

How to Be the Boss

Last Sunday I asked a group of people to consider whether they prefer to be leaders or followers. I had them demonstrate the degree of their preference for one or the other by choosing a place to stand along an imaginary line on the floor. 'Followers' definitely outnumbered 'leaders.'

Our definitions of leader vary along with our preferences, but whether we think of ourselves as leaders or not, many of us serve as the head, coordinator or manager of others. The senior pastor, Director of Christian Education and choir director are all leaders, but so are those who coordinate the altar care volunteers or the ushers. The Sunday school superintendent and members of the church council are leaders, but so are those who lead home Bible study groups and those who coordinate human care teams. The church has a lot of people in leadership positions.

When we head a group, our actions affect the others in our group. Some people instinctively use their leadership position and influence to benefit group members. The rest of us need to think about it and practice it. Here are some basic ways any leader, major or minor, can benefit the people in their group.

1. Stay connected to THE Boss.

We are God's stewards in all we do. Regular worship, participation in the sacraments, and frequent time in God's Word and prayer (alone and with others), are always our primary resources.

2. Be a servant leader.

As King of kings, Jesus is the ultimate leader. Yet he came to us as a servant, pointedly reaching out to the most lowly, to the extent of sacrificing his life. No other path is possible for his followers.

3. Know your purpose.

We're often so busy doing things, we overlook purpose. Does your group see its purpose in the immediate task: to complete a lesson, hand out bulletins, or sing an anthem? Or is the purpose connected to results in human lives: to grow in faith and trust, to support meaningful worship or to communicate God's truth? Does your group talk about how their purpose connects with the congregation's purpose? If everyone has their own purpose, they go in different directions.

4. Look for giftedness.



Most people do not have a clear picture of their own giftedness; some have no picture at all. One of the greatest contributions a leader can make is to notice and mention the gifts and abilities of people on their team, and open up ways they can use these gifts.

5. Help people do their jobs.

Be an enabler. Regularly ask, “How’s it going?” and really listen to the answer. Provide training and resources. Minimize or remove roadblocks and hurdles. Go to bat for your team. Kingdom work will flourish.

6. Address problems early.

Most of us prefer to avoid conflict rather than address it. We even feel that’s the Christian thing to do. Speaking the truth in love is harder, but it’s the only way of handling conflict that, in the long run, builds a healthy body of believers.

7. Help people grow.

Look for potential. Some people, even busy people, would actually enjoy more responsibility. Delegate well. Identify and train new leaders.

8. Offer affirmation.

A simple “thank you” acknowledges not only the effort, but the person behind it. Commenting positively on the work accomplished builds that person for further kingdom work. And tying the work’s result back to the initial purpose affirms the importance of the contribution and encourages future participation. It also reminds both worker and boss that the focus is on neither of us, but on the leader we all follow, Jesus Christ.

