

# “Unleader”

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### Kindle Notes by Dave Kraft

Leadership in the church involves hard decisions, but if the way you carry out those hard decisions is not saturated with meekness, gentleness, kindness, peace, and patience, then your leadership is shipwrecked.

Take me to someone who is following Jesus with his or her character, as evidenced in his or her methods. Take me to someone who is following Jesus in meekness and servanthood. Jesus told his disciples he wanted them to abandon the leadership culture of the kingdoms of the world and follow him into the servanthship culture of the kingdom of God.

Jesus, the one and only, is the Leader with the vision. The rest of us—even the best of us—are called to point away from ourselves and clearly to him. To make Jesus the one and only premier focus must be our one and only premier focus. Just like a groomsman, we are honored to stand with the groom, but we are to fade into the crowd. Those in the wedding party are not there to see us. The spotlight is to be on the groom, on Jesus. Just as it was with John the Baptist, our joy will never be complete as long as we continue to increase the spotlight on ourselves at the expense of shining it on Jesus.

A further concept given much attention in evangelical circles is the idea that leadership is all about having the skill set to acquire followers. To follow Jesus means to follow him in the way he treated people, regardless of their social status or what they could give him in return. It means to follow his gentleness, humility, kindness, and love in the most strident of circumstances. Following Jesus means treating the people that you work with on a daily basis with goodness and brotherly love. My chief concern is tied to the most common patterns of leadership we see in today’s church—how leadership has been twisted and distorted in the way it is defined, modeled, and practiced.

In a post, Ed Stetzer asked Darrin Patrick, “Why do most churches stay small?” Darrin explained: “Largely because most pastors don’t know how to build systems, structures, and processes that are not contingent upon them. Most pastors can care for people, but don’t build systems of care.

Most pastors can develop leaders individually, but lack the skill to implement a process of leadership development. When a pastor can’t build systems and structures that support ministry, the only people who are cared for or empowered to lead are those who are “near” the pastor or those very close to the pastor. This limits the size of the church to the size of the pastor.

The majority of current assessment processes are fixated on management concerns, preaching skill, strategic administrative acumen, and such. They are focused on leadership at the expense of followership and servanthship. The issue of ministry gifting and guidance by gifted individuals is not in question. The problem is the hierarchy and the dominating, conquering ways and means behind the structures it creates, coupled with the behavior of those who maintain them. The insidious nature of Nicolaitanism lies in the separation between normal saints and elevated leaders. Take note, Jesus doesn’t merely dislike this stuff. He doesn’t prefer things were not this way. He categorically hates it.

The apostle John challenged one individual, calling him out by name, for his ambitious desire to stand above the believers in the local church: “I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority” (3 John v. 9, emphasis added). Diotrephes, very likely, was a gifted follower. The problem was that he loved preeminence and wanted to be first. He viewed himself as top dog and wanted everyone else to see him that way as well. I can’t help but wonder if he called himself senior rabbi, lead herder, or maybe executive shepherd.

This verse takes on even more impact when you consider that many churches today are structured with one guy on top. They claim to have plurality of leadership with a first among equals—the very language used in this verse. It's clear that Jesus' first disciples were convinced of a future hierarchy in the kingdom of God. They also wanted, and expected, positions of honor and rank in Jesus' administration. Two thousand years later, many of Jesus' followers are obsessed with the wrong questions and pursuits. The scary thing is that most conferences on church leadership and church planting (including most church-planting systems) involve similar ideas.

We see the nonrelational nature of hierarchical power highlighted by the words of VISA founder Dee Hock: “One who is coerced to the purposes, objectives, or preferences of another is not a follower in any true sense of the word, but an object of manipulation. Nor is the relationship materially altered if both parties voluntarily accept the dominance of one by the other. A true leader cannot be bound to lead. A true follower cannot be bound to follow. The moment they are bound they are no longer leader or follower. If the behavior of either is compelled, whether by force, economic necessity, or contractual arrangement, the relationship is altered to one of superior/subordinate, manager/employee, master/servant, or owner/slave.”

Seminary professor Rusty Ricketson says, “ The titular leaders of the church must establish a permission giving atmosphere in which the follower is secure to initiate activity without fear of reprisal. Leaders do not empower followers. Rather leaders create the structural freedom in which followers can exercise their gifts and abilities. Such freedom results in high follower participation and greater productivity.”

