

# What is Your Leadership Paradigm?

By: Roger L. Parks, Psy.D.

Diverse leadership theories abound in today's culture. An examination of the leadership literature reveals a plethora of viewpoints as to the nature of leadership, including trait theory, behavioral theory, contingency theory, transactional leadership, charismatic leadership, and transformational leadership to name only a few. What many of these leadership theories have in common is a focus on leadership style or behavior; that is, what must the leader do to maximize his effectiveness with followers?



Although leadership style or behavior is worthy of study, I believe we need to examine a broader, more substantive issue which has to do with one's paradigm or mindset of leadership. Specifically, I am proposing that the key question to pose is this: whose interests are you serving as a leader? As I will discuss, how you answer this question will determine not only your effectiveness as a leader, but even more importantly, your spiritual standing with God.

If your honest response to the question is –“I'm really serving my own interests,” then you've likely adopted our culture's value system in which power, status, and wealth are the primary motives of one's behavior. A leader who embraces this paradigm is known as the autocratic leader. The autocratic leader uses power to coerce followers into complying with his/her own needs. In effect, the leader is the dictator who treats his/her followers as servants. Autocratic leaders devalue and even abuse their followers resulting in devastating consequences such as loss of trust, low morale, decreased productivity, suspiciousness, and fear. We've all heard of leaders who abuse their power and whose organizations or ministries suffer tremendous hardship as a result. On a spiritual level, autocratic leadership is incompatible with Christ's admonition in Matthew 20:25-26 in which He states: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.” In light of Jesus' words, one has to conclude that autocratic leadership is not an option for Christian leaders, and has no place in the church or Christian ministries.

I will now discuss a second paradigm for leadership which is typically less harsh and more benevolent toward followers. According to research conducted by Dr. Jim Laub, a Professor of Leadership Studies at Palm Beach Atlantic University, there is a large number of organizations which can be categorized as paternalistic. By paternalistic, Laub is referring to those leaders who view themselves as parents and their followers as children. They tend to place the needs/interests of the organization first and those of their followers second. Paternalistic leaders can either be nurturing or critical but what they share in common is their belief that followers are not adult partners in the leader-follower relationship. Paternalistic leaders are willing to delegate responsibility for some tasks but they retain the right to make the most important decisions for the organization. According to Dr. Laub, paternalistic leaders are quite common in Christian churches and ministries.

I now turn to the third paradigm of leadership known as servant leadership. Simply stated, servant leaders place the needs/interests of their followers above their own self-interest. They treat their followers as adults who are trusted to make important decisions for the organization. Servant leaders are willing to collaborate, share their power, and are committed to the growth of their followers. Although they have a clear vision for their ministry or organization, they elicit input from their followers in order to foster a deeper sense of commitment and ownership of the vision. Servant leaders also display authenticity and value honesty, integrity, and accountability in their relationships. The Scriptural case for servant leadership is quite evident in Jesus' own words as previously mentioned in Matthew 20. Christ has given us a mandate to be servant leaders – it is not an option if we truly want to be His disciples.

So, the question is: "What is your leadership paradigm?"

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Submitted to Ron Porter, President, The Christian Leader.org