

## Finding Your Leadership Style

*Ten different ways to lead God's people.*

by Bill Hybels

A few years ago, I began to notice major differences in the ways gifted leaders led their teams. They all had the spiritual gift of leadership referred to in Romans 12:8, but they approached the challenges of leadership differently.

About the time I was making this observation, the management team at Willow Creek gave me a leadership book for my birthday. (The year before, they had hired an Elvis impersonator, who burst into my office during a meeting to serenade me. Elvis discovered my leadership style in a hurry. He barely made it out of my office with his blue suede shoes.)

This year they gave me a more appropriate gift—*Certain Trumpets*, by Garry Wills. Wills describes the enormous impact of great leaders whose particular leadership style meshed perfectly with a certain need in society.

For example, when people are being oppressed and want to break free from that yoke, the situation calls for a radical, transforming leader.

In a complex, pluralistic democracy, with thousands of constituencies that must be drawn together to form a government, a political or electoral leader is necessary.

In war time, a military style of leadership works best.

During an ideologically intense social struggle, an intellectual leader might fit the bill.

Wills effectively argues that there are many different styles of leadership, and certain styles fit certain leadership needs better than others.

Over the last few years, I've identified at least ten manifestations of the leadership gift as it plays out in the church. It's been helpful to our staff to identify our leadership styles and build leadership teams accordingly.

### **1. Visionary leader**

These leaders have a crystal-clear picture in their minds of what they want to happen. They cast visions powerfully and possess indefatigable enthusiasm to pursue the mission.

Visionaries shamelessly appeal to anyone and everyone to get on board with the vision. They talk about it, write about it, burn white-hot for it. They are future-oriented, usually idealistic, and full of faith to believe the vision can and will be actualized if the dream is talked about and cast often enough.

Visionary leaders are not easily discouraged or deterred. In fact, if people tell them their dream is impossible, that just adds fuel to the fire in their spirit.

Visionary leaders may or may not be able to form teams, align talents, set goals, or manage progress toward the achievement of the vision. But this one thing is sure: They carry the vision. They cast the vision. They draw people into the vision, and they'll die trying to see it fulfilled.

I was at a conference with John Maxwell some time back. John was teaching on vision, and he started his talk on one side of the sanctuary to symbolize the beginning of the vision.

"You have no money, you have no people, you have no faith, but you have the vision. So you put one foot in front of the other, and you walk, by the light of the vision . . ." He began to walk across the stage.

"Then, along the way, as you share that vision, God gives you the faith, the power, the people, the resources . . ." Everyone's eyes were riveted on John as he made this vision walk. But there was a planter between where he was and where he was headed. Inside, I'm screaming, *Watch out for the planter!* John never saw it. He ran into it and stumbled—but the vision was so powerful that he never stopped speaking, never lost his train of thought. I was looking around the crowd, and no one else even seemed to notice!

You know a person is a visionary leader when he trips on the stage and no one even acknowledges it! It was a picture of the leader who cannot help but pour out the vision, despite any obstacle.

## **2. Directional leader**

This style doesn't get much press, but it is exceedingly important. The directional leader has the uncanny, God-given ability to choose the right path at those critical intersections where an organization starts asking hard questions: "Is it time for a wholesale change or should we stay the course? Do we focus on growth or consolidation? Should we start new ministries or deepen and improve existing ones? Should we add facilities or relocate? Is it time for some fresh staff, or do we dance with those who brought us here?"

These are directional issues, and they are capable of immobilizing an organization. But a leader with a directional style is able to sort the options. He or she can carefully assess the values, mission, strengths, weaknesses, resources, personnel, and openness to change of an organization—then, with remarkable wisdom, point that organization in the right direction.

Wrong calls at these key intersections can wreck organizations. Shortly after Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam became king. His first critical intersection came almost immediately: a representative group of the people asked for their workloads to be reduced. Solomon had worked people to the point of despair. Rehoboam had to make a directional call. The older counselors said, "You'd better ease up on them." The younger counselors said, "Just load them up." He made the wrong call at that intersection, and it wrecked the kingdom.

When Willow Creek is at such a crossroads, I will not move in the direction I believe God is calling us without the green light from two board members who are strong in directional leadership. Whenever we've followed their lead, we've made good decisions. Whenever we've ignored their advice, we've paid a high price.

