

Look, Mom! I'm Flying

Editor's Note: Here is part two of a three-part series on "Peter." For Part 1, [click here](#).

The Peter Principle reminds us that, "In a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to the level of his incompetence."

I also teach the "Peter Pan Principle."

Other leaders and writers have coined their own versions of the Peter Pan Principle.

Some teach that males never grow in maturity past the age of 12. "Boys never grow up." My wife has done 42 years of research on this topic and could probably add to this discussion.

Dan Kiley wrote a book in 1983 titled *The Peter Pan Syndrome*. The book was an international best-seller and spawned a wave of similar philosophies of behavior. Kiley offered many theories about why men never really want to take responsibility.

I propose a different type of Peter Pan Theory. My theory applies to leadership and was initially focused on men. I've broadened my thinking to include women leaders, because I have seen evidence that the theory holds across gender.

I believe leaders have a fear of being "found out." Someday, maybe today, people will find out that I really cannot fly. It looks like I'm flying, but I know there is a cable to help me fly.

Many of you will recognize my description of this Peter Pan theory as "The Impostor Syndrome." This syndrome holds that some people feel as though the reasons for their successes are due to luck or timing. Most people who harbor this syndrome (research documents 70 percent of us feel this way at times)

feel like they are not competent and explain away their successes. They have an inner “Peter Principle” and fear exposure of the cable.

My Peter Pan theory is a leadership paradox. Many leaders are more comfortable “doing” than leading. When I think back over my career, I can easily identify reluctant leaders. Some led without any notion of a destination. Others led with a task orientation.

I recall listening to leaders who never made me feel that they believed what they were saying. They showed passion, but their speech was void of conviction. I’ve heard many pastors deliver a message that I felt was birthed in theory rather than heart.

We can’t preach another man’s heart. The words of a leader proceed from the heart.

When I lead with the words from a book, I fly with a cable.

When I “try” the latest theory of pop-management gurus, I fly with a cable.

When I speak about what I heard at a convention, I fly with a cable.

Cable-aided leaders practice a LIFO system in their speech: Last in, first out. If I heard it, read it or copied it, it’s used to form my next company initiative.

Management by cabling around!

Leaders depend on a cable when they feel their thoughts are not worthy. Dependence on self yields to depending on the supply of others.

Leaders who really fly are led by the Holy Spirit. When we are led by divine inspiration, we think fresh thoughts, speak principles with morning dew and depend upon His daily bread.

The Holy Spirit does not lead me to be an impostor.

Today's Scripture

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13).

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