

Research Offers Alternative List of the 12 Traits of Effective Leaders!

Proven management surveys yield new list of 12 keys to ministerial effectiveness.

Recently there has been a proliferation of books purporting to help distinguish between highly effective church leaders from those who are less effective. However, most of these books are based on anecdotal observations. In other words, one, two or even a dozen illustrative examples are given to support a certain list of effective leadership skills. While this type of research is helpful, the reader may wonder if it stands up to quantitative verification.

A recent study by Robert Herman, professor of organizational behavior at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, and Martin Butler, professor at Nazarene Bible College in Colorado Springs, looks at the qualities that characterize effective religious leaders (Butler and Herman 1999). Working with leaders, pastors and laypersons within the Church of the Nazarene, Herman and Butler's research exposed twelve (12) characteristics of effective church leaders.

The study employed two popular leadership questionnaires and a lesser known ministry-orientated version. The Managerial Practices Survey (MPS) is well known with strong reliability and validity (Yukl 1990). A second survey, the Leader Behavior Questionnaire (LBQ) is likewise broadly utilized and reliable (Sashkin and Burke 1990). The third is a lesser known survey titled the Ministerial Effectiveness Inventory (MEI) (Malony and Majovsky 1986). It is fairly short adaptation of the "Profiles in Ministry" survey developed by the Association of Theological Schools.

Their research revealed that effective leaders are:

(1) Managers. Sample question: "This minister checks work progress against plans to see if it works."

(2) Problem solvers. Sample question: "This minister handles church-related problems and crises in a confident and decisive manner."

(3) Planner. Sample question: "This minister plans in detail how to accomplish a task or project."

(4) Delegator. Sample question: "The minister presents a policy or strategy in general terms and then asks you to determine specific action steps for implementing it."

(5) Inspirer. Sample question: "This minister develops enthusiasm for a task or project by appealing to your pride in accomplishing a challenging task or doing something never before done."

(6) Change agent. Sample question: "This person has been able to help this church adapt to changing conditions."

(7) Shepherd. Sample question: "This persons shows that he/she really cares about people."

(8) Communicator. Sample question covers the ability of the leader to clearly state directions and views.

(9) Multitasker. Sample question: “This minister uses a style of leadership that is flexible and responsible.”

(10) Student. Sample question: “The minister demonstrates a style of lifelong learning through continual education, research, and study.”

(11) Servant. Sample question: “The minister does not frighten people off with his/her dominating, superior attitude.

(12) A person of integrity. Sample question: “The minister’s lifestyle does not involve illicit sexual activity and/or gambling.”

REALITY IN ACTION: Ministers can be taught to be better planners, delegators, change agents, multitaskers and problem solvers. Thus, lay leaders will want to encourage their clergy to read books, attend seminars and peruse periodicals that deal with strengthening these characteristics.

Ministers should also look for mentors who exemplify the above stated characteristics. A good question for a minister to ask him or herself is “who do I know with the following characteristics...?” and then ask oneself the questions stated above. Remember, care for individuals (the shepherding skill), the servant motif, and personal integrity are usually not learned in seminars or books, but by observation and tutorship.

Seminary and ministerial training programs will also want to take into consideration how they are fostering the above skills. And pastoral search committees may also wish to ask some of the above questions to their prospective candidates, or better yet the candidate’s former lay leaders.

Butler and Herman have done the church a great service by clearly delineating some of the key attributes of ministerial effectiveness. By considering these research generated skills we can better assess our leadership development and sharpen our ministerial skills.

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