

Leadership and Default

By Ken Love

Ron Heifetz in his recent book, “The Practice of Adaptive Leadership” suggests that organizations have a default way of life that becomes the norm. A “default” can evolve from a worldview; past practices that have worked and/or practices that look attractive, though remain untested.

Leaders – not just organizations -- have defaults as well. I want to take a closer look at several defaults I’ve encountered in my coaching and myself. Healthy leaders must take time to think through their defaults and move toward other possibilities.

First is the default of power. Imagine a pastor who is being challenged by others in the church. As tensions mount, the pastor defaults to exercising his power to protect himself and the church’s way of life. The root of the power default must be confronted, as I believe it is almost always traced to fear and insecurity. Some hard work must be done to understand our place in the Body as well as our brothers’ and sisters’ place. All are significant. The Scripture tells us that God does not play favorites. We must experience the convergence of our call and God’s Kingdom plans. We must be content living out our calling; not trying to fulfill another’s! What if we are called to lead a church of 75 but not 300? Can we work through that and live it with joy and freedom?

Conflict avoidance is another common default. Have you realized that healthy conflict could open our eyes and heart to a preferred future? But when a leader succumbs to fear and avoids conflict, the future is blocked. Wow! Are we limiting God’s future movements in our lives because we are unwilling to walk toward conflict?

Another default is “I’ll do it myself” rather than depending upon other people. Yes - delegation and follow-through are time consuming and hard work. However, when this default takes hold, it creates dependency and prevents the body from having a healthy sense of ownership. Remember - creating ownership is a key responsibility of a leader.

Breaking the “do-it myself” default requires leaders to adopt a different worldview and different practices. The different worldview is one of work! Work is a gift of significance and impact. Work allows ownership and builds character. Work, according to the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2 is a gift. As leaders exercising default modes, could it be that we are withholding gifts from those we lead?

You might respond, “Well, I can share the work load with others, but it won’t be done as well as I can do it.” Perhaps getting the job done to your satisfaction isn’t the main point. Are you focused on getting work done or growing people? Sure, maybe an individual won’t perform or produce as well, but in the end, the Body

will be much stronger, further developed and ready for the next challenge. And that is a gift. Are you keeping the gifts to yourself?

What are your defaults? What are the jobs only you can do? What jobs are you keeping from others, and unwittingly withholding gifts from the Body? What new theology about work, about people and about God needs to free you to empower and develop others?

Sure, we will be disappointed at times. Jobs will go undone or partly done. In the end, though, you will become a better developer of people, which in turns expands the Kingdom. And that's our goal, right?