### **3. Strategic leader**

Some leaders have the God-given ability to break an exciting vision into achievable steps, so an organization can march intentionally toward the actualization of their mission.

Visions are powerful. Visions excite and inspire people. They compel action. But unless people eventually see progress toward the fulfillment of the vision, they conclude the vision caster is just blowing smoke.

A strategic leader forms a game plan everyone can understand and participate in, one that will eventually lead to the achievement of the vision. A strategic leader challenges the organization to work the plan. She says, "Don't get distracted. Do what needs to be done to achieve the next step, then the next, and we'll achieve the vision together." A strategic leader is able to get various departments of an organization synchronized so that the organization is focused toward the prize.

The vision of Willow Creek has been compelling for more than twenty years. But it has been a seven-step strategy, put together by leaders in the early days of our church, that has helped us move toward the achievement of that vision.

### **4. Managing leader**

There is always discussion in leadership circles about the differences between management and leadership. You've heard, "Managers do things right; leaders do the right things," and other delineations.

Those may be helpful, but I'm convinced certain leaders possess the unique ability to establish mile markers on the road to the destination, then organize and monitor people, processes, systems, and resources for mission achievement. Old Testament examples include Joseph and Nehemiah.

What's most amazing to those who don't have this style is that managing leaders derive enormous satisfaction from doing all this managing!

You'd be surprised how many visionary leaders are inept at managing people, processes, and systems. Many directional and strategic leaders are incapable of actually putting the players, resources, and systems in place for the goals of the organization to be achieved.

I've often said around our church, "Sooner or later someone's going to have to manage all of this stuff." We've always had an abundance of visionary, directional, and strategic leaders, but we've always had a shortage of managing leaders. That has hurt us all along the way.

Managing leaders often aren't as popular as the leader who can give the big vision talk or make the big decision around the board-room table or put the big plan in place. But in the day-to-day world, someone has to manage the process to make sure we get where we want to go.

## **5. Motivational leader**

These leaders possess insight into who needs a fresh challenge or additional training. They can sense who needs public recognition, an encouraging word, or a day off. They know when a pay increase, office change, title change, or sabbatical is needed.

Unfortunately, some view the motivational style as a lightweight style of leadership. Well, just ask team members how important it is to receive ongoing inspiration!

I will follow a leader who will fire me up, call out the best in me, celebrate my accomplishments, and cheer my progress, even if it means a lower-voltage vision, an occasional bad call at a crossroads, or a periodic lapse of managerial effectiveness.

Motivational leaders know that teammates get tired, lose focus, and experience mission drift. Workers wonder if what they're doing really matters to anyone—or to God. Motivational leaders don't get bitter or vengeful when morale sinks. They see it as an opportunity to inspire and lift the spirits of everyone on the team.

Jesus was a consistent motivator of the disciples. He changed Peter's name. He promised his followers a hundred-fold reward in this life and in the next. Often, Jesus would take the disciples away and say, "Let's not take a hill. Let's sleep at the bottom of one. Let's go fishing, eat, and hang out."

Some of our teammates would love more than anything else a day with their leader around a campfire in an unrushed setting, instead of always being under our command.

Remember the time Jesus said, "I call you friends"? He always promised them, "In my Father's house are many mansions. I can't imagine spending eternity without you people around me. You'll be with me forever."

Don't ever look down on yourself if God has given you the motivational style.

## **6. Shepherding leader**

This man or woman loves team members so deeply, nurtures them so gently, supports them so consistently, listens to them so patiently, and prays for them so diligently that the mission of the team gets achieved. It happens primarily because of good will in the hearts of those who have been cared for by the shepherd.

I'm on the board of World Vision, an organization that has fed starving children for more than thirty years. They've had several different presidents, and constituents have supported the vision, regardless of who was at the helm.

It's a different dynamic with shepherding leaders and their teams. Team members support their *shepherd*, and teammates often feel, *Whatever cause is important to the leader is fine with me. If it's broadly Christian, if we can accomplish it in community, if we can retain our shepherd, we'll do it.*

Second Samuel 23 records David's leadership in the early days. He drew together the lonely and disaffected, then shepherded them deeply and lovingly. One night, he happened to mention that he was thirsty, but his troops were surrounded by the enemy. Three members of his team risked their lives to sneak behind enemy lines to bring David a jar of water. When they gave him the water, he was so moved by their expression of love that he poured it out as a worship offering.