Men and women can, and should, function in leadership but never be underscored with rank as leaders. Leadership must be viewed as a spiritual gift and not as a position of power. To develop the familial culture of a Jesus community requires us to jettison any hint of corporate-style, top-down authority structure, along with the language that supports it. Within the culture of the corporate business world are leadership patterns of forcible command and control. These structures include protocols of who can and cannot be questioned, consulted, or criticized. Overtones of fear are sprinkled throughout such companies. Employees learn quickly when and when not to speak, and to never speak up. If you make the mistake of doing so, you could soon be gone—in the twinkling of an eye.

Management professor Margaret Wheatley notes that If people are machines, seeking to control us makes sense. But if we live with the same forces intrinsic to all other life, then seeking to impose control through rigid structures is suicide. If we believe that there is no order to human activity except that imposed by the leader, that there is no self-regulation except that dictated by policies, if we believe that responsible leaders must have their hands into everything, controlling every decision, person, and moment, then we cannot hope for anything except what we already have—a treadmill of frantic efforts that end up destroying our individual and collective vitality. When will we ever learn that we cannot think our way into the kingdom of God? And we can never lead our way into it either. We can only live our way into the kingdom of God by following the way of Jesus.

The suffocating bureaucratic systems that drive factory-like churches stem from leaders obsessed with the search for predictable and controllable measures and outcomes. Make no mistake—fear is what lies behind overly mechanized churches, ministries, and denominations. The fear of not being able to control outcomes is what creates these types of leadership structures and cultures. And the only places fear can abide are where faith is absent.

Church leadership cultures based on the corporate business world are invariably defined and navigated by boundaries of all kinds. In a machine, every piece has its place, and it must be kept in its place. Specific roles, responsibilities, lines of authority, and limits are created and instituted. Where this takes place relationship networks on the human level are circumvented and choked out and the power of God ceases to flow through the body of Christ. Very often people are deeply hurt in the process.

The progressive evolution of the ideal leader of a church in these molds has allowed a myriad of anti-Jesusian methods to be accepted across the evangelical landscape.

As the church has simmered in the tainted pot of leadership stew, the very practices and attitudes that Jesus and the New Testament writers expressly forbade have spread like the black plague across the church world. It has become all about the one great leader, the king, the gospel knight in shining armor.

Persons with NPD (Narcissistic Personality Disorder) would have at least five of the following characteristics:

1. Have a grandiose sense of self-importance. They routinely overestimate their abilities and inflate their accomplishments, often appearing boastful and pretentious.
2. Often preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, and beauty, or ideal love.
3. Believe that they are superior, special, or unique and expect others to recognize them as such. They may feel that they can only be understood by, and should only associate with, other people who are special or of high status and may attribute “unique,” “perfect,” or “gifted” qualities to those with whom they associate.
4. Require excessive admiration. This often takes the form of a need for constant attention and admiration.
5. A sense of entitlement is evident. They expect to be catered to and are puzzled or furious when this does not happen
6. Sense of entitlement combined with a lack of sensitivity to the wants and needs of others may result in exploitation of others. May expect great dedication from others and overwork them without regard for the impact on their lives.
7. Lack of empathy and difficulty recognizing the desires, subjective experiences, and feelings of others.
8. Often envious of others or believe that others are envious of them. May begrudge others their successes
9. Arrogant, haughty behaviors characterize these individuals. They often display snobbish, disdainful, or patronizing attitudes.

Staff members, church boards, and church members are turning their heads, looking the other way, holding hands over their ears, and providing safe passage for “great” leaders who are “getting the job done.” These people are deemed to be so important and have built such legacies that we cannot muster the courage to call them out. They become untouchable.

It should be pointed out that this is one of the reasons that, in the wisdom of the Lord, we find no New Testament writer giving any grounds whatsoever for the lone-hero leader type this—Jesus jerks. These are the pastors and leaders who, though admired by the crowds and masses, are known by their ministry staffs as ... um ... let’s just say that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on one. These are the church leaders who display virtually no consistency in the fruit of the Spirit. You would be hard pressed to experience gentleness, kindness, patience, meekness, and the like from them on a regular basis. Sure, their public ministries evoke the message of the Bible, but their non-platform lives betray the state of their hearts.

