

Leadership and Personal Values

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My father was a man who barely spoke out on issues. His basic premise was that if it did not affect him personally, why bother! I sometimes wondered if he really believed what he was saying because he would also tell me that no matter what type of leader I grew up to be, it would coincide with my personal beliefs. I did not fully appreciate what he meant back then, but I now have a deep understanding of what he was conveying to me. What he was telling me is that whatever leadership values I adopted for myself would go hand-in-hand with my personal values.

The Bible states that “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Knowing your values can enable you to center your life. Covey (1990) states that, “By centering our lives on timeless, unchanging principles, we create a fundamental paradigm for effective living” (p.123).ⁱ “Values are based on one’s beliefs and as we attach meaning to our values we truly can interpret the way we live...this is how we establish the behavior pattern we use for our daily decisions” (Fisher & Martini, 2004, p.2).ⁱⁱ Understanding one’s values can benefit the individual as well as the organization a person leads.

According to Rue (2001) as stated by Hoak (2005), “Considerable personal power is available to each of us when we discover our values, adjust them to make sure they are balanced and healthy, and create ways to honor them through action” (p. 5).ⁱⁱⁱ Understanding personal values can enable you to make informed personal and leadership decisions and take accurate actions that align with what you deem valuable rather than being “like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind...unstable in all he does” (James 1:6-8). Since values are the core of who we are, personal values will influence your leadership and be the foundation of your leadership values. Lee and King (2001) aptly assert “being aware of your personal values strengthens you as a leader and helps you get the most personal reward from your leadership work” (p.55).^{iv}

Bennis (1989) declares, “To become a leader, then, you must become yourself; become the maker of your own life” (p.51).^v Knowing your personal values can also enable you to lead through the turbulent waters of organizational life without compromising your standards. Values provide solid bedrock for organizational decisions. “Values, then, are the beliefs about what means and ends are desirable or undesirable, preferable, or not preferable” as well as a motivator to “keep us focused on why we are doing what we are doing and the ends toward which we are striving” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 62).^{vi}

Hoak further states that values determine whether a person or leader is moral or immoral as well as credible. Therefore, “The first stop on the credibility journey is thus clarification of values” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p.60).^{vii} Values determine what leaders stand for and “ultimately the constituents will choose their leaders based on moral judgments” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p.67).^{viii} No matter what you think or know, personal values and leadership values are fully connected to one another in that “you must first understand yourself, your passions, and your underlying motivations. Then you must seek an environment that offers a fit between the

organization's purpose and your own" (George, 2003, p. 19).^{ix} Leaders are defined by their values.

As Lee & King so eloquently state, "Your core values drive your life decisions and your decisions about when you want to lead, how you want to lead, and how much you want to lead. Becoming aware of them is job number one, because once established, they will strongly influence what you pay attention to, how you make choices, and what you will defend in a conflict" (p. 58).

ⁱ Covey, S. (1990). *The 7 habits of highly effective people*. New York, NY: Fireside

ⁱⁱ Fisher, R., Martini, P. (2004). *Inspiring leadership: character and ethics matter*. King of Prussia, PA: Academy Leadership.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rue, B. (July-Aug 2001). Values-based Leadership. Retrieved from the World Wide Web <http://www.looksmart.com>; Hoak, Susan (2005), Personal and Leadership Values. Unpublished article, Regent University.

^{iv} Lee, R., King, S. (2001). *Discovering the leader in you*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

^v Bennis, W. (1989). *On becoming a leader*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley

^{vi} Kouzes, J., Posner, B. (2003). *Credibility*. California: Jossey-Bass

^{vii} Ibid

^{viii} Ibid

^{ix} George, B. (2003). *Authentic leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.