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

Dr. James Bultman

Today Reference



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When Leaving, Take the High Road

A TCL E-Leadership Resource

Proverbs 16:16

The highway of the upright turns aside from evil; whoever guards his way preserves his life.

One of the most difficult and stressful times in the life of a leader is when he or she comes to the conclusion that they must leave a team, church or organization. Far too often it is a result of disunity instead of a celebration of some sort of growth, whether that be spiritual or professional. I yearn for the day when we leaders are routinely sent off to God's next assignment with mutual encouragement.

In light of the fact that does not happen often, let me share with you some tips on how to leave well when things on your team are not well.

1. Tell the truth in love.
2. Don't revile (speak abusively) about any person or organization.
3. Let others decide on their own what they must do.

Telling the truth is not easy. It is so much easier to lie, or to tell a half-truth. The problem is that when we lie, we forfeit the opportunity for us to grow or for others to grow. When we commit to tell the truth, it should cause us to examine the offense to determine if in fact it is worth verbalizing. If it is not, then one should re-evaluate why they must leave. Maybe they shouldn't.

Secondly, one of the greatest temptations is to need some sort of validation or sympathy from others when you leave. In order to get that, some turn to bashing their bosses, their co-workers or even their church. Reviling your former boss or team members will only satisfy the flesh in us for a few moments. If there is any fruit of the spirit in us at all, regret will follow. Sometimes regret begins within weeks, sometimes it takes years ... but it will follow. Once regret gets a hold, it is really hard to shake loose. The longer it takes to say we are sorry, the longer regret has its way with us.

Finally, don't rally the troops around you, especially if you are leaving a ministry or team at church. While there are biblical reasons to rally others along side of you, I have yet to hear of any church split over an essential of the Christian faith. I never have heard of a church fight over whether or not Jesus is the son of God, nor if he died for our sins, nor if he really rose from the dead. Usually groups will leave the church over relational issues resulting from the inability for people to examine and debate issues with a real desire for God's wisdom.

Eleven years ago I left a church over a very serious overt manipulation by the senior pastor. I loved that church ... still do. The majority of my spiritual growth happened at that church. However, God used that pastor's sin issue to launch a new chapter in my life. I privately told him the truth, I never spoke harshly of him since and did not encourage anyone else to leave, ... hard to do when the phone kept ringing at my home.

Years later, that pastor became terminally ill. He let very few people visit him, even keeping his own elders at bay. I sent a request to him so that I might visit him before he died. To everyone's surprise he agreed. I had a wonderful time with him over lunch. At that lunch he lamented where things had gone wrong and apologized to me in his own special way. I still remember how his face lit up after I told him not to worry about the past, and that God had provided me with another ministry to lead. I vividly remember how happy he was to hear that. One of the last things he said to me was that he was grateful that I "had taken the high road" when I left.

Friends, while I don't have any regrets about how I left that church, I still am cognizant that the high road is not an easy road. It is a hard road. It is not very wide. Our flesh and the devil are partners, and they love it when we run off that road.

So if you must leave, guard your way and keep both hands on the wheel.

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