**REBORN TO LEAD** by Al Diestelkamp

It seems that some people are just “born to lead.” By this I mean that there is something about their personalities that causes them to step forward to take the lead, and this attracts others to follow.

While recognizing this to be true, we want to appeal to others to discover their untapped potential for leadership by stepping out of their comfort zones. Perhaps more Christians should see themselves as being “reborn to lead.” This is especially needed in local churches that have not been able to “set in order the things that are lacking” (Tit. 1:5).

Much of what follows under the heading of “Defining Leadership” I have “borrowed” and adapted from material developed by Matt Hennecke for use in corporate management training seminars he has conducted. However, the focus here will be on spiritual leadership that will benefit our homes and our congregations.

***Defining leadership***

Leadership may be defined simply as influence, and everyone has some influence. Granted, some have more than others; but if we are living, we have influence. In fact, our influence might continue long after we have died. “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks” (Heb. 11:4).

In a group, those with the greatest influence will likely be leaders, while those with little influence will more likely be followers. Of course, influence can be used or misused to lead people in either right or wrong directions (e.g., positive role model vs. gang leader).

***Two basic types of influence:***

*Formal influence* is the influence one possesses by virtue of title or position. In a proper family environment the husband/father is automatically given influence over his wife and children. A police officer, by virtue of his position, gives him influence over others. An employer has natural influence over his employees. An elder is granted formal influence by God.

*Informal influence* is the influence one possesses by virtue of his knowledge, expertise affiliations, charisma, etc., and not by title or position. Wives often exert their informal influence over their husbands. Even small children exert informal influence over their parents. Employees may exercise informal influence over their employers. Members often exert informal influence on elders.

***Two responses to influence:***

*Legitimate influence* is the perception of or response by the person being influenced that the influence being exerted on him by another is appropriate. In other words, the person doing the influencing is right or within his rights to exert influence. For instance, when a supervisor tells an employee to start work on a new project, the employee recognizes the legitimacy of the supervisor to influence him.

*Illegitimate influence* is the perception by the person being influenced that the person exerting the influence does not have the right to do so—that the influence is inappropriate. For instance, if a supervisor tells an employee to wash and wax his car, the employee may do so but may feel the request is *inappropriate* or even an abuse of power.

***Four possible forms of leadership:***

1. *Formal, legitimate influence* exists when a person, by virtue of his title or position, is perceived to have a right to exert his influence and leads in the right direction. An example from the New Testament is the apostles’ solution to the perceived problem of the Grecian widows being neglected in the daily ministration of necessities (Ac. 6:3,5).

2. *Informal legitimate influence,* wherein a person—by virtue of his knowledge or expertise—is perceived to have a right to exert leadership and leads in the right direction. An example of this is Barnabas vouching for Saul of Tarsus (Ac. 9:27).

3. *Formal, illegitimate influence* is exerted when a person uses his title or position to influence another and is *perceived* to be abusing or misusing his authority. Peter’s hypocrisy concerning the Gentiles might be an example of this (Gal. 2:11-12). Those drawn away by Peter may have *thought* “this isn’t right” but nevertheless acquiesced to Peter’s example because he was an apostle.

4. *Informal, illegitimate influence* exists when a person without formal authority uses informal means (threats, skills, persuasiveness, status, etc.) to get others to follow him even though they believe the direction is inappropriate. Negative peer pressure can be an example of this. The pressure of the group could get individuals to go along with a course of action that they deem to be wrong. Such was the influence a woman in Thyatira used to get Christians to commit adultery (Rev. 2:20).

***Levels of spiritual leadership***

Not everyone can serve as an elder. We do need men who will prepare themselves to take on this task; but due to circumstances, either within or beyond one’s control, this may not be possible for some men, including unmarried men or a qualified man in a congregation that lacks a plurality of qualified men. We have examples of men in the first century who, to our knowledge, never served as elders but were great leaders (Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, Titus).

***Preparing for leadership***

To be a successful spiritual leader, one must study the Scriptures to know where to lead (2 Tim. 2:15), worship consistently (Heb. 10:25), work diligently (1 Cor. 15:58), and be courageous “in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2). A leader may want to be liked but must be prepared to be disliked. In other words, we should all work to develop our knowledge of the Word and skills in being Christ-like. Such gives us influence to lead. Interestingly, elders should be selected to formally lead from those men who have already demonstrated over the years their informal influence achieved through a knowledge of the Word and Christ-like behavior.

A successful spiritual leader must guard his reputation by avoiding situations that can destroy one’s influence (2 Tim. 2:22). He must avoid bitterness and selfish ambition (Jas. 3:13-14).

Be the kind of leader you can be. Someone is looking to you for leadership. Accept the responsibility and look for ways to increase your influence for good.

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