring person. When he saw the sick, he healed them. When people were hungry, he fed them. He cared for children and wanted to bless them. He did not stigmatize the sick, such as lepers. Leprosy was equivalent to HIV/AIDS today. People with leprosy were shunned by society; but Jesus touched such lepers and cleansed them. In short Jesus was other people focused. How different Jesus was from the selfish mentality which is so concerned about me, myself and I!

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Everything is centred on the "me". What's in it for me is the biggest question many leaders ask. By contrast Jesus was always looking out for the interest of others. He demonstrated what Paul said in Philippians 2:3-4, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

This is how Jesus progressed from the position level of leadership to the permission level. He loved people and associated with them. No wonder Jesus commanded a huge following wherever he went. He touched the hearts of people before he asked for their hand in doing the work.

Nehemiah was also this kind of leader. His heart was broken over the city of Jerusalem even though he himself was very comfortable in the city of Susa where he served the emperor. When he first returned to Jerusalem he was without a position. He knew it would not be position or title that would rebuild the wall. He had to build a Team, and such a team could only be built on permission, not position, and not title.

So Nehemiah challenged the people to face the reality that the broken walls of Jerusalem were not only an embarrassment to their nation, but more importantly to God. So what did he do?

- He challenged their national pride;
- He enlarged their vision;
- He encouraged their participation;
- He set the goal;
- He motivated them to have ownership;
- He divided the responsibilities;
- He mobilized them to action.

The result is that the people were moved to action because Nehemiah connected with them on many levels relationally. Thus Nehemiah led from the level of permission, not position. He communicated trust and credibility, and people now chose to follow him out of devotion rather than duty. He was influencing from his person, not from his position.

So in short what have been saying here? We have been making an implicit contrast between the position and the permission levels of leadership. They differ in motivation, methods and results.

- The position level of leadership is motivated by desire to exercise power arising from position and title. The permission level leads from the person, not the position.
- In terms of method, the position power relies on the carrot and the stick. At the position level you drive people from behind, forcing them to obey you in order for them to obtain the rewards (the carrot) or avoid the punishment (the stick). The results of exercising position and title is that people temporarily change out of fear. They are only extrinsically motivated. As soon as the external pressure goes, there is no more motivation for people to continue. However when we as leaders move to the permission level we find people becoming more intrinsically motivated. This time people follow because they want to, not because they need to. Their motivation is therefore likely to be longer lasting than in the position level of leadership.

Having said all this, however, we need to offer a caution. Leaders must recognize there is a difference between being liked as a friend and being followed as a leader. Experiencing a mere relationship without producing any results for the church or organization will eventually fail to motivate people to make sacrifices, take risks, and follow you. That is why you should not stay too long on this level because that will cause highly motivated people to become restless and move on. In the next programme we will help you to move from the permission level of leadership to the production level. Until then, practice these tools for wise leadership.

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Discussion Questions for: Series 11 - Talk 2 - The Permission Level of Leadership

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

Study Question 1: for Personal reflection
What does this episode mean to you personally as a leader?

Study Question 2: for Group Discussion
What does this topic mean you as a group of leaders?

Study Question 3: for applying the topic
What can you apply from this topic in your role as a leader?

Summary:

Leaders can take people much further when they willingly follow than when they are told authoritatively to follow. Both Jesus and Nehemiah motivated people to follow.

Discussion Questions:

Study Question 1: Personal reflection

Even if you had the authority to make people follow you, how could you rather motivate people to follow you out of their own free will?

Study Question 2: Group Discussion

Discuss with your team: How can you make it easier for your superior to lead out of the "permission level" instead of the "position level"?

Study Question 3: Applying the topic

Personal challenge: Identify one person who you have found difficult to motivate through your authority, and now try using the "permission level" of leadership to obtain the goal.

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