



*The Leadership Ellipse:
Shaping How We Lead by
Who We Are*

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[Bob Fryling's] message is two-pronged: you can't be a Christian activist without being contemplative; you can't be a Christian contemplative without being an activist. With winsome accuracy he has joined two ways of life that are often "put asunder." It strikes me as a remarkable achievement.

From the foreword by Eugene H. Peterson, author of *The Message*

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Leading with a Dancing Heart

For about twelve years I had a good friend, Koichi Ottawa, in Japan. . . .

Ottawa spoke with a heavy Japanese accent and felt shy about his imperfect English (that was far better than my nonexistent Japanese). However, he did understand puns, and his keen sense of humor often surprised me with his play on English words. One such occasion was when we were talking about the significance of spiritual formation for leaders. I was lamenting that sometimes I did not see the connection between taking the time to focus inwardly when there were so many things to do outwardly. I was fighting with my need to get things done.

Ottawa smiled at me and said that being in the "presence" of God was necessary for me being a "presents" for others. At first I didn't get it, and I wanted to correct his wrong use of the plural. But then it dawned on me that what Ottawa was cleverly saying was that there is a strong connection between being with God and the ability to do things and be a gift for others. My leadership ellipse was not two separate worlds that didn't inform each other. Rather, how I lead is shaped by who I am. . . .

But the importance of this direct relationship between pietism and practice is not intuitively obvious in our make-it-happen culture.

In our democratic, capitalistic nation there is a dominant story line that not only can we be all we want to be but we can accomplish anything we want to do. . . . This way of thinking and acting has been the tremendous engine of accomplishment in not only business but also in academic research, in sports and even Christian ministries. . . .

I struggled with how to connect an internal life of quiet with an active external life of leadership and service. What I really wanted was a way for my inner life to clearly shape my outer life rather than being separated from it. . . .

Despite my lack of dancing ability, I love the way this image connects soul and body. I enjoy watching people do classic and traditional dances. Their bodies are in tune with their emotions. Their faces are alive and there is energy in their feet. . . .

A dancing heart is a passionate and compassionate heart, a heart that wants to tell others that Jesus is alive, a heart that eagerly seeks fellowship with other believers, a heart that cares about the poor and issues of justice, a heart that gives us focus and context for life. A dancing heart is a heart that reflects our deepest affections.

There are many ways that we can choose to be involved with others that are not only an expression of faithfulness but also strengthen our leadership. . . .

I have always chosen to be involved with our annual inventory and other opportunities for work involvement that I don't have to do. There is always the temptation to do this just to be seen doing it, but when I freely pitch in and help others with their jobs, there is a partnership of involvement that is very satisfying and builds community. . . .

Pursuing this kind of integrity is a long-term and comprehensive endeavor. It necessarily involves spiritual contentment in God, a rejection of that which hinders our growth, a renewed way of thinking and a buoyancy of spirit that energizes us for involvement with others. When we have a dancing heart of inner integrity, we are better able to pursue integrity and involvement in our outer world.

Yet we cannot dance all of the time. Leadership is difficult, and there are many burdens and demands that weigh heavily on us. Even Jesus was prophesied to be a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." A dancing heart is not a sanguine heart or a heart with a peppy perspective that always sees the glass as half full.

Rather a dancing heart is alive with the Word and Spirit of God and being in the presence of God that responds to the people and needs in our world. My prayer in my rule of life is that I want to have "a dancing heart that is attentive to others and engages the world around me with God and his Kingdom." As leaders we may have different styles of dancing, but we cannot afford a life of mere marching that does not get involved with others.

Adapted from chapter 4, "A Dancing Heart: The Practice of Involvement"