

Shepherd Leader

"When he has brought them out, he goes ahead of them and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice."

Karin Syren in an article *Elements of Timeless Leadership* says that great leaders always move out in front, establishing direction, insuring order, and providing correction and regulation as needed. They are always passionate about their followers, great leaders are eager to live their lives in service to their needs.

The image of the shepherd is found throughout the scripture. In the Old Testament there is strong rebuke and warning for bad shepherds, and introducing prophecies of a good shepherd that is to come. Then Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd and in the epistles the notion of good shepherding is extended to those who would be leaders.

The good shepherd as opposed to a bad shepherd shows great concern for the sheep or team. The shepherd provides nourishment and rest, guides, and strategically leading the way. The shepherd is intimately concerned for the safety of each individual in the team; willing to sacrifice comfort and life for the sake of team.

The shepherd leader is a protector, restorer and healer of those within his or her leadership charge, being concerned for those who have lost their way, and includes serving, but it's more than serving.

"The shepherd always tries to persuade the sheep that their interests and his own are the same." Stendhal

Christianity is experiencing a major crisis:

"Men of the cloth are supposed to be guardians of the rule of law and shepherds of the flock. But recent happenings beyond the pulpit have raised serious questions about the leadership values of the men who preach change every Sunday to millions." Daily Nation, 27th July 2011.

The church is divided due to multiplicity of conflicts, overloaded and often ill-

equipped leaders, some are in the gospel business because of money and self-aggrandisement, not as shepherd leaders.

The mega churches and small churches alike, as well as the newly mushrooming ones suffer from the same disease of irresponsible leadership. However, there are those churches and church related organisations whose leadership is based on biblical principles, sound leadership, and managerial values.

The shepherds who lack understanding seek their own gain; and the shepherds with knowledge and understanding go out of their way to seek the individuals that have gone astray to build the flock.

A chief is a man who assumes responsibility. He says, 'I was beaten'; he does not say 'My men were beaten.' Antoine De Saint-exupery

The shepherd leadership style recognises principles that have stood the test of time:

- The leader understands that the individual in the team is not a tool and a means to an end, but a resource in the leader's stewardship care, empowered, entrusted by another; responsible, and answerable to a greater authority.
- The team hear, recognise and follow the voice of their leader: Trust develops with experience gained in relationships. Rather than familiarity breeding contempt, it breeds trust and, with time and consistency, strengthens expectations.
- The leader knows the individual intimately and is able to call each by name, as far as possible. Consistent caring always produces results. Relationship is the key; there is no such thing as an absentee shepherd leader.
- The shepherd leader leads the sheep into the safest, most beneficial conditions available away from harm. Strategically maintaining the lead into safety. With a willingness to lead and match with the team into uncharted waters.
- The shepherd leader is willing to take a personal risk to ensure the immediate needs and well-being of the team. The well-being of those entrusted to the leader is paramount to the shepherd. The shepherd leader is prepared to lay

down his/her life both literally and figuratively.

- The shepherd leader is not motivated by compensation or reward, but has a deep committed interest in the team towards a specific mission, in all purposes bringing satisfactory celebration to the team. This is characterised by longevity and consistent presence, with or without significant compensation.

Sometimes, the shepherd leadership style is dismissed as too simple a style and only good for leading the team to eternal rest and only good for the simple and unsophisticated leaders. It is the passionately brave that take the front to lead and bring the sheep following them.

"The true leader serves. Serves people. Serves their best interests, and in doing so will not always be popular, may not always impress. But because true leaders are motivated by loving concern than a desire for personal glory, they are willing to pay the price." Eugene B. Haebecker in The Other Side of Leadership

The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on.

A shepherd leader visibly steps out in front, finds a better path, and meets the needs of the followers and never being so far out in front, but comes alongside.

Leaders become shepherds when they awaken to the reality that their actions and decisions can improve the quality of their followers' lives forever.

A shepherd style leader is "whole-person leadership" practices a fully integrated life: a matter of head and hand and heart. It's a way of thinking and doing and being.

Victor Hugo observed:

"Common sense is in spite of, not as a result of education."

In our generation of leaders, we need leaders who are educated, endured with much knowledgeable but wise, simple and passionately dedicated, and deeply committed to the interest of the sheep.

The shepherd leader styles incorporates vision and strategy to a destination, motivation to bring the team along, selfless care to provide the best, and instilling discipline to a harmonious team.