



*The Steward Leader:
Transforming People,
Organizations and
Communities*

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A Steward Leader of No Reputation

With years of experience in development and fundraising as well as extensive theological training, R. Scott Rodin offers a new model for leadership that is personal, dynamic and transformative for the leaders themselves as well as for the people they work with and the organizations in which they serve. Combining a biblical picture of leadership with insights culled from the best of leadership literature, Rodin's approach is both theologically rich and practically compelling. In the following excerpt, Rodin confesses his own misunderstandings of Christian leadership.

Over my nearly thirty years in not-for-profit management and consulting, I have held a number of leadership positions, including development department head, seminary president, association president and company president. I have also held important leadership positions such as father, husband and church member.

In my roles as a leader I have been mostly wrong. Now, I was not wrong about everything. In fact, I believe I have been right about a lot of things I have attempted and accomplished in these roles. I could create the usual list of “legacy” items that we leaders make in justifying our time in leading others. There is much that I am thankful for, many moments to treasure and certainly a legacy that I trust will make a difference to generations that follow.

Yet at the very heart of my reflection on my leadership lies these major conclusions: I was wrong in my understanding of leadership in Christian ministry. I was wrong in my expectations of others and myself. And, what may be the hardest to admit, I was wrong in my motives.

I look back and wonder how I went so wrong. I was brought up in a relatively functional home with wonderful parents and a good relationship with my siblings. My career path had certainly prepared me for leadership: years of fundraising experience, a Ph.D. from a leading school in Great Britain, successful work in not-for-profit administration and a knack for strategic planning and vision casting. I had good experience in managing effective teams and working with not-for-profit boards. There was no lack of preparation for the task.

Nor was there a lack of motivation. I had long believed that God had gifted me for leadership. I rose naturally and quickly into key leadership positions wherever I went. It felt right, seemed natural and was usually satisfying and challenging. So it was natural for me to take leadership roles as they came along.

BOOK EXCERPT

R. Scott Rodin (Ph.D., University of Aberdeen) is managing principal of OneAccord NFP, and Senior Fellow of the Engstrom Institute. He has been in fundraising and leadership development for twenty-six years, including serving as president of the Christian Stewardship Association and president of Eastern Baptist (now Palmer) Theological Seminary. He is the author of five books, including *Stewards in the Kingdom* (InterVarsity Press), *The Seven Deadly Sins of Christian Fundraising* and *The Four Gifts of the King*.

My problem was not with preparation, motivation or even with a lack of a sense of calling or lack of a sincere desire to serve God with the best of my skills and abilities. The problem lay solely with my understanding of what Christian leadership is.

At any moment in my trajectory as a leader, if you had asked me for a Scripture that epitomized the leadership ideal, I likely would have pointed you to Nathan's directive to King David, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you" (2 Samuel 7:3). I could identify with David as "God's man at God's time," and I believed that God would pour out his wisdom and favor if I could be such a man. After all, there were kingdoms to conquer and people to be led. There were great things to be done for the Lord, and no vision was too limited, no goal too small.

Reflecting back on my leadership experiences and the leadership I have witnessed in my years of consulting, I would now point to a different verse. In speaking of Jesus' incarnation, Paul tells us that Jesus "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7 KJV). It does not say that Jesus became a man of *bad* reputation or of *questionable* reputation, but simply of *no* reputation. That is, reputation, image, prestige, prominence, power and other trappings of leadership were not only devalued, they were purposefully dismissed. Jesus *became* such a man, not by default or accident, but by intention and design. It was only in this form that he could serve, love, give, teach and, yes, lead.

In reflecting on my years in the seminary president's office, the church and the living room, I have come to the conviction that true Christian leadership is an ongoing, disciplined practice of becoming a person of no reputation and, thus, becoming more like Christ. In his reflections on Christian leadership, Henri Nouwen refers to this way as resisting the temptation to be relevant. "I am deeply convinced," he wrote, "that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self." In the past I rejected this idea outright. Today I see and affirm this way of no reputation that lies at the heart of godly leadership.

—excerpted from part one, *"Becoming a Steward Leader of No Reputation"*