

From the Desk of David Lantz

Who, Me? A Leader?

Leadership. Some people are born to lead, while others have leadership thrust upon them because of unforeseen circumstances. I remember trying to explain what a leader is to my son, Jason, then four years old, after his Sunday school teacher told me that he was a natural leader. I remember saying to him, “Jason, you’re a leader. That means if you are the first one to pick up toys and put them away in Sunday school, the other kids will want to pick up toys too.” Jason immediately saw the benefits of being a leader. “Daddy,” he said, “if all the other kids watch me and start picking up toys, then I won’t have to pick up any more.”

I had taught my son that leaders are people who influence others. My son had reminded me that the motives of a leader may be less than pure!

All of us, in one way or another, are leaders. Perhaps you are a leader of many, whether in your church or at work. Perhaps you are a leader of only a few, either as a parent or as someone’s best friend. Whatever your particular situation, it is important to understand that you can change the world for either better or worse through the people you touch. As Christians, therefore, we must understand the qualities that God values in a leader – and the consequences of our failure to consistently employ those qualities. The story of Gideon serves as a reminder of what those qualities are, and what happens when we forsake them.

Gideon, the Reluctant Leader

During the time of the Judges, Israel repeatedly did evil, worshiping the gods of the Canaanites and forsaking the Lord. As a result, God allowed them to be conquered. In Judges 6:6, we read that “Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the Lord.” God heard their cry and raised up Gideon to lead Israel.

Gideon demonstrated four special qualities that God values in a leader. Only in one area, accountability to God, did Gideon finally fall short. Let’s look at how he succeeded and discover how we can be leaders for God today.

Be willing to rely on God

While Gideon was busily beating out wheat in a winepress so that the Midianites wouldn’t see him and come take it from him, the angel of the Lord appeared, saying: “The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior!” (Judges 6:12). Gideon was incredulous – he could hardly believe this was happening to him. We can easily identify with his response: “Who are you talking to? I’m not a valiant warrior – in fact, I’m a nobody. You’ve got the wrong man.”

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There must have been someone else in Israel who was not only an accomplished warrior, but would have jumped at the chance to lead Israel against the Midianites. However, instead of this unknown warrior, God chose Gideon, a man who would have preferred not to get involved. Why? *Because God sees us not simply for who we are, but also for what we can become.* By choosing Gideon, God wanted a man who knew that in order to be a successful leader, he would have to rely on God, not himself, for victory. Recognizing our reliance on God is the most important quality a leader must possess.

Stand up for what is right

Through a series of events, Gideon gained confidence as a leader. When told by God to tear down the idol of Baal, Gideon did so. But, “because he was too afraid of his father’s household and the men of the city to do it by day ... he did it by night” (6:27). While Gideon’s first blow in the war against evil was struck with less than 100 percent confidence, the important point is that he responded faithfully to God’s call. The Israelites were impressed by the mere fact that he was willing to take a stand for righteousness. They responded by flocking to his side to do battle against the Midianites.

Somehow, people get the impression that leaders should be fearless, that they should show absolute confidence in everything they do. In Gideon, however, we see that God valued his desire to take a stand for righteousness, not his fearlessness. It is when we are weak that God can use us most. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:10; “For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Expect your faith to grow

As Gideon learned that he could trust the Lord for victory, his confidence grew. Can you imagine preparing for battle with an army of 32,000, only to be told to send all but 300 soldiers home? God did not want Israel to say “My own power has delivered me” (7:2). Without his experiences of tearing down the idol and of receiving specific signs from God, Gideon would not have been prepared to take this additional step of faith. As leaders, we need to remember that God will not assign to us a job that we can’t handle. It is only as He trains us and we respond in faith that seemingly impossible tasks will become possible with God’s guidance.

At the height of success, give the glory to God.

As the saying goes, “Nothing succeeds like success.” It is when we have reached the top that our self-confidence soars, that we glory in the accolades of our supporters, and that we forget to acknowledge God in our lives. At the peak of his success, though Gideon remembered the sovereignty of God, he quickly succumbed to the trappings of success.

After defeating the Midianites, the men of Israel wished to honor Gideon by making him their king. Gideon, however, refused. “I will not rule over you,” he said, “nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you” (8:23). But no sooner did Gideon honor

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God in this way than he immediately asked each warrior for a share of the spoil. Not only did Gideon receive 1,700 shekels of gold (worth about \$150,000), but he also received ornaments, robes, and pendants that had belonged to the kings of Midian. Then Gideon took the spoil, made it into an ephod, and placed it in his home town of Ophrah. In Judges 8:27, we read: “And all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household.”

Beware the Snares of Success

What was wrong with placing the ephod in Ophrah, and why did it become “a snare to Gideon and his household?” An ephod was a two-piece, sleeveless garment worn by the chief priest to help him discern God’s will. Gideon’s sin was that he usurped the function of the chief priest, which only the descendants of Aaron had a right to perform. Not only that, he made the ephod an object of worship in his hometown, rather than Shiloh, the religious center of worship at that time.

Human nature has not changed since the time of Gideon. In the secular and religious worlds, many men and women have achieved a great deal of good only to fall victims to their own success. That is why, after being willing to rely on God, after standing up for what is right, after having a capacity for growing in faith, and after giving the glory to God instead of oneself, a leader must also remember that he is accountable to God in both motive and deed. Gideon, though he achieved much good in his life, ultimately became ensnared by the fruits of his success. As a result, all that Israel had gained was lost: “Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god” (8:33).

As leaders, you and I have the opportunity to change the world for either better or worse through the lives of the people we touch. The attitude with which we approach this opportunity will determine whether the fruit we bear is good or bad.



David Lantz provides project management consulting services to not-for-profit organizations. An Adjunct Professor of Business Management for the University Phoenix and Indiana Tech, he writes on the use of Business Technology and Christian Leadership. His latest publication is the e-book, **Finding Community: Creating Connections on the Frontier of Online Ministry**. Go to www.findingcommunity.net, to learn more, or email him at dlantz@buyingtechnology.com

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