

# The Gift-Bearing Leader

In a recent installment of “Leadership Development for the New Millennium” I gave you a definition of leadership. In that definition I stated that the functions of leadership are to shepherd, motivate, develop and equip those being led.

It is my conviction that a good leader is more an equipper than a doer. They get more satisfaction out of equipping ten people for ministry than trying to do the ministry of ten people. Many times the reason leaders are overwhelmed and over-committed is that they are not equipping others but doing it all themselves.

If Moses’ father-in-law were around, he would have the same advice for you and me that he had for Moses (Exodus 18). One of the main responsibilities of a leader is to develop and equip others to make their unique contribution. So, what is involved in doing that? Here are three precious gifts you can give the people around you!

## **Give Them Affirmation**

I recently saw the movie, “The Rookie.” It is a great story about an over-the-hill major league pitcher who made an unbelievable comeback. In the story was the familiar theme of a father who seldom, if ever, affirmed his son. Even at the end of the movie the rookie’s father could not say anything affirming or confidence building. How sad! Many in the body of Christ today are starved to hear, “I’m proud of you... You did a great job...I’m so glad you’re on the team.”

How many once gangly, pimply-faced low self-esteem, no confidence teenagers are accomplishing great things today because a parent, coach, or teacher affirmed and believed in them? How many are still struggling big time, can’t hold a job, are in and out of trouble, because nobody showered them with needed affirmation, or said flat out, “You’ll never amount to anything.” Might you be the first to break that negative chain for somebody you lead?

Trent Dilfer, the Seattle Seahawks starting QB for the 2002 season, was quoted in our local Seattle paper as saying that one of the things that was most important to him in working with a team was receiving affirmation when he did something well. Surprisingly, he said that it was missing with the other teams he had played with even though he led one of these teams to an NFL championship. He said he didn’t mind being “beat up” when he did a lot of things wrong, as long as he was affirmed and complemented when he did things well.

Most people desperately need to hear: You can do it! I believe in you! Well done! I grew up without ever hearing my dad say he loved me and believed in me. To this day, it still causes me to struggle and I am in my 60’s.

Fortunately, many other men have said it since then. Because of having not received it from my earthly father, it has taken me a long time to accept it and believe it from my heavenly Father. Genesis 27:38 captures the affirmed starved soul of Esau as he cries out to his earthly Father, “Have you only one blessing, my Father. Bless me, me also O my Father And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.”

### **Give Them Freedom to Fail**

Fear lies at the heart of many decisions made and lives lived (or not lived). Fear prevents adventuresome prayers from being prayed, spine-tingling risks from being taken, sacrificial gifts from being offered, lives from being touched and the gospel from being shared. Theodore Roosevelt warns us about being one of those cold timid souls who knows neither victory or defeat. The biggest risk is not taking a risk.

One day you may find yourself sitting in a recliner in a rest home with a shriveled soul and forgotten dreams. All that can change if someone you look up to gives you permission to try, to risk, to explore, to experiment, to fail. You can be that someone to those who look to you for leadership.

One of the jobs of leadership is being a “Fear Buster.” When is the last time you allowed somebody the freedom to try something for the first time? Is there permission to try and fail among those you lead? Are people excited to try new things or frozen stiff due to fear of failing you and the organization? Create a back-slapping rather than hand-slapping atmosphere and watch those in your leadership begin to bloom and grow. One of my goals is to bless those I lead by giving both affirmation and freedom to fail.

### **Give Them a Listening Ear**

Someone told me years ago that God gave me two ears and one mouth so I should listen twice as much as I speak. That is hard to do for most leaders (me included). It is so easy to be enraptured with my own ideas, and points of view and think less of what others might be feeling, thinking or wanting to say. Nothing encourages or enriches a person more than to have a leader who is actively listening and asking questions to draw them out, thereby valuing them as a person.

The ability to listen well is an incredible gift to those you lead. Listening gives you information as to where people are coming from, and what’s really important to them. It takes skill and patience to listen for the reason(s) the person has for speaking. The need to is fully understand the thinking or motivation behind the speaker’s words.

Three questions to ask:

1. Why are they saying this?
2. Why is this important to them?
3. Why do they think I should listen?

Think of your mind as a blank page and imagine yourself saying to the speaker: "I'm here with a blank page for you to write on." You, as the listener, must then try not to interrupt, interject bias, or get argumentative. Truly good listening requires releasing ego and agenda. People long to know that they are valued, important, and have worth. Sincere listening accomplishes this.

A good leader gives gifts to those being led. The gift of affirmation, the gift of failing and the gift of listening.