

Does Your Pastor Have These 7 Character Traits? Do You?

A good place to start is a set of working definitions for good leaders and great leaders. Let me offer one assumption, that both good leaders and great leaders are Godly individuals with integrity of character.

With that said:

Good leaders lead what is seen and known, while maintaining healthy relationships, stay inside the budget, and get the job done. This is good! Any church would be delighted to have a pastor like that. This leader focuses on the mission in context of present reality. He or she cultivates great relationships, raises money and hits budget targets. They realize salvations, transformed lives and numeric growth for the church.

Great leaders lead toward what is yet unseen and not fully known, often increasing revenues, while developing new and entrepreneurial relationships, and exceed expectations. This is great! Any church would be thrilled to have a pastor like this!

This leader sees what is not yet seen, communicates it in a compelling way, and leads the church toward that vision. This often results in momentum. He or she is able to continually attract and develop new relationships of high capacity people, often realizing revenue above budget and the results exceed expectations (salvation, transformed lives and numeric growth for the church).

You might be quick to dismiss this whole idea by saying: "The great leader simply has more talent than the good leader." It is true that innate ability makes a big difference. The parable of the talents in Mathew 25, verse 15, confirms that

God gives to each *according to his own ability*.

But I have met hundreds of leaders who seem to settle for “good enough” after assessing themselves as a “two-talent” leader. Over time, this kind of thinking can lead to “one-talent” behavior and thereby resulting in “one-talent” performance. Instead, if a “two-talent” leader seeks to leverage what has been given for maximum Kingdom stewardship—that can be the beginning of the transition from good to great.

With that in mind, let me offer seven characteristics of great leaders that I believe are within the grasp of any leader who will stretch and reach:

1. Great leaders have great faith. Faith is a big deal for spiritual leaders. Jesus got frustrated with His disciples when they exercised less faith than He thought they should. Jesus often used the phrase “little faith” when addressing them. This has caused me to consider the level of my faith. What do I really believe God can and will do? Do I live out my faith in such a way that inspires others? How about you, what do you believe? The best leaders I know have great faith. They aren’t always right, and they don’t have all the answers but they believe God will come through on His promises!

2. Great leaders create. There is no denial that a good percentage of local church ministry is managing stuff and simply getting routine things done. This consistency provides the much needed stability for any church. But many of the critical priorities for a great leader involve new, improved, and innovative ideas in order to take new territory. This is the process that leads to the coveted momentum we all desire. This creativity may not take the majority of your time, but it should get some of your best time. What is the last best idea you’ve had? What have you done with it?

3. Great leaders insist on healthy relationships that are productive. Jesus teaches us to love everyone, but he also guides us to make our deeper investments into a selected few. He modeled this with His twelve disciples. Jesus was honest with His disciples. He confronted them, made expectations clear, and spoke the truth in love. He challenged them to bear fruit!

In order to have healthy relationships you must first be healthy as the leader. Not perfect, but self-aware, authentic, and willing to give more than you get. Healthy relationships are honest, embrace mutual voluntary submission, and serve for the greater good. Great leaders don't settle for friendships that get stuck or stagnant. They pursue growth and an iron sharpens iron kind of love that results in Kingdom fruit!

4. Great leaders practice fierce focus. Most leaders can name their real priorities, but surprisingly few stay focused on them to the point of accomplishment. Distraction is lethal to leaders. There are so many things that demand your time and attention, but only a few things really matter. Philosopher William James said, "The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook." In other words, the real genius is in knowing what not to do! You can't do everything, but if you do the most important things first, you will gain your greatest results. It's amazing how many of the less important things don't need to be done.

5. Great leaders know when to push and when to back off. No one likes an intense leader, but all leaders must exert leadership intensity. Anyone who is intense all the time is too much to take. People end up not liking them and resisting their leadership. A wise leader knows how to kick in the intensity at the right times and when to back off to let the people breath. It's like a race car driver. If they mashed the accelerator to the floor all the time, they would end up in

the wall. Great drivers know when to let up as well as when and how to feather the brakes.

6. Great leaders are willing to tolerate “messy” if it means progress. Leadership is not a tidy process, it’s not for the faint of heart and if you are a perfectionist you may struggle. People are messy, that’s okay. Part of a leader’s job is to help people live better through Christ. This is not an excuse for unorganized chaos or making it up as you go. It recognizes that life is messy and that we need to embrace whatever it takes as long as it leads toward progress. The goal is progress for people individually and progress for the church overall as an organization.

7. Great leaders have settled their call. One of my personal blessings from local church leadership through the years has been conversation with thousands of pastors. One of the significant observations from these conversations is the difference between those who have settled their call to full time ministry and those who have not. For those who have settled their call, it’s not about success or failure, though we all want success. It’s about commitment.

When your call is settled, it’s settled! There is a rest and peace in your soul, you know who you are and to whom you belong. You know your purpose and though you may not always be satisfied, you are always content. This is the foundation for great local church leadership. This gives you and God freedom to realize your fullest potential.

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