

## **Leveraged Leadership**

### **By Bob Young**

Back to basics: Leadership is influence. Leaders are everywhere. My influence determines my leadership. Influence is personal, not corporate. I cannot lead those I do not influence. Because there are bad and good influences, there are bad and good leaders. Good leadership is hard to find. Leadership is not position. Some people in church leadership positions are not leaders. They may be directors, but they are not leaders. Leadership is not done by committee. Too many elderships are in reality a glorified committee. Leadership ultimately boils down to influence—it is personal not positional.

The tendency in many churches is toward operating like an organization more than like an organism. When a local church first establishes an eldership (and forever thereafter) diligent effort is required to avoid the tendency toward impersonalization. Consider what often happens. A church names elders. Suddenly, leadership involves knowing and announcing the needs of the flock but does not involve personal action and influence. Suddenly, leadership is decision-making and direction more than personal, pastoral relationships.

Leveraged leadership. When a group is fortunate enough to have good leaders, persons who understand influence and personal relationships, leveraging that leadership is the difference between progress and mediocrity. (“Leveraged leadership” is not a biblical phrase but it is a biblical concept.) How can the church leverage leadership? In any church, there are only so many leaders, and good leaders are difficult to find. Building an effective local church depends on the ability of the leader to use his influence to do three things: (1) to put in place the necessary systems, processes, and methods, (2) to make them known to everyone in the church, and (3) to make them flexible enough that they can be changed as needed, most often from the bottom up. The first step involves identifying and using the gifts, talents, preferences, skills, abilities, and willingness of all of the members. The second step means making it easy for members to know, access, learn about, use, and change the processes. The third step focuses an important point—that every member has the ability to influence the system and processes to improve them so that the body is functioning as a unit.

Many churches appoint leaders and keep using an organizational model that is unbiblical and does not work. Believe it or not, these basic ideas of leveraging leadership, identifying and using all of the gifts that exist within the church, and decentralizing control are foreign concepts to many who fill positions in church leadership. Churches are not built on and do not depend on the personal efforts of the leader or leaders. Every person has only so much time and energy. Therefore, many churches try to solve the problem and fill the gap by reverting to an organization model and appointing or hiring more organizational leaders and workers. Some U.S. churches have dozens of positions that have been filled either with “official” volunteers or with employees, but the three steps outlined above have not been implemented. The members are not actively involved, the average member does not know what is going on, and the systems are mostly inflexible and controlled from the top down. Leaders who understand leveraged leadership are constantly looking for ways to duplicate themselves. They are developing other leaders. The systems, processes, and methods are designed specifically to involve others and to help others get the job done effectively.

What? How? An active, functioning, healthy church with many members doing the work involves hundreds of individual interdependent actions and processes. The members can work together efficiently and effectively if they know two things: what and how. What are we trying to do? What methods should we use? A common goal or purpose, common processes and methods. Dream about it, talk about it, agree to it, get the entire church on board—why this church exists informs what we are trying to do and how. Simple, isn’t it? For whatever reason, in many churches, this simplicity never makes into the day-to-day trenches where members live. Leaders continue to wonder why things don’t work and why more of the members are not involved. They never think about what would happen if all of the members were motivated and activated, if the what and the

how were constantly reinforced, and if the members who are doing the work in the trenches were given the responsibility to adjust methods, implement change and make it work.

Catching the dream. When everyone knows the goal, and sees the path to the goal, each person can identify his or her own role. Members figure out their own who and when and where. The church catches fire. Improvement is constant. Growth is normal. Leaders spend their time developing their influence and using that influence. Leaders become adept at identifying, developing, training, and deploying people. The church is a flurry of constant connections and reconnections; typical hierarchical connections are discarded. Every member encourages every other member. Members do not have to seek permission to act because they know the what and how. All that is required is to get new members up to speed so they share the victory. Churches that catch this dream grow rapidly!

The best leaders understand the biblical concept. In too many churches, leaders (elders) are chosen because they are effective leaders in secular enterprises. Sub-leaders (deacons) are chosen because they are willing and active in some area of "church work." Biblical leadership is not about being good at something or being active. Biblical leadership is about understanding the biblical description of the church. Biblical leadership is about understanding the biblical function of the church. Biblical leadership is about understanding how to facilitate the activity of the church and the involvement of every member so that the church accomplishes God's purpose and every member has a work. Good church leaders understand the importance of every member. They spend time with the members, they pastor and feed and influence. In the process they have more and more influence, and they are empowered to "lead" the flock. That they are leaders is clear, because everyone is following.