



THE OVERLOOKED SECRET TO HIGH-LEVEL LEADERSHIP

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*“If [a man’s] gift is leadership,
let him govern diligently ... “
–Romans 12:8*

Four years ago I was experiencing a difficult season in my life and looking for answers. One morning in prayer, the Lord impressed upon me that I had not been diligent. Since that time I have realized that diligence is a secret of successful leadership. I believe that many ministries and clergy leaders fail because they lack diligence. As Proverbs 10:4 aptly states, “Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.”

Diligence is not only important for church leaders, but for husbands and fathers as well. Marital strife and divorce run rampant in our society. A primary reason is the passivity, or slothfulness, of men. Passivity is the polar opposite of diligence. When leaders—whether in ministry or in the home—fail to fully embrace the call to diligent leadership and responsibility, the consequences are great.

Webster’s Dictionary defines sloth as “an aversion to work, exertion, or effort”. The term is derived from the Middle English word for slow or sluggish. Those who lack diligence—the slothful—do not discipline themselves sufficiently to tackle the difficult or unpleasant aspects of their job. They are slow to embrace responsibilities that are either humdrum or difficult. They avoid tasks that are unfamiliar or require a greater effort to master.

These behaviors are unbecoming to those in leadership. What can we do to avoid such detrimental habits so that we can fully become the leaders God intended us to be?

Here are some suggestions:

Clarify areas of authority and responsibility.

In Luke 7, the Roman centurion who came to Jesus for his servant to be healed knew the scope and limits of his authority. In order to be diligent, leaders must be fully aware of their authority and responsibilities. Do you have a written job description? Is it accurate? Have you approached your board of elders, directors or authority and clarified exactly what is expected of you? Do you know what issues you can make decisions about and which ones you cannot? Take the time and effort to make sure there are no gray areas so that you can fulfill your duties with confidence.

Make sure to plan thoroughly.

Proverbs 21:5 says, “The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage.” Set goals and objectives for yourself. Think through exactly which tasks you need to accomplish, and give yourself completion dates for each. Periodically review your progress. Good leaders consistently produce good results because they plan well.

Manage your time rather than let it manage you.

Ephesians 5:16 says, “Make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” Diligent leaders effectively organize their time, as well as use that time productively. Set aside dedicated time for studying, writing, doing administrative work, returning phone calls and any other tasks that need to be accomplished. Be disciplined. Do not be late to appointments. Begin and end meetings on time. Tardiness causes others pay the price for a lack of diligence. Put forth the extra effort to manage your time well. It will pay off in the long run.

Be a detail person.

Although leaders are responsible for big-picture vision, do not forget to focus on the details. In other words, sweat the small stuff—it can mean the difference between success and failure. As a noted author declared, “Both the devil and God are in the details.” Though it might seem like minutia—following protocol, checking facts and figures—such diligence ensures the strength of the end result.

Know your strengths and weaknesses.

Diligence to duty requires that you know what you are good at and what you are not. Most leaders are good motivators but poor managers. Be honest with yourself. Denial is a soothing balm we often use to cover our weaknesses or postpone an unpleasant task. An easy way to develop self-honesty is to do a “360-degree evaluation”. Ask your superiors, your direct reports, your peers and your family what your weaknesses and strengths are. This will help you more honestly appraise yourself.

Embrace the one thing that is hardest or least desirable to do.

In Luke 9:23, Jesus said to the disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Diligence is an issue of character and the moral resolve to do what is right. One of my greatest struggles is accomplishing tasks that I find undesirable. As I embrace these tasks I not only fulfill my responsibilities but also strengthen my character. Rather than give yourself permission to avoid the task, pray for God to help you die to your resistance.

Live a disciplined lifestyle.

Many church leaders do not make it a priority to live a scheduled and disciplined life. Yet studies indicate that individuals who lead disciplined lives accomplish more, have fewer health problems and feel less tired than those who do not. To live a disciplined lifestyle means creating daily and weekly routines and adhering to them. This means making an effort to go to bed at the same time, get up at the same time, eat your meals at the same time and have prayer and devotionals at the same time each day. Having structure provides you with the ability to adapt to the unexpected with greater ease.

Overcome procrastination.

National surveys indicate that the vast majority of Americans admit to procrastination. When leaders put off until tomorrow the good they could have done today, they often miss God’s windows of opportunity. Honestly appraise your work patterns. If you have a problem with procrastination, look deeper at the fears in your life that may be contributing to this behavior.

Avoid growing weary in well doing (Galatians 6:9).

Weariness is an enemy of diligence. An unbalanced life, heavy on work and light on recreation and relaxation, leads to burnout and depression. Diligence requires you to pace yourself and take care of yourself. Practice good nutrition, exercise regularly, cultivate close friendships and resolve lingering emotional issues.

Strive to be trustworthy in all areas of your life.

Trust is essential to leadership. Diligent leaders prove themselves to be worthy of God's and others' trust. When you promise to accomplish something by a certain date, do it. Stick to your word. Follow through on assignments, obligations and responsibilities. Do not make excuses. Show yourself worthy of the calling God has given you. Be reliable.

Diligently pursue God (Hebrews 11:6).

All of us must remember that God rewards those who diligently seek him. As leaders, our pursuit of God must be long, steady, persevering and done with painstaking effort. Anything less does not do his glory justice.