



## **Leadership letter**

### **Are you in control?**

Some years ago when our son was quite small, my wife was running the Christmas programme at church. All the children had their various roles in the nativity play and our son was to be Joseph. Everyone is dressed up and ready to go. Rite, my wife and Joseph my son are sitting with all the cast with a few minutes before the play was to begin, when Joseph leaned over to his Mum and said, "I am not going to do it." To which she replied as any Mum would, "Oh yes you are. There is no one else available and you know the part. You need to change your attitude and be involved." "I'm not going." The situation is getting desperate so Rite thinking hard, comes up with a plan. "I will give you 50pence if you play Joseph in the play." "Make it £1 and it's a deal!" The question is, who was controlling or trying to control whom?

Another situation comes to mind, where a ywam staff person was not doing well on the team. She hadn't been home for 3 years and was now in the middle of a fresh commitment. However she poured out her heart to us and felt the need to go home and visit her family and supporters. The problem was she couldn't face the base leader. She even had the money for her flight that had been given her recently. The last time she mentioned the idea, she was told that commitment comes first. She was needed. Now emotionally struggling and not know what to do, she came to us. My wife offered to go with her to talk to the leader and in 45 minutes it was settled. She was to go home for a season. Was the leader controlling? Principled? Lacking emotional intelligence? Or what?

Control is a word that has been banded about a lot over the last few years. Its almost a death blow to a leader – "Oh yes, he's a controlling leader!" or "She is a control freak," meaning that there is no hope for him or her. No one wants the "C" word attached to their resume. It has become one of the unpardonable leadership sins and one that will cause others to write the leader off.

Control is a way of thinking, an attitude, a way of doing things, and a perspective in how you relate to others. One of the difficulties is that there are so many interpretations of what control is, that two leaders can look at one another and accuse and label the other as controlling leaders!

For instance - One leader will call the other leader controlling if he/she is autonomous and seen to be making all the decisions. The other leader says, no it's controlling when you have to submit important decisions to a higher authority before implementing what you consider the word of the Lord.

Here are a few questions to ask yourselves. Make up your own mind if you feel these are part of being controlling or bring you into dangerous ground where control can be a temptation.

1. I like to involve many in the process towards decision making and once I have the feedback, I go ahead and make the decision.

2. I make decisions according to the policies that have been set and rigorously stick to them.
3. When I hear from God on an issue, it makes my decision making for the ministry a lot easier and quicker.
4. As a leader I guard the vision and values and so if I don't understand a vision or don't see its relevance right now I don't give my support.
5. When God gives a focus of vision for a season, I tend to say no to everything else.
6. Leadership involves placing people into roles and I create openings and organise people into those roles in order to be effective.
7. My view of things tends to be right most of the time.
8. When I am away or take a break, as a responsible leader, I check how my leaders are doing regularly.
9. A leader is responsible for the focus and results of each ministry under their influence and therefore they need to keep informed and be able to steer each ministry towards the overall goals.
10. I have made and keep connections with many key leaders in the nation. These are my friends and not contacts I can delegate or pass on to others.
11. Vision for my base, nation or ministry comes from my prayer and commitment to seek the Lord. For vision to be received from outside there has to be a process where it is shaped to become culturally relevant and locally owned.
12. As a leader over my base, nation, region, ministry I decide what we do and don't do, whom we accept on staff and what ministries we commit to.
13. I find myself talking mainly about my own ministry.

Compare the answers to these questions with the following:

1. I apologise to leaders and staff whenever I make mistakes. This means I find myself apologising regularly.
2. I repent regularly with leaders and staff as I seek the Lord.
3. I am open to new ideas, suggestions from any staff member or leader and often implement them.
4. I am approachable and able to discuss difficult issues amiably.
5. I ask for feedback in my leadership regularly and people feel free to do so.
6. People who hold me accountable are able to say no to me and I follow their advice even when it is difficult to do so.
7. In making decisions, I always ask myself, "Who else needs to be involved in this decision?"
8. My leadership team has clarified what decisions I can make alone, what needs consultation, and what needs consensus.
9. I am aware that my truth is not necessarily THE truth and that my hearing from God isn't 100% infallible.
10. I see my role as a door opener rather than a gate keeper. Sure boundaries and specific focus' are important but not to the extent of ostracizing those who don't think exactly the same.

