

How to Handle Your Call to Lead When You're a Woman

God is placing more women in ministry leadership roles today than ever before. The number of God-fearing women serving in leadership roles traditionally held by men in churches, ministries and Christian organizations of every kind is growing. How exciting to see godly men and women serving together at every level and the body of Christ more closely resembling the fullness of our Creator.

If you are called to be a leader in Christian ministry, God will bring it about. Psalm 75:6-7 tells us that promotion comes from the Lord. He also determines how long each leader serves. It is not up to us to prove or position ourselves for leadership. It is up to us only to be prepared and to live pure lives of obedience as we walk with God. That knowledge relieves the pressure of having to "perform" or to please people. We need to please only God.

My own journey in Christian leadership has been filled with blessings as well as challenges and changes. As I continually submit my ministry to the Lord, He has directed my steps and shown me His great wisdom. He also has taught me some key principles of Christian leadership that women need in order to be effective.

Walk in Humility Leaders who walk in humility not only engender the favor of the Lord, but also evoke trust, honesty and support from their peers and staff. Having a woman serve in ministry or church leadership is a fairly new phenomenon for many men who have been in ministry for years. A spirit of humility will help disarm the internal conflict they may be confronting.

Our accuser, the devil, will use any opening to sow distrust

and disunity among ministry leaders. A hint of pride can be misconstrued as a manipulative “Jezebel” spirit. James 4:10 tells us to humble ourselves before God, and He will exalt us.

A spirit of humility also overcomes the spirits of pride and arrogance that leaders are sure to encounter along the way. It is very tempting to take an aloof, self-righteous posture when decisions are questioned or mistakes pointed out. Fight that with humility. Hear what is said, and take it to the Lord.

Several years ago, one of my peers came to me with an offense. I honestly did not think I had done anything wrong and was tempted to shrug off the whole thing. However, tension was building between the two of us and between our teams.

We both took the matter to prayer and made some visible adjustments in our relationship. Our simple act made a significant change in the spiritual climate of the entire organization. Godly leaders will make changes in themselves and override previous decisions if necessary to stay in line with God’s Word and on track with the vision.

Know Your Boundaries Leaders should have a clear understanding of their mission, scope of authority and responsibilities. Having unclear boundaries leaves the door wide open for problems.

God is doing many exciting things in the world today. It may be enticing to jump on every opportunity that comes your way. Doing so, however, can distract you from your primary mission, dilute your effectiveness and hinder those who are ordained for those roles.

Having a clear vision of your mission will keep you on track, especially when opposition is fierce and problems are abundant. Be ready and willing to make tough decisions, to lead against the tide and to intercede for wisdom and victory. In ministry, the buck stops with the leader. If that is you, the buck stops with you.

As a woman leader, be vigilant against anyone who tries to assume the authority given to you. Some men, and possibly women, may try to undermine or take over that authority simply because you are a woman. Use the apostle Paul as an example. He exerted his God-given authority without apology to ensure the good of the churches under his care.

Paul rebuked those who tried to take over spiritual leadership that was his and was careful to stick to the field God had given him. Know your scope of authority, take responsibility for it and stick to it! (See 2 Cor. 10:13-15.)

A leader's responsibility includes caring for the people God brings alongside her. Jesus declared that, "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant" (Matt. 20:26, NLT). Serving is our responsibility. It keeps us humble and keeps us in touch with the health of our team. Most of all, it sets a godly tone even in stressful situations.

This has been an area of struggle for me. God moved me into a leadership role when I was still young. I feared that if I was seen serving others, my credibility as a leader would be eroded. I feared my male counterparts would not see me as a person in authority.

I should have trusted that when God makes a place for us, no one can take it away. Our gracious and loving Father did not humiliate me in any way, but has continually and lovingly prodded me to take on the nature of His Son, the nature of a servant. I learned firsthand that as we serve, our authority in Christ grows.

Have Integrity in All Things Christian leaders of either gender cannot afford a lapse of integrity. King Jehoshaphat instructed leaders under him to "'always act in the fear of the Lord, with integrity and with undivided hearts'" (2 Chr. 19:9). His words still apply today. This should be true in personal, professional and ministry settings.

