

A Leadership Development Program for Grace Community School

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Intentional leadership development is not occurring in Christian schools as it should. While one component of this problem is no doubt that it requires an expenditure of time and energy, another might be that there is not an organized program or system in place to develop young leaders within the Christian school. The purpose of this project was to develop and implement a systematic leadership development program for young leaders on staff within our school.

I was able to write and revise a leadership development curriculum using writings from top thinkers and writers on the subject. I taught through the curriculum with three young men on my staff with strong leadership potential, but in need of development. Along the way, I also modified the curriculum and taught it to a group of seniors as an elective class. The program was effective in the areas it covered, but highlighted the need for continued modeling and coaching. I would also like to develop a second-level curriculum, geared toward more specific issues that leaders in a Christian school face.

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I. Introduction

The world, and the Christian school, is in desperate need of leadership. But, it must be the right kind of leadership. The right kind of leadership honors God, restores health and effectiveness to organizations and relationships, and creates a biblical environment in which the leader is the chief servant.

The Christian school needs leaders who distinguish themselves as “great,” as defined by the positive impact they have on the people they lead. Christian schools are even more desperate for great spiritual leaders. The key to the growth and success of a school is good leadership. With great leaders, the school grows. With weak leaders, it flounders and fails.

Leaders within an organization must seek out and develop others. As identified in Jim Collins’ *Good to Great*, those organizations which have become great and maintained greatness over a sustained period of time developed strong leadership within their organizations and promoted that leadership from within. The leaders truly set up their successors for success.

On the whole, intentional leadership development is not occurring in Christian schools as it should. While one component of this problem is no doubt that it requires an expenditure of time and energy, another might be that there is not an organized program or system in place to develop young leaders within the Christian school. This was certainly true of my school, Grace Community School in Tyler, Texas. The purpose of this project was to establish such a system, proposing a model, a method, and the content

of a systematic leadership development program for young leaders within Grace Community School.

II. The Process of Developing a System for Leadership Development

The first step in developing a system for leadership development was identifying what to teach. I did a literature search of curriculum and materials addressing leadership in the Christian school, but I could not find one that I felt brought together the elements of effective leadership. So, I decided to write one.

As I began, I was inspired by the life of David. David was Israel's greatest king. God described David as a man with a heart like His. Although not perfect, David was passionate for God and pursued God in his leadership. David is a great model for the servant leadership which is so necessary for the Christian school.

Psalm 78:72 describes how David led: "And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them." There was something about David's heart that allowed him to lead Israel well. There was also something about the skill with which he led that made him effective. Taking inspiration from this verse, I broke the course into two components: the leader, and the leading. The first part would look at the heart of the leader, and other characteristics that make up a servant leader. The second part would focus on the art of leading.

It became obvious early on that the topic of leadership is enormous, too far-reaching to encapsulate in an eight or twelve week period of time. Therefore, I decided that my focus in this curriculum would be broader, on Christian leadership generally. I would develop a later section that focused on skills specific to the Christian school leader.

The entire course is designed as 12 separate sessions. Part one, “The leader”, makes up the first seven sessions. Part one addresses those characteristics of a spiritual leader who can be used by God to impact others. The first three sessions are dedicated to developing and maintaining the servant heart necessary for Christian leadership. Session four deals with the power of prayer, how to become a prayerful leader who draws near to and accesses the throne of God. The fifth session addresses those relational skills necessary to effectively lead people. Session six discusses effective communication, while session seven exhorts the young leader to be a lifetime learner, developing a spirit committed to personal, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual growth, as well as the discipline and ability to practice personal reflection.

Part two consists of five sessions, and deals with the art of leadership. Session eight teaches the importance of vision for the leader and those he leads. This session emphasizes that, for the Christian leader, vision is actually revelation, given by God rather than generated by man. Session nine takes vision, and teaches the learner to develop a course of action necessary to carry out the vision. Sessions ten and eleven address how to assign tasks and use one’s relationship with those whom one leads to assign tasks and hold others accountable to execute the vision. Finally, session twelve treats the practice of operational reflection, analyzing plans and modifying them as needed to achieve the overall vision.

There is a host of great leadership literature available. Therefore, I supplemented my own narrative with selected readings from some of the literature. In order to respect copyright requirements, I made copies of some sections, but purchased those books that we were going to reference extensively.

I spent the first semester of this school year writing the curriculum, with editing assistance from Dave Medema, my Van Lunen consultant. Dave's insights and wisdom were invaluable; primarily, he helped me with the tone of the curriculum, shifting part of the discussion questions to fewer "thinking" questions (my natural bent) and more "feeling" questions (Dave's natural bent).

I spent the second semester of this year teaching the curriculum to a group of young leaders within our school: my high school guidance counselor, our junior high assistant principal, and our athletic director. My guidance counselor and assistant principal are relatively new in their jobs; the athletic director has been here longer, but was in need of some leadership development. We met once per week in the mornings before school. They came prepared by reading the chapter associated with the session, as well as the supplemental readings. Each session had discussion questions based upon the readings. We discussed our answers to those questions, and how the concepts we were learning applied in their areas of leadership. The discussions were lively and interesting for all of us. We finished the sessions by the end of the semester.

III. Results, Analysis, and Commentary

At this point, it is too early to tell what the overall benefit of the leadership development course will be. As next year unfolds, we will have more insight as to how the course affected the leadership of the young leaders who participated. Their feedback was good. They shared that they learned more about leadership than they knew before, and that many of the readings and our discussion time revealed to them that some of the things they had intuitively believed true about leadership was, in fact, conventional wisdom.

One of the great benefits of the course was that it forced the learners to be intentional about their own leadership styles, their assumptions of what leadership is and is not, and how they can better serve those within their areas of responsibility. By modeling learning and reflection, and experiencing it themselves, the learners realized the value of being a life-long student of leadership.

The course felt too rushed, and there was a lot of reading week to week. In the future, I will revise the course by either paring down the outside reading requirements, or meeting every other week to give the learners more time to read and process what they are reading. As time goes by, I will also work with the men who participated in this course, talking with them about their daily practice, troubleshooting issues, and generally coaching them using some of the concepts in the course. Leadership development is not a one-time, twelve-week process that one can do and then forget. It requires a lot of follow up and mentoring over the young leader's life with the organization to effectively equip. This course gave them a good foundation, however, and allows all of us to have a common set of terms and concepts that will make the mentoring process easier and more effective.

In addition to taking more young leaders through the first program, I would like to develop a second level, a "201-level" course that focuses on teacher evaluation and supervision, financial management, curriculum development, working with a faculty team, and other areas specific to a Christian school environment. I would take this group of young leaders through that course. Hopefully, these courses will be part of an intentional process that will leave Grace Community School with strong leadership for years to come.

