



## **Leadership Letter**

### **Are you self aware?**

**1. Strengths – we all have them:** I was at a leadership meeting the other day where the team needed advice on how to move forward. We prayed, discussed and I challenged them in several ways, with the result that we ended our time with some clear action points. Afterwards one of the leaders encouraged me and said, “Stephe, that was so good, it pulled us together, clarified issues and helped us to know the next steps.” I was working in one of my strengths. There’s all kinds of things I do because they are part of my job but I wouldn’t call them all strengths. For instance one area that actually takes energy from me and requires extra grace is dealing with conflicts. I consider it a necessary and important but don’t get excited about it! Then there is providing financial accountability, giving pastoral care and problem solving. I do all these and every leader has to be involved to a certain extent in these areas but they take energy away rather than pour energy in.

There are a number of tests and indicators that can be used to identify strengths. A popular one is *strengthfinder*, which is put out by the ‘gallop organisation.’ You can fill out the questionnaire on line and it identifies your five major strengths in how you function and interact with the world as an individual. Mine would include words like *Maximiser*: I like to take a vision, work on it, develop it and tweak it so that it becomes the best it can be. *Achiever*: For me this means that every day, even on days off, I have a need to accomplish something. *Arranger*: I love to arrange things – give me a whole host of items to put in a suitcase, topics and issues for a conference, possibilities for a project and I will organise and arrange them so that it all works together. It is taking the complex and chaos and bringing order. *Learner*: I love learning – give me input! Without it I dry up. *Focus*: I have the ability to focus and see what’s important, gear my energies and attention to see something come about that requires concentration. Its helpful to know what you can do and the strengths you bring to the team. Do the test yourself and discover more about yourself. <http://www.strengthsfinder.com/home.aspx>

When I was a national leader in Scotland back in the 80’s, I was part of the UK leadership team. Lynn Green was chairing the team at the time and I received so much encouragement from being there. In 1990 he invited me to take on this UK role. In response my question was, “What strengths are you looking for?” As I compared myself to Lynn I realised I was very different in makeup and gifting. I continued to say, “I’m not a charismatic leader, I’m not a good orator, I’m not a wild visionary leader but I can build team and facilitate visionary development.” To cut a long story short I got the job. We need to know what we can do and what we can’t do.

**Staffing by strength:** One day Jesus stepped into Peter’s boat and rocked his world. Peter was a fisherman, who knew his trade well. Peter had experienced a fruitless night of fishing and Jesus asked him to launch out into the deep water once again. Having swallowed his pride, Peter set out and experienced an amazing catch of fish. Jesus turned to Peter and said, “I will make you a fisher of men.” Jesus saw Peter’s strength of gathering people and his gift of verbal communication and prophetically called him forth into his ministry of being a leader

and evangelist. He had all kinds of weaknesses and needed discipleship but Jesus looked at his strengths first.

Barnabas needed a co-worker and thought of Saul, who was known as a murderer, a trouble-maker and one who'd stirred up the crowds even as a new believer and had to be smuggled out of the city. Saul was outspoken and some found him very difficult to handle. This was the guy that came to Barnabas's mind but he chose to think of his strengths: single-minded, courageous, visionary, verbally articulate and very passionate for the growth of the church. So he recruited him and worked on his weaknesses as they went.

How do we see ourselves? How do we see others? Do we see the potential and strengths? Or do others weaknesses disqualify them in our eyes?

To identify my strengths, it may help to answer the following questions: How have others encouraged me in my leadership? What comes easily to me in my leadership roles? What aspect of leadership do I enjoy? What do I gravitate to in my leadership? Where do I experience an anointing in my leadership?

**2. Weaknesses – we all have them:** We don't usually look for tests to discover our weaknesses but tests we take to reveal strengths, personality, and gifting also show by implication what you are not so good at. Here is a challenge for you: Take a few minutes and write down 5 strengths and 5 weaknesses that you are very aware of right now.

Don't read on until you have thought of some strengths and weaknesses! So stop and think.

Which came easier? Hmmm. Does that tell you anything?

It's important that we are aware of weaknesses and we do need to work on them but not to the extent that our strengths aren't progressing. There is a need to bring damage control to our lives so that our weaknesses aren't hurting anyone, ourselves included. However it is important to note that our strengths pushed to an extreme become weaknesses.

- Decisiveness becomes impatient or unilateral decision making
- Getting things done becomes insensitive to others
- Caution becomes road blocking
- Enthusiasm becomes manipulation
- Loyalty and support become conformity
- Orderliness becomes perfectionism

So its good to remember that our strengths need to be linked with the strengths of others, so our strength doesn't move into weakness.