Though it seems clear that no sin could be more distinctly counter to all that Jesus was and is about, in Christian leadership, arrogance runs unabated like a free-flowing river. If you want to know how you are treating Jesus, just take a hard, honest look at how you are treating those around you. Pastor, leader, listen closely. Your relationships with those on your staff is a spitting image of your relationship with Jesus—your

The words of C. S. Lewis nearly always echo in my mind when I hear such statements: “Of course, it is very right, and often our duty, not to care what people think of us, if we do so for the right reason; namely, because we care so incomparably more what God thinks. But the Proud man has a different reason for not caring. He says “Why should I care for the applause of that rabble as if their opinion were worth anything?”

When dealing with an NPD individual you soon realize that there is a tremendous intolerance and sensitivity to anything less than a perfect performance. Some of these king-pastors even have new staff members sign agreements to never start new churches within a particular distance of their own churches. In the corporate world these are called non-compete agreements.

It should be clear to any Christ follower that such action is insidious and heretical to the very witness of Christ. Pastors such as these are clearly building their own kingdoms, and the reality is that they are far from the kingdom of God themselves. The truth is that they are the ones in competition with God. The “user” makeup of narcissists who have power over others will consider any question of their authority or failure to agree or comply with their wishes as an all-out attack on who they are.

Sandy Hotchkiss writes, “Mutuality and reciprocity are entirely alien concepts, because others exist only to agree, obey, flatter, and comfort—in short, to anticipate and meet my every need.” The most common rules of reciprocity do not come into play when dealing with an overly narcissistic leader. The only terms are the leader’s terms. So-called leaders with a consistent demeanor such as this are not leaders at all. They are not even following Christ:

Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries writes, “Their uninhibited behavior, self-righteousness, arrogance ... and inability to accept a real interchange of ideas impair organizational functioning and prevent adaptation to internal and external changes. Their consequent exclusion of others from policy-making, intolerance of criticism, and unwillingness to compromise inevitably have serious negative effect. Leaders driven by excessive narcissism typically disregard their subordinates’ legitimate needs and take advantage of their loyalty. This type of leader is exploitative, callous, and over-competitive, and frequently resorts to excessive use of depreciation.”

Countless time and energy is spent on inspirational rhetoric and “vision casting” in order to motivate crowds and church staffs in support of the vision. Personal boundaries of staff members are constantly infringed on or outright ignored for the sake of the vision. Guilt and shame are common tools used by the king-leader to ensure that unhindered service is exacted from underlings. When we go along with leaders like this, we are not honoring authority but enabling ungodliness. Arrogance and pride are without fail telltale signs of insecurity.

Questions to ask of your leadership and organization:

- Do we do things differently around here?
- Do we use people?
- Do we treat people on our team differently from the way they would be treated if they worked in the corporate business sector? What about when someone on our team decides, or is asked, to leave? How are they treated; as they would be treated in a worldly business or differently?
- Does everyone have free access to everyone?
- Is information shared or is it guarded?

- Is the concept of collaboration rhetoric or reality?
- Can questions and challenges take place without fear of retribution or loss of favor?
- Do staff members have the same freedom and security that church members do when it comes to speaking up or speaking out?
- Are staff members treated like hirelings or co-laborers?

The problem was that I was more into building a church than I was into building the people who were the church. Diffusing power means inviting others to share leadership, value and voice. Diffusing power means moving away from one leader and hero worship, to finding ways to include and make room for others, and continually fan into flame people's gifts and passions."

Author John Dickson says, "Humility is the noble choice to forgo your status, deploy your resources or use your influence for the good of others before yourself." When we are driving to fulfill personal ambition and prestige, to acquire ever more notoriety and power, along with exaltation, we are going in the opposite direction of Jesus and the kingdom of God.

The word "humble" is the translation of a Greek word meaning "to take a lower rank and become plain." It is not an overstatement to claim that Jesus detested boundaries that hinted at prestige and status. What causes us to go off the rails—through the sin of lording over others—is the tendency to rank the rarer gifts and talents of a few servants above the more common gifts and talents held by others.

Truth systems are open systems. But many denominations and churches have leadership cultures of fear. The top-down leadership hierarchy of command and control is so entrenched that invisible boundaries—walls of fear and mistrust—determine the degree of honest exchange among staff members. In many of these ministries staff members would never consider having a sincere and completely honest discussion with the senior pastor or an executive leader within the church or denomination for fear of reprisal.

Wherever you encounter an atmosphere of fear, you can be sure you have walked into a culture of command and control. The ones in control are afraid of not being in control, and they parlay their own fear into tools of control over others. The leadership moxie is so strong that staff members who are not classified as "senior" or "executive" exist not as called ones but as hired ones. And anyone who has been hired knows he or she can just as easily be fired.

