

## *Mentoring and Modeling Leadership Character*

**National Association of Christian College Admissions Personnel (NACCAP)**

**Seattle, Washington, Plenary Address**

*This chapter, at first glance, may not appear to relate to you and your specific leadership assignment. The address was given as a plenary address to the National Association of Christian College Admissions Personnel. I encourage you to take the thesis of the chapter, “You can become, for the students you recruit, leadership role models who exemplify, in word and deed, the very character qualities and values you most admire in others” and reword the thesis for your profession. As you read the manuscript, ask yourself how the article’s stated thesis may transfer to you and those you lead.*

I come to you today to encourage you in your leadership role of Christian character formation in students you recruit and service on campus.

Several questions will be asked. A thesis stated. Some assumptions made. However, exploring three vocational vision implications or affirmations in these questions, thesis, and assumptions for you and your primary leadership role on campus will consume most of my time. I welcome your responses to my hunches regarding Christian College Admission Personnel.

**First, the questions.** Who are your leadership role models? What are the character qualities and values you admire most in these individuals? How did these heroes exemplify ethical behavior for you? I’m passionate about my thesis. It is this:

**For the students you recruit, you can become leadership role models who exemplify, in word and deed, the very character qualities and values you most admire in others.**

Stated differently, I strongly believe that you can become leadership heroes for students like your role models were for you.

**This thesis is built on several assumptions:**

- 1. You are committed to recruiting “graduates to be.”**
- 2. You are committed to nurturing these recruits as “leaders to be.”**

### **3. You are committed to much more than meeting your recruiting goals.**

Your big picture for student recruits is their lifelong service to Christ and His Kingdom. In other words, enrollment-driven as you and the institution you serve may be, you are more driven by the development of Christian character and values in these “graduates and leaders to be.”

**This passion, grounded in these assumptions, sets you apart from most of your counterparts in other institutions or organizations.** For Christian College Admissions Personnel, these driving forces embedded in a vocational vision hold you steady when enrollment pressures mount, and institutional expectations rise. Because of this passion and perspective, you belong at the leadership table alongside administrators and faculty when student development and leadership character issues are discussed.

I’m convinced that this emerging vocational vision will impact you profoundly as you seek to increase your leadership effectiveness with students. The motivation for reaching enrollment goals will be deeply theological as you recruit and retain “graduates and leaders to be” for lifelong service to Christ and His Kingdom.

And, in the process, these students with whom you work will pass on to others what has been modeled before them! In turn, they will become leadership role models for others, as you were to them, and as others were to you!

This is what you “see” theologically when you work with students whom you recruit and seek to retain on campus.

For this to happen, in the context of the minutia of your work, what vocational affirmations must you embrace, or theological vision must you “see” regarding the students with whom you work? I think there are at least three:

The EVIDENCE of leading . . . is in the qualitative growth of the led, as individuals and as group members.

The PURPOSE of leading . . . is to nurture good and godly character (2 Peter 3:11-12) in the “graduates and leaders to be.”

The PROCESS of leading . . . is in modeling before our recruits what we seek to pass on to them.

I want to explore with you more fully these affirmations.

**Affirmation #1: The Evidence of Leading** . . . is in the qualitative growth of the led-- as individuals and as group members. In his excellent book, *The Dynamics of Leadership*, the late Dr. Harold Reed (1982) stated, "Leadership is known by the personalities it enriches, not by those it dominates or captivates. Leadership is not a process of exploitation of others for extraneous ends. It is a process of helping others to discover themselves in the achieving of aims that have become intrinsic to them. The evidence of leading is in the qualitative growth of the led as individuals and as group members."

**Your care for others is your measure of greatness.** What a profound concept!

Remember again your leadership heroes. I surmise that these individuals enriched you. You felt better when you left their presence. Stronger. More confident. Assured you could do what was asked of you.

Why is it that we feel very small when we leave the presence of some persons; and very *big* when we leave the presence of others? I want to lead and interact with others so that the latter characterizes me.

The late Robert Greenleaf (1977), in his classic text, *Servant Leadership*, asks the difficult question: "do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?"

