

Why Character Trumps Charisma Every Time

All leadership is built on two things—character and competence. Those are the twin values of leadership. Charisma is optional.

Some of the most charismatic people of the 20th century were also the worst. Hitler, Mao, and Marx and Mussolini were all charismatic. Charisma has absolutely nothing to do with leadership. If you possess it, it's merely a bonus and, if you allow it, it can actually get you into a lot of trouble. Real leadership is built on character and competence.

The Bible says in 1 Timothy 3:8-10 (GN), *“Church leaders must be of good character and sincere. They should be tested first and then if they pass the test they should serve.”*

One of the realities that has burdened me is the number of young leaders I see starting or moving into established churches who have tremendous talent and charisma, but who often lack the grounding of character. So in the last few years, I've been mentoring and teaching young leaders and addressing the need to put down roots and grow deep in the soil of God's Word and in the history of the church.

And for 30-plus years now, we've been addressing the issue of competence by repeatedly teaching pastors and church leaders how to plant and lead healthy churches that have a great commitment to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

You really need both character and skills to be a good leader. If you have character without competence what you have is sincere ineffectiveness. But far worse is when you have competence without character. If you have competence without character you become a menace—a menace to a church, a menace to a small group, and a menace to society.

To gain greater competence, read. Then read some more. I often tell Pastors that 25 percent of their reading should be among contemporary authors. Another 25 percent should be among authors from the immediate past generation of great leaders who are now in heaven—men like D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, Adrian Rogers, and W. A. Criswell. Another 25 percent should be among authors from the Reformation period up until the modern missionary age—from Luther, Calvin, and Wesley up to D. L. Moody's age. And a final 25 percent should be from the early church fathers up to the Reformation—from Athanasius who penned the Nicene Creed to Balthasar Hubmaier, the great Anabaptist contemporary of Zwingli.

If all you ever read is books written by your contemporaries, you're no smarter than anyone else around you. But if you see how history repeats itself and how you can learn from it, you'll be a huge step ahead. You also gain competence by getting trained and there are plenty of great conferences to choose from such as our All-Africa Purpose Driven Leadership Conference coming next year, or the Nuts & Bolts Church Planting and Leadership Conference at Lake Pointe Church later this year.

But remember, the maturity you need for ministry is not about skills alone. It's also about character. And the maturity of your character is not about age, it's not about your appearance, it's not about your achievements, and it's not about mere academics. It's about your attitude. That is the determining factor of spiritual maturity. Character is the habitual ways you respond to the situations of life.

Character is not your reputation. Reputation is what other people think you are, but character is what you really are. D. L. Moody said, "Character is who you are in the dark." Character is who you are when nobody's looking. Character is who you are when you're not on stage. Character is the real you. And God knows your character.

Charisma doesn't impress me, and it doesn't impress God. And if charisma impresses you, be careful. Re-train your heart to long for deeper character and greater competence. Those are the two rails on which great leadership runs.

Rick Warren is the founding pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., one of America's largest and most influential churches. He is author of the New York Times –The Purpose Driven Life. His book, The Purpose Driven Church, was named one of the 100 Christian books that changed the 20th century. He is also founder of , a global Internet community for pastors.

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