Truth is never the strong suit in cultures of fear—pretense is. Where systems of fear and control exist, truth is limited and, to a larger degree, shut down. People are afraid to share their honest opinions, concerns, and even creative ideas. It is too dangerous to take the chance of being honest with opinions and feelings. It naturally follows that Jesus does not show up because God does not give a spirit of fear, much less lead with one. Churches and ministries that have cultures such as these must rely more and more on fleshly techniques because they have less and less of the Holy Spirit to draw from. These groups are cultivated in fear, not in the love of Christ:

How often we must miss out on holy gems and divine words from the Lord through "employees" because they are muted by the remote control of church bosses. People should be trusted, not bossed or managed. Churches across the Western world are cluttered with command-and-control policies and procedures that strangle the life from the body of Christ because they jettison the New Testament when it comes to inner-office procedures. These are devices born from fear, and they create and perpetrate cultures of fear.

I am convinced that the present-day weakness in the body of Christ in the West is tied directly to leadership systems that dominate our churches. The body is weak because it is not allowed to function as Paul said it should. Each part of the body is not “working properly.” The body is not allowed to build “itself up in love.” It is held down by the power and control of a hierarchical few who believe they are the only competent ones to run it.

1 Thessalonians 5:12,13:

Respect those ... The word “respect” is a very poor translation. The King James Version actually gets it right, translating the word as “know.” The Greek word *eidenai* means “to see” and “to know.” It means to both perceive and experience something or someone by visiting with him

Who labor among you ... What an interesting phrase. The word translated “among” means “to be beside” or “to be with.” This speaks of position.

And are over you ... “Over you” comes from a Greek word that means “protector” or “guardian.” In no way does this word intimate positional, directive authority or supervision. It speaks to a function or role.

The title “lord” is reserved for Christ alone. To dominate others by use of our positions as elders, pastors, and so on, is incredibly dangerous territory to wander into. The scary thing is that many leaders in the church today don’t wander into it; they run in and set up a throne.

Frank Viola said it well: “My experience has been that when the fundamental aspects of love and servanthood are mastered in a church, the issues of authority and submission amazingly take care of themselves.”

Leadership cultures of command and control make it clear to underlings that certain information is to be held close to the vest. Other situations are never to be discussed between staff members—such as disagreements with upper-level leadership decisions. When information is censored and controlled by a handful of authoritarians at the top of the ladder, a culture of distrust is fostered. Censoring and controlling information and knowledge are essential for maintaining a dominant culture.

**FIVE TYPES OF AUTHORITY** In his excellent book *Organic Leadership*, Neil Cole mentions five types of authority that we most often encounter:

1. **Positional authority** is derived from the rank or place one occupies in a system or organization. It is tied directly to the chain of command. With positional authority, the amount of respect a person has is based on the position alone. Many times those who show respect to a person in positional authority do not actually respect the person as much as they fear the position.
2. **Expertise authority** comes via the experience, knowledge, or learned skill a person has in a certain field. This person may not hold a particular title or position. He or she is respected in his or her field of expertise only. It is a very limited form of authority.
3. **Relational authority** is based on who a person is as that person relates to others around him or her. The greater degree of love and respect others have for this person is the degree of authority he or she has. Those who know this person respect him or her and open the door of their lives based on personal respect.
4. **Moral authority** is possessed by one who others respect on the basis of his or her reputation as a person of integrity, with moral fiber and truthfulness. As long as people believe they can trust this person, the moral authority remains. If trust is shaken or the reputation disintegrates, the authority goes with it. Moral authority can take a lifetime to gain and be lost in a day or less.

5. **Spiritual authority** is the strongest type of authority. No one can earn spiritual authority, because it comes from God and only he can grant it. God uses people with this type of authority by speaking through them. Their authority is not autonomous but comes as God wills in the “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Heb. 13:17). the Greek word translated “obey” in this verse. It is not the often used hypakouō, which means “to hearken to a command.” And it is not peitharcheō, which means “to obey a superior.” The word translated “obey” in this verse is peithō, which means “to be persuaded by.” The author of Hebrews is pleading for the saints to be persuaded by those who are of deeper spiritual maturity.

Jesus invited his followers into a process that was more apprentice-like than classroom-like. He formed a life-as-laboratory culture in which ideas and theories were practiced and tested rather than merely preached and taught. His was a community of disciples, where the newly converted followed the previously converted in a new way of doing life.