Greenleaf and Reed prod us to explore the rich relationship between the leader and the led. Particularly, these men were passionate about values, goals, and attitudes necessary for a leader to exemplify to bring out the best in those served and to equip them to grow as persons who become servants. The question for those of us who work with students is this: **How can we lead and work with students in such a way that they grow in this process?**

My understanding of leadership, as stated earlier, affirms that:

**Leadership begins with humble service to others to enable them, through teaching and example, to live their lives under the Lordship of Christ, to understand, accept, and fulfill their ministry to each other and their mission to the world.**

Kouzes and Posner (1995) believe that "Leadership is an affair of the heart, not of the

head.” They continue, “We suspect the best kept secret of successful leaders is love: being in love with leading, with the people who do the work, with what their organizations produce, and with those who honor the organizations by using its work. Leadership is an affair of the heart, not of the head” (1995).

Over the years, the late Roman Catholic theologian, Henri Nouwen (1975), has influenced me in my understanding of leadership. He opened my eyes to the rich practice of hospitality as a way of life fundamental to Christian tradition for seventeen hundred years of the Christian church. It is a concept that has the potential of transforming relationships with those with whom we live and work.

I often wrestle with the biblical and historical understanding of hospitality in the Christian tradition including its pain, limitations and leadership implications.

Hospitality primarily means the creation of free space – making room where the strange and the stranger can enter and become a friend (Pohl, 1999). It is being to others with whom you live and work, a living witness of the risen Christ. The gift of hospitality is the opportunity we provide for the guest, the stranger, the friend or co-worker to find his or her own way, even in the context of differences of thought or behavior that may exist.

With this perspective, the attitude of hospitality helps us to make room or create space for those with whom we live and work. It often provides the opportunity for those individuals to enter into deeper contact with themselves, with others, and with God. The result is often a healing relationship and the creation of a community of workers. As we cultivate the leadership art of hospitality, biblically and theologically understood, we often serve angels of God without even knowing it. It is an art we need to nurture.

Former pro basketball star James Worthy stated, regarding his University of North Carolina basketball coach, Dean Smith, “He is the greatest man I’ve ever known.” (Worthy, 2015). Coach Smith believed that Worthy’s development as a person was as important to him as his development as a player (Worthy, 2015). Again, Reed (1982) reminded us, “Leadership is known by the personalities it enriches, not by those it dominates or captivates.” The evidence of leading is reflected in the qualitative growth of the led -- individually and as group members.

**Affirmation #2: The Purpose of Leading . . . is to nurture good and godly character (2**

Peter 3:11-12) in the “graduates and leaders to be.”

In the New Testament, Peter asks the character question: “What sort of people ought we to be?” (2 Peter 3:11-12) He is quick to give his answer: “*Men and women of good and godly character.*” Paraphrasing D. L. Moody, “If I take care of my values, my character will take care of itself” (Moody, date unknown).

Character does count! Character is who we are when no one else is around and who we are in the pressure times of our lives Character is the sum of our values, priorities, commitments and decisions. **Character springs from the core values by which we build our lives.** Character captures what it is we most want our children to inherit from us. Character is always the wellspring and foundation of our outward actions (Engstrom, 1997).

Peter identifies the character qualities he believes are necessary for us to be effective in our work and to become leaders of good and godly character. He mentions the qualities of “*faith, goodness, knowledge (or discernment), self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love*” (2 Peter 1:5-7).

This list parallels another list in Ephesians 4:2 – We are to be “*humble, gentle, patient and bearing with one another in love.*”

The Old Testament prophet Micah (6:8) asked, “*And what does the Lord require of you but to act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?*”

People around us too often see or hear the opposite of the character qualities mentioned above. I am convicted when my colleagues hear or see from me a cynical tongue, a judgmental spirit, a negative attitude, a condescending demeanor, manipulation, lying, cheating, or immorality. If we do not guard against them, these negative attitudes and behaviors can eat us – and our co-workers – alive!

In a Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) presidents’ annual conference I attended, Dr. Frances Hesselbein (January 1999), president and CEO of the Francis Hesselbein Leadership Forum, stated, “Leadership is about **who** you are, not **what** you do.”

What are the core **values** of the organization you serve? Have you identified your personal foundational **values** by which you desire to live your lives?