Do not mix personal and ministry funds. Ensure legal compliance unless a law opposes Scripture, which is sometimes the case in closed countries. Thoroughly examine every accusation of wrongdoing in your organization. If there is any truth to it, set the record straight.

Count the cost before making a commitment and then keep your word, even when it hurts (see Ps. 15:4). Show yourself faithful even in the small things, which indicates how you will handle greater responsibility (see Luke 16:10).

Avoid All Appearance of Evil Many eyes are upon today's Christian leaders. Some folks are looking for a role model, while others are watching for a leader to slip up so they can once again ridicule a follower of Christ.

It is wise to implement safeguards in advance to avoid compromising becomes increasingly important as more men and women serve together in leadership. Consider these practical suggestions:

- Do not spend long periods of time alone with any man, unless he is a relative.
- Reserve your most intimate thoughts and feelings for your husband, family or female accountability partner.
- If you must travel with an unrelated man, keep an appropriate distance physically and emotionally. If either of you are married, avoid one-on-one social interaction.
- If you travel to minister, take along your spouse or a female "armor bearer." Have them accompany you to your room each evening.
- If you feel drawn into an unhealthy relationship with anyone—man or woman—disengage immediately, and discuss it with your spiritual accountability partner.
- Dress modestly at all times. If you are young, be accountable in your clothing to a godly woman who is at least 10 years older.

- Although you have freedom in what you eat and drink, do not let your freedom be a stumbling block for those who are less mature. Seek God about what freedoms you can enjoy.

Christian leaders must be willing to be accountable to others for their actions and appearance. Believers cannot live by the standards of the world. Our standard must be Christ and Him alone. We are called to be “‘holy, because [He is] holy'” (1 Pet. 1:16).

Choose a Good Team Every leader needs a team. Someone who fulfills a vision alone may be a very gifted individual but is no leader. The first step in assembling a good team is determining what gifts and strengths are needed to accomplish the mission. Then, honestly assess the gifting, strengths and weaknesses of team members.

Ask God to bring people with a complementary mission who have the missing gifting and strengths. Be willing to wait for the right fit. Understand God brings some people for only a short time. Be willing to release and bless them when they feel called to go elsewhere. Don't be afraid to bring aboard gifted men. Be ready to lead them.

Leading men and women is very similar. Everyone needs a clear understanding of the mission and direction. Everyone enjoys using their gifting and strengths for something meaningful. Everyone responds well to confident, caring leadership. Many men respond well to a direct communication style, but not all. That is more a function of personality type than gender. One of the main differences is how men and women build camaraderie. Men tend to lean toward joking and active fun.

Women prefer compliments and personal sharing. Finding a healthy balance for mixed gender teams is possible and makes for effective and joyful ministry dynamics.

Through the years, God has placed many men—including former

senior pastors—on my team. As of yet, there have been no authority issues. Each has come in obedience to God and in fulfillment of his own mission.

As leader, my role has been to point them in the right direction and serve them so their gifting is used effectively in furthering our mission. All have respected that. We have learned from one another, and the kingdom has benefited as a result.

What About Spiritual Chauvinists? Although many Christian men are embracing the new way God is using women in ministry leadership, not all are willing to—just yet. Some have been taught that Christian leadership is not a woman's place. Some may have cultural biases. Some are threatened by anyone else in leadership—man or woman.

Their rejection of a woman leader can take a variety of forms. They may not take her seriously. They may purposefully exclude her from strategic meetings. They may ignore her counsel and partnership. They may be outright hostile. In any case, it is critical to respond in a godly, professional manner.

Remember that bringing glory and honor to God and building His kingdom takes priority; personal pride has no place. Jesus instructed His disciples to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matt. 10:16, RSV). Conduct yourself in like manner.

If the man in question truly has a heart to see God's kingdom advanced, send a man from your team to build a relationship and see if God opens the door of partnership that way. If it proves to be a hindrance to the work of God, partner with someone else.

Do not get distracted with a battle that is not yours. Unless God assigns you to confront it, forgive and move on. God will make a way for what He wants done.

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