

SHEPHERDS: Leaders, Managers or Both?

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In the corporate world there is a continual discussion relative to whether there is a difference between a manager and leader? The consensus is that there is a difference. After affirming the similarities between managers and leaders, John P. Kotter, in his book *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management*, writes this: "But despite some similarities, differences exist which make management and leadership very distinct" (p.5 The Free Press, 1990).

The manager usually is involved in scheduling, planning and budgeting; controlling data and monitoring risk factors; seeing to it that employees do their job; status quo is usually a major function. On the other hand the leader is traditionally thought of as a pioneer, dreamer who is giving direction to new goals and projects. A leader is a visionary who is mobilizing people to follow him to new places; implementing changes in order to get to the desired results. When these two functions are taken together they sometimes have the ingredients for conflict.

When a strong leader is on fire for a new goal he can upset or disrupt the orderly, everything in its place, manager who doesn't function when his apple cart is being upset. Managers may cry wolf in an effort to maintain status quo. When there is a tug of war or fight among managers and leaders, the organization suffers.

Well, you might be thinking, what does this have to do with shepherding? It has a lot to do with shepherding because of the complexities in the world which shepherds have to deal. While the ancient and traditional model of the shepherd taking a lazy stroll along a hillside with his sheep following him, doesn't fit the freeways, media madness, and challenges the flock is facing today. The lives and schedules of the flock are beyond identifying all the diversity it exhibits every day. Some members live close to the church building, some live in the suburbs, some live out on acreage, some live in apartments, some live in high-rises. Then there is the diversity of jobs. Let's not forget the diversity of parenting activities and responsibilities.

The diversity being faced by the shepherds of a congregation is, at times, almost overwhelming. I know this from personal experiences serving as an elder for nine years, and working with elders for 47-years. The shepherd's hat rack is full. Just when it appears there are no more hats to wear another one is added. No wonder fewer and fewer men desire to serve as shepherds in the local congregation.

Now to the issue of this article. Is a shepherd a leader, manager or both? My answer is that he is both: a shepherd leads and manages. There are several reasons for my conclusion.

First, however when we define leader and manager we are not equating the local church with a business or corporate model, whose structure we are adopting. Christ is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). It is to God's word that we look into for leadership and management principles, which shepherds need to lead the flock as God desires. It is His flock (Acts 20:28).

Second, it is clear from God's word that shepherds aren't bosses creating rules and issuing orders, like executives do in corporation. Jesus taught that all Kingdom leadership would be the servant model (John 13:1-20). Paul taught that all management practices must be done faithfully by God's stewards (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Third, it is clear in Scripture that shepherds aren't selected or elected by a board of trustees or stock holders. According to Acts 20:28 elders are appointed by the Holy Spirit (i.e. the word of God). Their appointment is based on meeting the clear qualification given by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1: 4-9, etc.). This is in harmony with their responsibility as spiritual leaders and tenders of God's flock.

Fourth, Jesus taught and set the example of what was involved in shepherding: "My sheep hear my voice and follow me" (John 10:7-21). This is a clear indication that under-shepherds, elders in the local church (1 Peter 5:1-7) are leaders. They are leading the flock to the eternal goal—heaven—set by God (John 14:1-9). A shepherd cannot lead effectively without vision, plans, and identified results through mobilizing the flock. In Acts 15:22, 23 we see how elders were involved in leading with a group decision for how to treat the Gentile converts.

Fifth, a major management responsibility of shepherds is feeding the flock (1 Peter 5:1-5). This involves selecting the right "food" (Hebrews 5:11-14, Bible curriculum) for the flock; selecting the times, place and persons involved, if at all, in the distribution of that food (classes, sermons, etc.). This is where delegation is practiced (e.g. the selection of deacons, Acts 6:1-7, etc.). The elders are responsible for the proper management of finances, too.

Sixth, leadership involves two major functions that influence others: what they say and what they do. This is clearly what God intended when He required as a qualification that an elder be an "example" to the flock (1 Timothy 3:1-7). This spotlights the work of a shepherd as a leader. He sets an example by what he says and what he does. Behavior is powerful.

Seventh, shepherds, either by hands on, or through delegation, must manage the "business affairs" of the church. Such responsibilities as signing contracts, meeting local, state and national governmental regulations are management tasks in today's church.

Like it or not, agree with it or not, it is clear from reality, as well as Scripture, that shepherds in today's congregations are challenged to be both leaders and managers. This is inherent in their responsibilities as shepherds of the flock. Their challenge is to be guided by the Chief Shepherd's model and seek to practice behavior that "imitates the "Father's behavior" (Ephesians 5:1). The responsibility is eternally focused: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

No two shepherds are exactly alike relative to leading and managing abilities; all are qualified by God's word to function as elders. Within the eldership wise men delegate among themselves; thus, the function of God's shepherds glorify Him (Ephesians 3:21).