



Ted Ward on Leadership¹

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We need special revelation to augment natural revelation in reference to leadership. For example, a “secular” scholar studying the matter of leadership is unlikely to generate a list that reflects Matthew 23. Even when examining malfunctions of leadership, he or she looks in other directions to explain those malfunctions. There is something in Scripture that adds, distinctively, values in reference to leadership that are not altogether pragmatic; or deductible from the empirical. They’re not altogether researchable in the sense of, “If you really study leadership, its functions, its malfunctions, you come up with these same points.” In fact, if one applies leadership principles and practices from a Scriptural perspective, he or she might be neither efficient nor effective in the judgment of some.

In other words, sometimes the values we hold will be in conflict with the situation. Easier, more efficient, smoother, quicker aren’t necessarily the same things as godly. So when I look at Matthew 23 and I read what our Lord said, I am quite prepared to have someone respond, “That doesn’t always work” or “You can’t always do that.” In development assistance in particular, if the issue is getting on with the job efficiently so that we use minimum resources and minimum time for a given accomplishment, we will at times violate principles suggested in Matthew 23 for example.

Some will defend their values and assert that God values efficiency. I might agree but I will suggest that there is a price to be paid for seeking efficiency. And it is important to understand that God evaluates in terms of doing things his way.

If I had wanted the children of Israel out of Egypt, I think I could have done it a lot quicker. If I had wanted my people in the land I had promised them, I think I could have avoided the 40 years in the wilderness! Yet Moses is recognized as a great leader. We honor Moses not because he got the people to the promised land in a hurry, but because of how he learned to obey, to understand the purposes of God, to do things when God told him to do them even when they didn’t make sense. The issue of Christian leadership, then, is not efficiency; it’s obedience.

Now most of you are familiar with Peter Drucker’s distinction between efficiency and effectiveness, and it’s at that point that effectiveness has been lurking in the back of your mind. You say, “What Ward’s really going to say is that a Christian leader is effective more so than efficient.” But, to stay with the example of Moses, even he wasn’t effective—in terms of modern definitions of leadership. He didn’t accomplish what he set out to do. He failed early on to understand the notion of Deliverer, and he never led the people into the promised land. (Read Deuteronomy 31 and note God’s indictment on the people, “after you die Moses, this people will . . .”) If your big mission in life is to accomplish something and you don’t do it, you may not be remembered as an effective leader. At that point, Drucker’s distinction between efficiency and effectiveness doesn’t help me. Effectiveness raises different kind of value questions than does efficiency—which is really a time and economy question. There are other values besides time and economy. Values associated with effectiveness are complex, and understanding leadership in relation to that complexity is one of the greater challenges for Christian leadership.

¹ Ted Ward on Leadership. Church and Development Seminar. Wheaton College, July 1981