



Leadership Letter

Do you share leadership?

How do you share leadership? Some would say, you are either the leader or you're not, you can't share it! In the times when Kings ruled nations, there was no question of sharing the leadership. His word was the law and you went against it at your own peril. Today we experience a continuum of leadership styles from centralised to decentralised with varying degrees of movement towards one or the other.

For instance, the government in the UK has a prime minister who operates with a group of members of parliament (MP'S) called the cabinet, each of whom have specific roles in governing the nation. This prime minister has no final decision making authority, but works with his cabinet to bring proposals to the house of commons where voting takes place among the 650 members. Compare this to the president of the US who does have the final say in certain decisions or Switzerland where there is a confederation of 26 cantons that restrict the national authority to an absolute minimum and have established a very flat organisational structure.

'The starfish and the spider' by Brafman and Beckstrom looks at the revolution taking place through decentralisation. The book gives an example of the Spanish army who defeated the Aztecs in a few years by killing the leadership but couldn't defeat the Apaches in 200 years because killing one leader had the result of another immediately stepping forward. The Apache's had no hierarchy or top down structure, no headquarters, no fixed protocol and so like the starfish that reproduces itself even when one leg is cut off, they would function effectively even after splitting them into many groups. So how should we function in our various teams and global ministry?

Let's consider the structures in YWAM?

- a. Pioneer teams – these tend to be more dependent on the leader who carries the vision initially and are usually fairly small but very relational.
- b. Base teams – as pioneer teams settle and grow from one focus to multi-focus, they form bases with their own leadership teams that function as decentralised communities.
- c. Geographic leadership teams – as bases relate together in nations, areas & fields, eldership teams or circles form to hear the word of the Lord, share the corporate story, support and encourage development and underline our values and vision.
- d. Family of ministries - a global ministry like Kings Kids or Frontier missions seeks to connect and resource their teams involved in ministries world wide, moving across fields, areas and nations.
- e. Ministry Networks – a network circle forms in order to share a similar vision or ministry, connect, support, learn, grow and be stimulated by one another.

All these various teams have some form of leadership or coordination and we are all aware of the expectations that can be present in the group towards the leader. They want to know where they are going and therefore need a visionary leader to point the way. They want someone who is relational that will give them attention and listen to their needs and personal vision plans. It's also important to have someone that understands the need of organisation and systems, so that everything runs well and smoothly. And of course they need to hear from God so that they know that they are clearly on track. The list can be long and we know that no **one** person can ever have all the gifts required to lead a team and meet the expectations of everyone. It takes a team of differently gifted leaders.

Carl Tinnion, one of the national conveners in YWAM England, has been birthing a series of new networks throughout the nation (14 at the last count). They are peer led with everyone given an opportunity to have a voice and contribution. They meet on a regular basis at least 3 or 4 times a year and they discuss best practice, lessons learned, new ideas and brainstorm together. It's a relational approach with sharing and praying. It has open membership and is coordinated by a facilitator(s).

Is this kind of structure possible in bases and geographic leadership teams, where no one has overall responsibility, no one has the final authority and all roads don't lead to one individual? This requires a very flat structure. This also requires a level of maturity where no one is moving in independence or seeking to control others but in humility prefers one another and lives in relationship and mutual accountability together. The biggest challenge for leaders in this kind of structure is to be proactive, intentional, stepping up to responsibility of fulfilling assignments without have a title to go with it.

We are talking about developing leadership teams that understand team and the giftings within that team. As they function together they guide, protect and care for a geographical area or global ministry. When this group of leaders gathers together it becomes an eldership circle that embraces the breadth of ministries and teams and seeks God for wisdom in serving and equipping them.

Here are four key areas in the functioning and outworking of an eldership circle:

Affirmation: There is power in affirmation, in blessing, in speaking life into the lives of one another. The example of geese is often used as a metaphor of a well functioning team. One of the lessons we can learn from them is their habit of 'honking from behind' to encourage their leaders up front. Sadly we don't do this enough to leaders up front, to peers or to those we serve. Another well-known story is that of the prince who looked and felt like a frog but only the kiss of a beautiful maiden could turn him into a prince again. The problem? Cute chicks don't kiss frogs! That's where we can come into the picture and fulfill the very important ministry of encouragement. Words of affirmation from anyone on an eldership will make more difference than you know. Time is valuable and time given to an individual in this way adds value

to them.

