

Growing Into Leadership

By Dr. Gregory Wiens



Recently Mary Kay and I went to an outdoor concert of a band that sang songs from the “British Invasion” of the 1960s. They mostly sang songs from the Beatles and similarly vintage music. In the midst of this good music a woman stood up and began writhing and moving around as if she were attempting to dance 60s style dancing in a straightjacket; she also was playing an air-guitar. Then it happened, I saw she had a big hearing aid on. Now, let me say this in defense of hearing aids, I think they are great and have some close friends who wear them, so I am not criticizing them.

However there seemed something completely out of kilter in a sixty something year old wearing a hearing aid, who was attempting to be a teenager in her dancing and playing an air guitar. Before I dig my hole any deeper, I am 57 so I am in a similar age bracket (that is why I recognized the dances she was grotesquely attempting). I was reminded of 1 Corinthians 13, *“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹²For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*

Had the woman been a teenager, her actions would have been completely in sync. However, Paul says some things change as we age. How have you become more like Christ as you have aged? How has your leadership changed with age? In other words, how do you lead differently now than you did five, ten, fifteen years ago? I know my leadership today is significantly different than it was a decade ago.

Recently, I have read or listened to two very disturbing books entitled: Necessary Endings by Henry Cloud and Tribal Leadership by Logan, King & Fischer-Wright. Cloud’s book was disturbing because it showed me how far my leadership has yet to develop. I will talk about this next week. Tribal Leadership was disturbing because it was as if the authors had studied my life and watched me progress through various stages of leadership. They assert that cultures within tribes (understand these as churches) can go through five levels of cultural development.

Their studies have revealed that leaders (48%) often spend most of their lives in the third stage of leadership, which is characterized by the phrase “I am great.” In this stage leaders push and push themselves to be all that they can be. They read, study, work, change and improve so that they can have a significant impact through their efforts. These leaders often do not have enough time in their lives to get everything done because there is simply too much to do (this is a problem we will deal with in my article next week).

Though these leaders would never say it or may never think it, the corollary underlying truth is that “Others are not great”. These leaders attempt to do everything they can because they are great. However, they have learned that others can’t be trusted because they simply are not as good; so they do it themselves. They often have others on their team that can support them or they may be good mentors for younger people to achieve greatness. But, no one on the team is as good as the leader. This is the criterion for being the leader, being the best of the team. These leaders are often stars and may be pastors of very large churches. They relate to staff and others in dyads. Meaning they continue to relate to a lot of other people, but this stage three leader is at the center...all communication goes through him or her.

However, some of these leaders (22%) have an epiphany in their leadership awareness when they come to grasp the true meaning of working WITH others. The phrase surrounding the next level of leadership is “We are great”. This stage four leader realizes that others are much more gifted than they may be, but together everyone can make significantly greater impact if they can work as equal partners. These leaders learn to form triads rather than dyads. By this the authors mean that the leaders continually try to connect other leaders with other more gifted leaders. They figure out how to create healthy relationships between other team members apart from themselves. They have learned that high impact happens when teams of highly gifted people work in teams where they (as the leader) may not be integrally involved. For this reason, these leaders ironically have enough time to get done what needs to be done, because they are no longer the hub of the wheel.

From my perspective, most churches fall into a level three culture because most of us as leaders function as stage three leaders. In some ways this is like the lady I witnessed attempting to act like a teenager; we need to grow up into Kingdom leaders who lead at the next level.