While there are many cause-driven people waiting to be drawn into a mission by a visionary leader, there are surprising numbers of community-driven people who want to be shepherded and loved. When they are, they will joyfully pursue almost any kingdom purpose. If you can shepherd a group of people, you're a leader, and you can really make a difference.

## **7. Team-building leader**

Team-building leaders have supernatural insight into people. They find or develop leaders with the right abilities, character, and chemistry with other team members. They place people in the right positions for the right reasons who will then produce the right results.

When the team-building leader gets everyone in place, he or she then says to the team, "You know what we're trying to do. You know what part of the mission you're responsible for. You know what part of the vision the rest of us are responsible for. So head out. Work hard. Achieve your objectives. Communicate with your co-laborers, but lead."

The team-building leader might not nurture or manage people well. He or she reasons that shouldn't be necessary. If the right people are in the right slots doing the right things for the right reasons, they'll get the work done without the leader looking over their shoulder. Few things are as exciting to me as drawing together the right people, putting them in the right positions, then letting that team play hard and have fun.

## **8. Entrepreneurial leader**

These leaders possess vision, boundless energy, and a risk-taking spirit. Their distinguishing characteristic is they function best in a start-up operation. They love being told it cannot be done.

But once the effort requires steady, ongoing leadership—once things get complex and there are endless discussions about policies, systems, controls, and databases—the entrepreneurial leader loses energy and may even lose focus and confidence. He or she starts to peek over the fence and wonder if there's another start-up project out there.

Entrepreneurs often feel guilty at the thought of leaving something they gave birth to. But if they think, *I can't give birth to something every few years*, something inside them starts to die. That's their style. It's important in the kingdom.

The apostle Paul was an entrepreneurial leader. He wanted to build churches where Christ had not been named. He wanted to pioneer them, then let someone else run them so he could move on. He made no apologies for his leadership style.

## **9. Re-engineering leader**

Some leaders thrive in a situation that has lost vision or focus, or one that has been staffed inappropriately. This kind of leader says, "Oh boy, I get to re-engineer this whole situation." They find out what the mission was and what it needs to be now. They decide how progress and success will be measured. They love to tune up, heal, and revitalize hurting organizations.

But when the group is running on eight cylinders, re-engineering leaders may not want to lead over the long haul. Often, rather than manage what they've re-engineered, they look for another project to overhaul. When they find one, they salivate. "Would you look at that train wreck? I'd love to get my hands on all that twisted metal and human carnage. I could really sort that out and make something great out of that."

## **10. Bridge-building leader**

This leader brings a wide variety of constituencies together under a single umbrella of leadership so that a complex organization can achieve its mission.

This feat requires enormous flexibility in a leader—the ability to compromise and negotiate, to listen, understand, and think outside of the box. It requires not only the ability to be diplomatic; it requires also the gift of being able to relate to diverse people.

In a start-up venture, a leader is surrounded by those who share his or her vision. Contrast that with a church or parachurch organization made up of scores of well-defined constituencies, many of whom care little about the overall vision of the ministry anymore. They just want to make sure their interests are served.

I talked to a pastor who said, "I'm dying. The choir wants new designer robes. The youth want a new gymnasium. The missions department wants to give more money away. The

Sunday school department wants more classrooms. The production people want more equipment. The seniors want large-print hymnals, and the Gen Xers want to turn the board room into a cappuccino bar."

The variety and velocity of those requests had him imagining each of those subministries as the enemy. But that situation fires up a bridge-building leader. A bridge builder becomes the best friend and advocate of all the constituent groups. He or she seeks to unite them and focus their efforts.

### **Beyond envy**

It concerns me that there is a certain amount of "gift envy" among church leaders these days. God gave each of us our gift mix for a reason. When leaders adopt someone else's style, they miss the unique opportunities God has given them.

I celebrate when I look around the world and see flourishing churches of all kinds, with many different types of leaders, because it's going to take a variety of churches led by a variety of leaders to reach our world with the love of Christ.

Whatever your style, recognize it, celebrate it, and step up to the plate and lead.

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