Questions can be interpreted very differently, and so you may have a different perspective from me. But hopefully these questions got you thinking about your motivation and involvement of others in your leadership style.

Let's take a quick look at a few control styles according to me. (I am open to be rebuked!)

1. **Classic control:** Jezebel – we are all familiar with this controlling queen who had to have everything done according to her desire. This is the person with a strong personality, loves to be in charge, makes all the decisions, is often intimidating, causing fear and threatening consequences if they are not obeyed. They tend to be dictators, gang leaders, or much closer to home - authoritarian husbands or wives, dominating fathers or mothers, or over the top bosses and leaders.
2. **Stronghold control:** Satan – profiled as one who kills, steals and destroys. But also is subtle in the way he creates opportunities to hook us to habits through our weaknesses and then we have given authority over to him to control us. Any weakness given over to the enemy and not yielded to God becomes a stronghold or what John Ortberg calls a signature sin, that holds us back, hinders and controls our behaviour.
3. **Perfectionist control:** Paul – couldn't see John Mark as an asset to the team and broke relationship with Barnabas over it. Perfectionists have very high standards and don't allow others to get involved unless they jump through hoops, are checked up on, corrected or had their work re-done because it wasn't done to the right or adequate standard for the perfectionists' satisfaction.
4. **Wheeler-dealer control:** Laban – held back knowledge from Jacob about his plan to marry off his elder daughter first. These leaders are deceptive to make sure they get the outcome they desire. They control the elements, the relationships, they hold the trump card, and steer the course of events from behind the scenes.
5. **Agenda control:** Pharisees - these people are law makers and policemen (or women) for others to keep these rules. They hold and keep to the agenda – there's no flexibility, and no adaptations. They are legalistic and keep you accountable to what they hold as 'right.'
6. **Conversational control:** Peter - tried to steer conversation and contradict what Jesus was saying about the style of death he would go through. Jesus had to confront him and say that he didn't have God's interests at heart. We can be so full of our opinion that we push it onto others. Have you ever had someone answer questions for you, make commitments for you and steer the conversation so you never really get to speak?
7. **Emotional control:** Delilah – cried and cried until Samson was worn down and shared his secret of power. Emotions can be manipulating and used to get our own way. We have all seen the child throwing a tantrum on the supermarket floor – its uglier when it happens in adulthood.
8. **Personality control:** Every personality can use a form of control. The DiSC profile has four personality types and each one has its temptation to control:
  - a. D – directive, dominant, telling you what to do and how to do it
  - b. I- manipulating, persuading, optimistically overwhelming you with their ideas and opinions that get you to nod your head in agreement
  - c. S – their processing and slowness of approach, causes a hold up to decision, rigidity, caution and stubbornness to what has worked in the past and therefore why change now

- d. C – their clinical, logical, implications thinking, quality control, work to rule approach.
9. **Passive control:** Where people delay making decisions and everything has to come back to them because nothing is delegated clearly. They are always nice to talk to, easy going and look like team players but actually control by holding all the strings under the table. They might not even realise they're doing it. They leave everything to the last minute where others can't just step in and do it, and they often then step into the need and do what is necessary.

So how do we avoid control? Using the appropriate leadership style for the appropriate context. So before you speak, decide, give instructions, organise, whatever... ask yourself, "what is the appropriate approach here?"

The real problem is this: Many who have a problem with control don't realise it. Control is a blind spot for them. So by definition they can't see it. Someone has to tell them, which can be scary if they are the intimidating classic control types. How do we confront control? With humility, calmness, firmness and the fear of God.

Servant leaders: treat people as valuable individuals who have gifts and strengths, who hear from God, have thoughts, feelings, visions and dreams. Servant leaders aren't doormats, wishy-washy decision makers, people pleasers and led by what others are saying. No, but they hear from God, love people, and use the appropriate decision making process to move the ministry forward in God's timing, with ownership from the team.

As I write I am in the midst of talking to my son about his wedding plans later in the year. Suddenly I am aware that I have specific dates that I want him to choose between as it would be difficult to change some of the events in my calendar or have to absent myself from meetings. Control is concerned about my comfort, happiness and opinions rather than those of others. Conviction hit.

May we continue on our journey of the loose grip – not having to control everything and everyone in order to feel at peace! Wow am I glad that Jesus doesn't have a speck of control in his way with us – that's why it's such a joy to serve and obey him.