

“Leadership is the art and science of inspiring others to reach their full potential in the pursuit of a common vision”

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The TCL E-Leadership Resource Obedience or Expedience?

I was driving from Columbia, SC to Raleigh, NC with my father-in-law. Not relishing time in a closed confine with one's in-laws. But this three hour trip with Ben proved to be a great leadership lesson. I had just moved back from overseas to become the leader of a struggling non-profit. Ben was a leader of some repute in his field (having served in the Reagan administration). Feeling proud to be the “Pres” in my new position, and feeling for once on equal footing with my father-in-law, I asked a peer level question.“Ben, what would you say is the key to effective leadership?” I was not prepared for his godly wisdom.

“Jim, leadership is not as great as people think. I couldn't wait to ‘climb the ladder’ and finally be in a place where I could create lasting change without interference. Instead I found that the higher I went the more responsible and accountable I became. Today, I have more ‘bosses’ than I did on the lower rungs.”

Over the years, I've played that video in my mind many times. Ben was right, the higher we go in leadership, the more responsible to others we become. David faced that principle in I Chr. 13. He had just become king. His heart for God was passionate as he worked out a plan to return the Ark of the Covenant after Saul had let it be captured by the Philistines (I Sam 5-7). The new king followed a great leadership principle. He consulted with his leaders and the people to get their buy-in for bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. Everyone agreed this would be a great way to show their passion for God. They had a great spiritual encounter as they transported the Ark; (I Chr 13:6) they worshipped the Lord with all their might.

Then the unthinkable happened. One of the oxen pulling the cart stumbled, causing the Ark to shift. Uzzah was walking alongside of the cart. Out of instinct, he reached out to steady the tipping Ark. Then something reminiscent of Spielberg's “Raiders of the Lost Ark” - the Ark “blazed” and Uzzah died.

What was supposed to be a celebration turned tragic. David's joy in the Lord turned into anger directed at God (vs. 11). He must have thought, “God, I was doing this for You! What were You doing?” David's heart was right, but his methods weren't. In his exuberance to bring back the Ark he failed to follow the details. As a result, a man under his care died. Those details had been clearly given by Moses in Ex. 25 and Num 4. God said that the Ark was to be moved by poles (not an ox cart). It was to be carried not by any Levitical tribe, but by the Kohathite clan. David should have known this.

Many times I've said, “It must be OK, I'm doing this for God.” Earnestness is important, but so is method. It's not just “that” something is done – it's also “how”. Motives and methods are both imperative to God. Yet, many leaders choose expedience over obedience. It's easier to “just do it.” At some point in time, expedience becomes a higher value.

Leaders should be asking “Lord, show me *what* to do and show me *how* to do it.” God is a God of details. They matter to Him – that is why we have a book full of worship details called “Leviticus” and a book given over to particulars called “Numbers”. If it matters to God, it should matter to His leaders. David learned a hard lesson – leaders are more accountable; more responsible. People's lives depend upon us.

Later (I Chr 15), David decided to bring the Ark back again. This time he tells the Levites to follow the details, “because you Levites did not carry the Ark the first time, the anger of the Lord burst out against us. We failed to ask God how to move it in the proper way. . . then the Levites carried the Ark of God on their shoulders with its carrying poles, just as the Lord had instructed Moses.” (vss. 13-15 NLT). Ben was right, the higher we go in leadership, the more responsible to others we become. Let's be careful to choose obedience not expedience. By Jim Killgore