

From Marketplace to Ministry:

5 principles to help leaders in business become effective in church

by Jeanine Parolini

Ted is a great guy and has worked for top firms in his industry. You've got high hopes for Ted and have put him into a high-level role at church to reflect your belief in him. Loyal, savvy, and intelligent, Ted is an answer to prayer. He puts in hours beyond your expectations. He gets the job done. Ted is optimistic and up for the next challenge.

As Ted brings major leadership contributions to your church, have you asked deeper questions:

- What is his understanding of the vision, mission, and values of the church?
- How has he demonstrated these values in his life?
- Does Ted have spiritual authority with those who follow him?
- Are people who follow him being developed holistically or mainly in the area of output?
- At the core, what are his motives for such dynamic determination and activity?

I bring these questions as one who has been making the transition from marketplace to ministry since 1995. I'd been doing strategic sales and consulting for seven years, and when I became a Christian in 1990, I began volunteering in the church right away. Ultimately, I joined the staff of a large midwestern church as a part-time employee, and today I work in another church full-time. During those years, I began to recognize important differences between corporate life and church. I witnessed people who did not embrace those differences, and I saw the pain they caused their followers. Church required a different kind of authority. I've developed five principles that help strong leaders from the marketplace become effective in church ministry.

1. Find out what this leader is "practicing the presence of."

I have learned to ask, *What is this person practicing the presence of?* Is Christ dictating his thoughts, emotions, personality, and will? Or is he practicing the presence of Jack Welch, Lee Iacocca, Donald Trump or some other leader? If I'm not sure, I ask, *Is this person willing and able to put people first and the task second? Can she speak the truth in love?*

Some leaders focus on the task because people are not easy to love. I might say to the person, "Share an example of a situation where it was hard to love someone." I listen for how the leader handled herself and the others involved. Was there resolution? How does she feel about the hard-to-love person today?

If I don't do this, I may put into leadership someone who will only hurt others and not build Christlikeness in them. Sam was a highly capable manager who took a 50-percent pay cut to work in the church and help with computers and technology. When considering buying new technology for the church, Sam wanted to proceed cautiously because there was a lot of money at stake and the contracts were complex. Sam's supervisor, who had also come from the marketplace, was more interested in hearing "can do" than processing "how to." So Sam's supervisor demoted Sam. Today, Sam works for a different church but is still grieved by the way he was treated.

2. Ask a marketplace leader to take time to be trained for church leadership.

Leaders who have built success in the marketplace may feel, *I've got all I need for success in ministry.* Taking time out for training appears to be almost an insult, a step back in their career. To be trained for church leadership, therefore, requires humility. But leaders who are willing to stop constant productivity to get good training bring humility to their new leadership role.

Samuel, Saul, and David had taxing times of training prior to expanding their leadership role. After being called and anointed by God, Samuel and David waited for a long time before stepping into major leadership roles. God was working on their character in the process. This built humility and expanded their leadership capacity. By contrast, when Saul's humility diminished, so did his capacity. Even though he remained king for a time, he lost credibility and spiritual authority with the people.

Training for church leadership is quite different than training most people have received in the marketplace. Marketplace training focuses on goals associated with a profitable bottom line. While the church also needs to be financially stable, the church has a different bottom line: training people in Christlikeness. Therefore, new leaders in the church need to learn skills in developing others. If your potential new leader is less than willing to get additional training, be concerned.

3. Hold leaders accountable for not just their decisions but their motives.

Strong, type-A leaders can use activity and success to keep from looking below the surface of their lives. They have been paid and rewarded for great feats of doing. They often have not taken time or made space to get in touch with their motives and feelings. I am one of these. I am in the lifelong process of discovering my unprocessed motives and emotions and learning to let God work on those.

James and John (Matthew 20:20-28) had unprocessed motives: they wanted to be great and get positions of honor ahead of others. Jesus did not keep their motives quiet; he exposed them and even brought the situation to the other disciples to teach them.

Following Jesus' example, I try to hold leaders accountable not just for their decisions but for their motives. I may ask, "What were you thinking and feeling as you tried to make that decision?"

4. Model how to surrender strategy to the Spirit's leading.

God has given humans great capacity for ideas, systems, and processes. In ministry, great capacity must come from the spirit of God. The Holy Spirit brings the most creative ideas, systems, and processes, and human agendas must constantly be surrendered for the Spirit to work fully.

Gary, a rising leader in the church, had experienced success in the marketplace. At church, he felt pressure to quickly increase the number of people participating in his ministry. Because he wanted to succeed by increasing the number of participants, Gary didn't want to lose anyone. So he encouraged Ken to become a small-group leader in the singles ministry, even though Ken was going through a divorce. Another time, Gary interviewed someone for membership and gave his approval, only to find out later the guy wasn't a Christian.

When major decisions or pressures arise in ministry, I want to model a willingness to surrender our systems and strategies to the Spirit of God. I don't want to sacrifice key values to accomplish what seems humanly important. I may ask a leader, "When faced with a big issue, what is your first response? Tell a recent story about that."

Often, our human agenda sets people in motion quickly and creates the appearance of progress or resolution. Usually, the Spirit's plan requires taking time to pray and to address the root issue. To find the Spirit's plan means we must pray and wait, even when that's difficult.

5. Focus on the church's mission: people development.

The role of the church is to bring people into a transforming relationship with God where Jesus becomes Lord over all areas of their life. Thus leaders in key roles need to model lives that are being transformed by God holistically. Key leaders are responsible not only for tasks; they are responsible to lead people toward Christlikeness.

I have had the opportunity to watch a number of men and women who have made this transition to ministry. Some have gone in the direction of task-based ministry, and role and position became idols in their lives. I've watched them struggle, burning out and searching for something missing from their lives. The leaders who make the transition to ministry successfully learn to focus not on feats of doing but on developing others.

George came from the marketplace to work at my church. I began to mentor him. George felt pressure to produce results in the church. At the same time, George desired to love people. He was confused how to do both. During our time together, George learned to see not just *what* people were doing (or not doing), but *how* they were doing it. He began to see how relational problems were keeping tasks from being done well. He became a safer manager for his employees. In fact, two women in his department who had been friends became tangled in a conflict that caused one of them to want to quit. George was able to facilitate a conflict-resolution process that began to heal the estrangement between these friends.

Today George leads a flourishing ministry that is surviving over the long haul. He continues to humble himself by getting additional training, establishing loving relationships as a key value, growing in spiritual strength and authority, and modeling a life changed by Christ.

I recognize that I have set high expectations throughout this article. I have done that with a purpose in mind, to bring us to our knees and more deeply realize our need for Christ's work in our lives. As we work with leaders transitioning from the marketplace to ministry, we must remember that it is all about finding and selecting people who have open and humble hearts.

—Jeanine Parolini is Director of Adult Discipleship and Small Groups for North Heights Lutheran Church in the Twin Cities (www.nhlc.org). She is pursuing a Ph.D. in organization leadership from Regent University and is married to her best friend, Mark. www.ChristianityToday.com ✪ Copyright © 1994–2002 Christianity Today International