**Staffing our weakness:** Let's observe those who have strengths in the area of our own weaknesses and then invite them to join us. When I took on the leadership of YWAM Scotland, the first person I looked for was someone who was more pastoral than I was. The leader who I recruited and worked with me in this role was such a complement to me. It was like he had a sign on his forehead, "Come and pour out your heart to me" because that's what people did. I also needed others who were more detailed than I was and who could plan projects, organise finances, generally administrate the work and establish management structures.

There are different kinds of weakness in personality. For instance in Myers Briggs, the way we perceive or experience the world is called either “sensing” or “intuition”. The way we decide is called, ‘thinking’ or ‘feeling’. In Myers Briggs theory these four traits are put into an order of strength in each personality known as dominant, auxiliary, tertiary and inferior. If your dominant is ‘thinking’, your inferior will be ‘feeling’. These inferior areas or weaknesses are seen as areas that need growth. Maturity means therefore that we can respond in all four functions in the appropriate way, depending on what is required.

**3. Limitations – we all have them:** We might aspire to be a superman or superwoman but unfortunately we are limited to be mere mortals. Even in our areas of strength, we have certain capacities and if we’re not sure where that boundary line is, we can be in danger. In a leadership team meeting some years ago, the question was asked, ‘How are you doing generally in life and relationships?’ The response given was ‘I’m fine’. Everyone was fine, including me. A few weeks later one of the leaders had to take 6 months out of ministry, due to burn out. So what was going on when that question was being asked? Was the leader lying? No, he was just not aware of his limitations.

The other day I was talking to a friend and I mentioned that I hadn’t been sleeping well. He asked further questions, which drew out the fact that I was in an extremely busy season, with a number of the hats I wear converging at the same time. This meant it was a more stressful season for me than normal. The difficulty is that stress isn’t always felt initially. It creeps up on us. Only when we list down the issues that we are carrying do we begin to understand and have an awareness of what is going on and then perhaps feel the stress a little more. So in response to this revelation of the amount of stress I was under, I wrote a prayer of release to pray daily. I recognised that I actively need to let go of trying to control everything and find solutions. I had reached my limit - the danger point. I needed to know my capacity.

These are some questions I can ask myself: How many balls can I juggle in the air at any one time? How many relationships can I maintain? How much time away is manageable and is there grace for? How many hats or roles can I wear in any season? How much time can I serve in my ‘minor’ area of ministry without being released into my ‘major’ area? When we know our limitations, it’s up to us to create the boundary lines and keep to them.

**4. Blind spots – we all have them:** I was driving along the main road in town last week when a driver pulled out right in front of me. We both slammed on the brakes and he apologised profusely. Somehow I was in his blind spot and he hadn’t seen me coming. Blind spots are dangerous and life threatening. When you are driving, looking in the side mirror to see if anything is coming just isn’t good enough. We need to turn our heads and look clearly over our shoulder to see the full view of the road. Often when backing out I need someone in the back seat to let me know if it’s clear to go. In order to overcome our blind spots, we need others help and feedback. Fortunately others can often see where we are blind! The problem is that our cultures often don't encourage feedback and so without asking and pressing for input we don't receive it.

I was recently watching ‘American idol’ on TV. It is a programme where a team of experts in singing and performance, audition acts to appear on the show. It was so embarrassing. The poor guy auditioning was tone deaf and couldn't sing in tune but he was so pumped up and believed he was the best thing going. His family was also there watching and cheering him on. I guess you’d have to call this a deaf spot!

Here's a challenge for you. What blind spots have been pointed out or have you discovered over this last year? Here are a few that I have become aware of (of course there are others that I am still blind to – that's why I need people close to me to point them out in a loving way):

- As an introvert, everything is sorted in my head and I think I have communicated clearly but feedback tells me that I haven't!
- I have a limited vocabulary of emotional intelligence. I feel good, bad or ugly – which means I have blind spots in terms of labelling my personal expression of emotion and understanding the emotions of others.
- I am generally over optimistic in terms of what I believe I can squeeze into a week sometimes with negative results.
- Sometimes I am not aware of how stressed I am and it often takes someone else to point out that I need to take a break or slow down. (something that I don't really like doing!)

So here are four dimensions that make up who we are – strengths, weaknesses, limitations and blind spots. The more we grow in understanding of these dimensions, the greater will be our ability to work effectively in team. The more aware we are of these four areas, the more we can maximise strengths, choose jobs that are fulfilling, staff our weaknesses, live with less stress, and generally be a better leader.

Happy discoveries.

Stephe