

The Times, They Are A-Changing

Posted by admin

Bob Dylan sang these memorable words back in the sixties. Things were changing big time then and have continued to this day. Those who study such subjects tell us that the rate of change we are experiencing today is at “epidemic proportions.” Yogi Berra hit the nail on the head, as he often does, when he wrote, “The future ain’t what it used to be.” In a very interesting book entitled, *21st Century Leadership* we have a compilation of fresh thoughts on leadership by one hundred top business leaders from around the country. They agree on one thing right out of the chute, “A dramatic changing game is taking place everywhere.” Change is not new, but the increased prevalence and pace of change is. Change is inevitable, but changing is an option. I want to be changing along with the times. Let’s look at one major and necessary change in the area of leadership for a new millennium if we are to be continually effective in our leadership.

The Change from Positional Power to People Power

John Sculley notes that, “Our old, ineffective hierarchical model will need to be replaced by the new empowerment mode.” We all experienced positional power in our childhood when one of our parents asked us to do something we didn’t want to do. We replied, “Why?” The answer came back with strong conviction, maybe a touch of anger and a voice to match. “Because I said so, that’s why.” End of discussion (as if there really was one to start with)!

That is positional power in its purest and simplest form. It never fails to amaze and worry me how much of that thinking and style still permeates a lot of Christian leadership today. It is counter-productive and flat out won’t work any longer. It is abusive, manipulative and unbiblical.

What is called for and very much needed in today’s Christian leader is a heavy reliance on relationships, not position. We must minimize top-down domination and maximize respect for individuals and their ideas. Today’s leaders are wise to function as coaches not commanders, maestros not masters.

This means that we include rather than exclude people in the decision-making process. It means that we give people a voice in what is happening, not just tell them what we intend to do or what we want them to do. People prefer to be asked, not told.

People desire decisions and changes to be discussed rather than announced. Positional power needs to be replaced by highly relational teams where knowledge, decisions and creative ideas have shared ownership and are not hogged by an elite few or, worse yet, by one!

I firmly believe that moving from a leadership style of positional power (father knows best) to people power (we can get it done together) will accomplish three things:

1. Restore value to people for who they are and what they can contribute.
2. Empower people to use their God-given talents.
3. Improve morale, joy and fulfillment. One does not have to be a Bible expert to realize that Jesus' life and teaching reflects "people" rather than "positional" power.

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave."
Matthew 20:26-27

Having led from positional power for many years, I am very convinced that "the times they are a changing," and I want to change with them. As I personally seek (with His help) to move from positional to people power some of the practical applications for me are:

1. Asking more questions rather than making more decisions.
2. Taking more time to think through how what I do, say, or decide affects the people I lead.
3. Believe in my heart and demonstrate by my actions that those I lead have a lot to offer in the way of insight, advice, ideas and knowledge that can complement my leadership, protect me from sin resulting in better and more God-pleasing results.
4. Ask myself frequently if I am being inclusive or exclusive in the way I am functioning. Up with people for the new millennium.