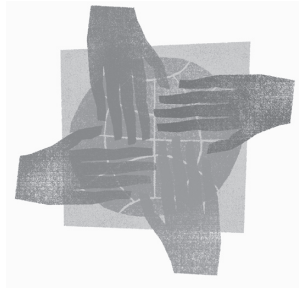


LEADING
ACROSS
CULTURES



EFFECTIVE MINISTRY AND MISSION
IN THE GLOBAL CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

WE LIVE IN THE MOST EXHILARATING ERA of world missions since Acts chapter 2. The worldwide body of Christ is growing rapidly, spreading widely and interacting more than ever before. Missionaries are going from everywhere and serving everywhere. But the globalization of the church also presents dangerous possibilities for crosscultural tensions, especially regarding leadership values. Church leaders must learn to cooperate with people who have radically different assumptions about leadership. From a human perspective, the hope for the worldwide church depends on effective multicultural leadership.

Today's generation of leaders in the global church must learn new skills and be willing to discard some of the styles that made them so effective in monocultural leadership. Learning to lead in the multicultural context will be disconcerting. Geert Hofstede, a pioneer in leadership and culture, writes:

Learning to become an effective leader is like learning to play music: Besides talent, it demands persistence and the opportunity to practice. Effective monocultural leaders have learned to play one instrument; they often have proven themselves by a strong drive and quick and firm opinions. Leading in a multicultural and diverse environment is like playing several instruments. It partly calls for different attitudes and skills, restraint in passing judgment and the ability to recognize that familiar tunes may have to be played differently. The very qualities that make someone an effective monocultural leader may make her or him less qualified for a multicultural environment.¹

The challenge: Christians from every nation are interacting with each other and cross-pollinating the worldwide church. Yet increased cooperation has potential for fresh tensions within the body. High on the list of misunderstandings is a clash of culturally diverse leadership

values and styles. As we understand the cultural underpinnings that influence our views of leadership we will be able to work together with mutual respect.

My hopes for the book: I pray that the ideas presented here will be used of the Lord to foster mutual understanding, cooperation and enhanced ministry as leaders from around the world work together more effectively. Through eyes of faith, I picture multicultural teams partnering with beautiful harmony so that the body of Christ grows and is strengthened in every way. The stakes are high! I pray that believers from around the world will work together with such love and understanding that all people groups will be radically changed by the power of the gospel.

The plan of the book: I write from the perspective of twenty-four years of crosscultural leadership experience. Those years include mistakes, for sure. I also write from the perspective of a social scientist and academician who is committed to the full authority of the Bible. This book will seek to integrate biblical principles of leadership with social science research and experience to the end that the practice of leadership is enhanced and the worldwide body of Christ is strengthened.

INTENDED READERS

As I interact with crosscultural practitioners, I find that virtually all have faced frustrations stemming from leadership misunderstandings. I picture the following people who could profit from the book:

- missionaries from anywhere in the world serving short-term or long-term in any other culture
- students and professors interested in leadership and culture
- mission pastors seeking to implement crosscultural, church-to-church partnerships
- church missions committees that equip, select and support the missionary force
- youth pastors and others who face the challenge of leading cross-cultural short-term mission trips
- pastors of multiethnic churches

- executives of mission agencies who partner with leaders in other cultures
- pastors and parachurch ministers who receive missionaries from another culture
- crosscultural business people working under the leadership of those from a different culture
- theological educators involved in crosscultural leadership development
- crosscultural relief and development workers serving with local leadership
- mission mobilizers from scores of sending countries who seek to challenge believers with God's command to make disciples in the whole world.

DEFINITION OF MISSIONARY

The word *missionary* has mixed connotations. For some people, missionaries are heroes and spiritual giants, worthy to be put on a pedestal. At the other extreme, missionaries are thought to be religious fanatics who destroy cultures and stir up sectarian strife. Many times, they are stereotyped as being from the West and having white skin. More recently the idea has surfaced that all believers are missionaries. I remember a missions conference with the theme, "You are either a missionary or a mission field." I recently visited a church that featured a large sign over the exit: "You are now entering the mission field." Some Christian organizations define a missionary as anyone needing to raise support. A prayer letter from a Christian camp announced that all the camp staff were missionaries, meaning the camp didn't pay them a salary. One of my American friends jokingly defines a missionary as anyone who receives a tax-deductible receipt for the cost of their travel.

Most missionaries are neither spiritual giants nor destroyers of culture. They go out from every country in the world, they have a unique calling, and they are not defined by whether they raise support or not.

*A missionary is anyone, from any country, who leaves home in order to proclaim the gospel, usually in another culture.*² The term is derived from

the concept of “apostle,” or “sent one,” so by definition, missionaries move beyond their home ministries.

In the Old Testament, priests had local responsibility for taking care of the temple, while prophets spoke the word of God both to Israel and to the nations. Jesus’ disciples were also called apostles or “sent ones.” They were called to *leave home*, family and occupations for the sake of Jesus and for the gospel (Mk 10:29). New Testament pastors, elders and deacons were responsible for local house churches, while “apostolic bands” left home to preach the gospel. During much of the history of the church, parish priests led local congregations while religious orders³ carried the gospel to distant places. Put simply, missionaries are people who leave home for the sake of the gospel.⁴ While differences between local and nonlocal ministries become fuzzy at times, the basic distinction helps to avoid confusion of roles.⁵

Christians living or doing business in another country are not necessarily missionaries unless they intentionally seek opportunities to share the gospel.⁶ Yet, communicating the gospel is not the only thing that missionaries do. They do in fact hold verbal proclamation of the gospel together with meeting human need. Through the centuries missionaries have holistically proclaimed Christ as they healed the sick, built schools, provided clean water, initiated agricultural innovation and spoke out against injustice.

When an Indian family moves away from their own culture in south India to the Islamic North in order to do the work of evangelism and discipleship, they are missionaries. Chinese family members setting up a market stall in Afghanistan for the sake of taking the gospel westward are missionaries. An Australian English teacher in China who looks for informal opportunities to share the gospel is a missionary.

DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP

There must be hundreds of definitions of leadership, each one reflecting philosophical, theological and cultural values. People from a goal-oriented culture might define leadership as accomplishing the task through other people. Leaders from a relationship-oriented society would prefer to define leadership as the ability to build alliances and

friendships. Societies with a low tolerance for ambiguity insist on a precise definition, while those with a high tolerance for ambiguity would likely not bother with any definition.

Recently the *U.S. News & World Report* editors selected their choice of the best leaders. They defined a leader as a person who “motivates people to work collaboratively to accomplish great things.”⁷ The selection committee used three criteria for the best leaders: (1) they set direction; (2) by “building a shared sense of purpose,” they achieved results that had a positive social impact that exceeded expectations; and (3) they cultivated a culture of growth by inspiring others to lead.⁸

Since there is no divinely inspired definition of leadership, I will show my theological and cultural bias with the following description: *Good leaders are fervent disciples of Jesus Christ, gifted by the Holy Spirit, with a passion to bring glory to God. They use their gift of leadership by taking initiative to focus, harmonize and enhance the gifts of others for the sake of developing people and cultivating the kingdom of God.*

My prayer is that God will use this book to fan into flame the leadership gifts of people in every land for the delightful and challenging task of multicultural leadership.