Ambition: As soon as Jesus started his earthly ministry he recruited followers. How did he do that? - by having ambition for them. He spoke prophetic vision over Peter and gave him a picture of his future catching men rather than fish. We are to do the same for those we relate to and especially the emerging generation. As leaders on eldership circles, one of our major callings is to make room for and help to champion and release young leaders. The expectation principle states: people will rise to the level of genuine expectation that someone they respect places in them. So our job as leaders is to believe in people and see them fly. Some of my most encouraging emails are from people who thank me for giving them opportunities and believing in them as leaders. What a joy it is to invest in people this way.

Accountability: Some years ago, as a mission we decided to remove the word autonomous from our dictionary. We are called to be decentralized but not independent or autonomous. It is accountability that helps to shape us and keep us on the right track as we problem solve, make decisions and develop vision. Every leader has strengths, weaknesses and an accountable relationship will help develop their strengths and help to manage their weaknesses. Every leader also has blind spots. When the blind spots fall in the area of their strengths, it's our job to affirm them and draw those strengths out. When the blind spots fall in the area of their weaknesses, those in relationship can speak into their lives with wisdom and gentleness.

Often in a flat organisation, leaders need to be intentional about consulting with other leaders, processing their thoughts and opinions, sharing their decisions and plans, and generally seeking out the wisdom of others. As proverbs tells us, 'it's in the abundance of counselors that we find victory.' An eldership circle should be the place to find that victory. Where we have teachable hearts and recognise that we can do nothing on our own initiative, as Jesus did when he was on earth, accountability becomes a very positive word. Where there is accountability there is generally also relationship and ownership.

Authority: Matthew 23 is the chapter where Jesus speaks out woes to the Pharisees who put heavy burdens on the people and Mark 10 is where he addresses his own disciples not to 'lord it over people but to serve them.' So what authority do we have when it comes to making decisions, dealing with difficult issues and planning for the future? In response to Jesus' word in Matthew 23:8-10, we are moving away from titles or positional authority. When you have to use positional authority to get something done you tend to lose it anyway. People commented about Jesus as he started ministry, that he spoke with authority and not as the scribes and Pharisees. That's the kind of authority we want to develop - spiritual authority. This is an authority that you develop over time, where others see a life worth emulating, a life of integrity, a life full of experience in hearing God and implementing what he says with good results. Where spiritual authority is seen, people listen and respond. Authority is something we earn through Godly living.

Very closely aligned with spiritual authority is relational authority. Where hierarchy is removed and the organisation becomes flatter, there is a greater reliance on developing close relationships. An eldership circle seeks to establish relationships with leaders and staff by giving words of affirmation, sharing ambition and providing accountability. This kind of relational authority is earned by coming alongside as a *'paraclete'* – following the example of the Holy Spirit who comes alongside each of us.

How is an eldership circle organised? Every team needs a convener or facilitator to invite members, help to organise and emcee the meetings. This leader isn't solely responsible but works with the whole group to give shape to the meetings, hear the word of the Lord, make important decisions and help to bring focus and direction.

Outside of the circle meeting, the convener(s) ensure that the leaders and staff in their sphere of ministry are connected and joined up in multiple expressions. This includes convening ministry, leadership and family/staff gatherings. Any member of the circle, can of course be available to staff to talk to between meetings but often the convener acts more as a point person, who can connect the individual to the most appropriate leader in the circle.

As the leadership circle meets, the convener(s) facilitates the team in recognising their gifts and sharing out specific assignments. The convener gathers agenda items and especially makes room for time in the Lord's presence, to intercede for the ministry, staff and geographic area, and to listen for the word of the Lord. A major agenda item is to champion new vision for projects, locations, networks and ministries and appoint leaders appropriately. Every circle that meets together forms a micro community and has the opportunity of modelling unity in the team through sharing openly and vulnerably, praying and supporting one another and being seen as a group that embodies a culture of honour. As the team travel, visit, mentor, teach and interact they are able to encourage every part of the family to hear and process the word of the Lord and live out the YWAM values.

So if you are part of a leadership team or eldership circle, step up to the high calling, put on that corporate hat of ministry responsibility, carry the load with the other members and move in your gifting on the team. Happy leading and eldering.

Merry Christmas

Blessings

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