The second of three foundational values for Mount Vernon Nazarene University

affirms: **We respect others.** Therefore, **we value and stand for** 1) A Magnanimous Spirit; 2) A Servant Mentality; 3) A Trustworthy Character; 4) A Positive Influence; 5) A Courteous Response; 6) A Giving Motivation, and 7) An Appreciative Attitude (MVNU, 1994).

These are leadership character qualities that characterize us at our best. They express core values to grow personally and professionally and to help our colleagues to grow.

Character springs from the core values by which we build our lives and nurture others. At our best and when we are truest to our leadership purpose, **leadership character development** in those around us is the heart and soul – the driving force and passion – of leading.

**Affirmation #3: The Process of Leading . . .** is in modeling before our recruits what we seek to “pass on” to them.

With this affirmation, we are confronted with communicating a lifestyle that is self-giving to the core. But how do you communicate a lifestyle to future leaders? How do you teach commitments, priorities, values, and disciplines? How do you pass on a leadership lifestyle that reflects a passion for the qualitative growth of the led and a pursuit for character development in both the leaders and the led? How do you teach a lifestyle?

Whatever else it means, it demands we take seriously the principle of imitation, or modeling before the led what we seek to pass on to them. We can show by example the change we desire to produce in people.

What about ourselves as leaders do we want our colleagues and co-workers to catch from us? Servant leaders are passionate to *pass on* to them a servant spirit. And it is more caught than taught!

Modeling or “exemplifying” is related to mentoring. Mentoring, according to Bobb Biehl (1996) in his book, *Mentoring*, “is a lifelong relationship in which a mentor helps his protégé reach her or his God-given potential.” A mentor communicates in word and deed that character is more important than comfort. Mentors communicate, more by example than by words the truth that those around me need me to be available to them, not to prove how valuable I am to them. We can be known as individuals who go around doing good. (See Acts 10:28.)

These are five basic mentoring questions I like to ask an individual or groups with whom I work:

**What kind of future do you envision for your church or ministry assignment?**

**What are your dreams for yourself or for the group for which you are responsible?**

**How are you doing, personally?**

**How are you progressing in your ministry assignment?**

**How can I help you?**

In the mentoring relationship, the frequently discussed mistakes of a leader are inconsistency, indecision, duplicity, (saying one thing and doing another), lying, lack of staying power, talking too much, and disloyalty.

Some necessary alternatives to the above mistakes are consistency, decisiveness, integrity (what you say is what you do), honesty, tenacity, listening before speaking, and loyalty.

Questions I asked periodically to the leadership team at MVNU (to whom I feel a keen mentoring and modeling responsibility) were:

- 1. Has your faith been strengthened or weakened as a result of your work at MVNU?**
- 2. In what ways do your spiritual gifts match the responsibilities assigned to you?**
- 3. With which of the MVNU core values do you agree with most? Least? Which one needs to be strengthened or eliminated?**
- 4. What questions do you have for me?**

Mentoring agendas differ vastly according to need, purpose, time, money, and personnel. Be proactive; not reactive. Modeling is a primary method or process by which leaders pass on the fundamental character qualities and values needed in future leaders.

I conclude by restating my thesis:

For the students you recruit, you can become leadership role models who exemplify, in

word and deed, the very character qualities and values you most admire in others.

Enrollment-driven as you and the institution you serve may be, you are more driven by the **development of Christian character and values** in these “graduates and leaders-to-be.”

This passion sets you apart from your counterparts in secular institutions. Your vocational vision contains the driving forces within you that hold you steady when the enrollment pressure mounts and when discussions take place regarding student development and leadership character.

Three theological affirmations were explored with you:

1. The EVIDENCE of leading . . . is in the qualitative growth of the led-- individually and as group members.
2. The PURPOSE of leading . . . is to nurture good and godly character (2 Peter 3:11-12) in the “graduates and leaders to be.”
3. The PROCESS of leading . . . is in modeling before our recruits what we seek to “pass on” to them.

As leaders, these leverage-producing concepts and driving forces within us will characterize us at our best and convict us at our worst.

In the midst of your weariness, never forget that your motivation for reaching enrollment goals must be deeply theological. You are recruiting and retaining “graduates and leaders to be,” for lifelong service to Christ and His Kingdom.

Please receive this blessing from me:

*Grace to you. Grace to you. May grace abound in all you do.*

*Grace to do the will of the Father, Grace, grace to you.*

