



Follow the Leader

By Greg Wiens

The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development

By Dr. J. Robert Clinton

NavPress, 272 pp. \$15.99

There are a few times in your life when a book will literally change the way you view everything from that point on. This is one such book. If you are committed to work your way through this book, you will be rewarded with a perspective on how God builds leaders that will forever alter your view of leadership. The book is entitled, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*, by J. Robert Clinton.

The ideas in this book were originally part of a course Clinton taught as a Professor of Leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary. He spent six years studying leaders in the Bible and in world history. His research showed that leaders often experience similar phases of leadership development in their lives.

Clinton likens a leader's growth to that of a training room in which there is a line: a timeline that can be segmented into six major phases. When I read this book 20 years ago, I resisted such a linear representation of life, especially my life. However as I have lived, led, grown, coached and developed other leaders, I continue to come back to this simple time line.

The Six Phases of Leadership Development

Sovereign Foundations

God providentially uses both the good and bad experiences in leaders' lives to prepare them for later use under his lordship. The story of David is a good example. Despite having seven older brothers and a father unconvinced of his merits, David felt he was destined for a greater purpose. As he writes in Psalm 139:14, 16, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. ... All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

Inner-life Growth

Leaders seek to know God more intimately through the use of spiritual disciplines. Formal involvement in ministry often occurs in this phase. God patiently develops discernment and obedience through tests; each successive test building on the previous one. If a leader fails or skirts a test, God graciously provides another opportunity for him or her to succeed.

Ministry Maturing

God helps leaders foster their spiritual gifts and navigate relationships within the body of Christ. God is working *in* the leader rather than *through* the leader, and at times the ministry benefits as a result. In this phase, leaders learn to increase their skills for increasing effectiveness. Though the leaders attempt to maximize their impact during this phase, God is trying to teach them that they minister out of who they are.

Life Maturing

Leaders are now mature enough for God to begin to work through them. They have also gained enough wisdom to prioritize their spiritual gifts and understand where to focus their efforts. Times of isolation, crisis and conflict provide perspective on ministry's role in their lives; that the success of the ministry itself is not as important as their relationship with God. The depth produced in this stage gives the leader the insight into knowing what they should not do.

Convergence

God opens a distinct role for leaders that showcases the best of what they have to offer. There is a clear fit between the needs of the ministry and the gifts of the leader. By this phase, leaders are unencumbered by a need to please everyone at all times. They are not encumbered by having to do things that they simply are not gifted to do. This phase is the culmination of the previous four. Many leaders never reach this phase, because they are unable to move beyond the earlier stages.

Afterglow

Leaders receive recognition for a life well lived. They enjoy a wide range of existing relationships spanning a long life, and have accrued a great amount of wisdom that benefits younger leaders. Their impact is indirect through the many leaders they influence.

Between each of these stages there is often a boundary, or a time of isolation. There is also a change of influence when transitioning from one stage to another.

This book can give a leader a sense of direction and coherence to their life. For me personally, it gave me hope as I struggled early in life to find the perfect place of ministry. As I learned, I would not find it for years to come, and my focus needed to be allowing God to work in me rather than through me. As a pastor in churches full of challenges, I was able to view conflict as God's method for refining me. Similarly, times of isolation were simply transitional periods between phases.

The only drawback of this book is Clinton's choice of language. He creates a whole new set of terms to describe leadership development, making it a tough read at times. The effort required for some of the meatier sections will surely pay dividends through the rest of your life.

Whether you are advanced or just beginning in your leadership development, you will find this book a wonderful companion in helping you grasp what thousands of leaders before you have learned: God is patiently working in your life to perfectly equip you to fulfill your intended purpose, it is best if you cooperate with him and grow.

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