"Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda" Interaction

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Becoming a Person of Influence Interaction

Point #1. Spiritual Leadership Defined

Blackaby and Blackaby (2001) define spiritual leadership as: "Moving people on to God's agenda" (p. 20). They further expound on influence as "[moving] people from where they are to where God wants them to be" (p. 20) and indicate this can only be done with the help of the Holy Spirit (p. 21). The authors posit that leaders ought to be working from God's agenda rather than their own (p. 23). They say, "The greatest obstacle to effective spiritual leadership is people pursuing their own agendas rather than seeking God's will" (p. 23).

Interaction with Point #1

I agree with this point based on 22 years in campus ministry. As a Chi Alpha missionary, I meet students at various places on the faith spectrum. They may be anti-God, have no faith, or belong to another faith. Some are nominal Christians who never fully trusted Jesus. Others are marginal Christians, experiencing faith through their family but not for themselves. Others are fully committed and lack only in leadership. My role as a campus missionary is exactly as described by Blackaby and Blackaby: moving them on to God's agenda. The authors made a powerful declaration:

> If Christians around the world were to suddenly renounce their personal agendas, their life goals and their aspirations, and begin responding in radical obedience to everything God showed them, the world would be turned upside down. How do we know? Because that's what first century Christians did, and the world is still talking about it (p. 29).

Healthy churches offer glimmers of this "radical obedience." Healthy Chi Alpha communities show promise for turning their campuses upside down. Why is community and campus

transformation rare rather than realized? Because radical obedience is costly. Genuine spiritual leadership is costly.

Point #2. Leader's Preparation Described

Blackaby and Blackaby describe the importance of leadership preparation and development to organizational health in the statement, "The greatness of an organization will be directly proportional to the greatness of its leader…Therefore, the best thing leaders can do for their organization is to grow personally" (p. 31). They stress the impact of past hurt on how leaders lead and point out that many very successful leaders lived very dysfunctional lives. The authors claim, "So many of history's great leaders suffered major failures, crises, and disappointments in their development as leaders that these traumas almost seem prerequisite to leadership success" (p. 41). They clarify that hardship and failure do not produce leaders automatically, rather people's responses to experiences, both good and bad, determine their success or failure as leaders (p. 41). Blackaby and Blackaby say, "Leaders are not people who escape failure, but people who overcome adversity" (p. 42).

Interaction with Point #2

I experience the validity of this point every year in the lives of student leaders. Many of my most productive leaders have survived childhood trauma – physical abuse, emotional abuse and manipulation, and divorced or dysfunctional parents. The wounds of the past drive them to succeed in the present. As they mature in faith and spiritual health, I walk them into God's agenda for their lives. The maturing process is slow and mundane. We have a truism in Chi Alpha: "It is a garden, not a factory." People grow at the speed of seed. The authors address the process in a thoughtful statement: "When spiritual leaders wait patiently on the Lord, regardless of how long it takes, God always proves himself absolutely true to his word. Sometimes the time

it takes God's promise to be realized can seem eternally long, but a promise fulfilled by God is always worth the wait" (p. 51). Later Blackaby and Blackaby talk about the ordinariness of the maturing process. "Most character building does not occur while one is attending a seminar or taking a course. Rather, God uses everyday events, both good and bad, to shape leaders" (p. 54). Leadership preparation is not glitzy, but utterly ordinary, like sand laid down by a stream that forms bedrock given enough time and pressure.

Point #3. Leader's Vision Corrected

The authors describe the many sources of leader's vision, both the good and the bad in chapter four. They claim counterintuitively that past success can be an enemy of healthy vision. How can past success be the enemy of future success?

> Max Dupree warns: 'Success can close a mind faster than prejudice.' A leader may be reluctant to reject previously successful methods…It's too risky. Peter Drucker observed: 'No one has much difficulty getting rid of the total failures. They liquidate themselves. Yesterday's successes, however, always linger on long beyond their productive life' (p. 58).

Blackaby and Blackaby caution church leaders in formulating vision based on need. They warn against "basing their ministries solely on meeting the needs being expressed by people. While churches must be sensitive to the needs in their communities, a need expressed is not the same thing as a call by God" (p. 61).

Conversely, the authors caution against basing vision on available resources. They indicate that vision does not serve resources, rather resources serve vision (p. 64). A church can become burdened by utilizing resources instead of following their God-given vision.

Interaction with Point #3

I am currently suffering under the burden of an unlooked-for resource that has driven vision. A Chi Alpha group from New Mexico offered a mission's team to work on our campus. We are in the throes of creating meaningful work for the team. I allowed an available resource to drive my vision for the semester and I am regretting it. Our staff team has devoted many hours organizing the housing and activities of the team, diverting them from their immediate tasks. Blackaby and Blackaby said it best: "Foolish leaders will thoughtlessly accept resources and then try to piece together a vision that uses the resources they have accumulated" (p. 64).

Point #4. Leader's Character Dissected

Blackaby and Blackaby expound on illegitimate and legitimate sources of influence in chapter 5. They list position, power, and personality as illegitimate (pp. 86-93), while God's authentication, encounters with God, character/integrity, a successful track record, and preparation are legitimate sources (pp. 93-117).

Interaction with Point #4

I fully agree with the authors on the sources of influence. I have suffered under leaders who were pursuing position while serving in the U.S. Army. Personality-based ministry left me with little respect for the leader when they departed in ignominy after a brief but damaging tenure in the church.

I strongly identified with the story of Billy Graham's encounter with God. When his faith was badly shaken, he told God, "Father, I am going to accept this as Thy Word—by faith! I am going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be Your inspired Word" (p. 103). I experienced a similar moment with God in college. In 1985, in a class called *Our Judeo-Christian Heritage*, the professor vehemently attacked student's faith weekly. His attack was consistent and vitriolic and raised doubts and questions in my mind. As I

read Graham's words, I heard the distant echo of my own words in 1985. My decision was final and, like Graham, "In my heart and mind, I knew a spiritual battle in my soul had been fought and won" (p. 103).

Point #5. Leader's Influence Explained

In chapter seven, Blackaby and Blackaby explain how a leader influences through prayer, hard work, communication, service, and maintaining a positive attitude. They describe leadership that starts with a leader's character and moves to a leader competency, claiming "It is not one's credentials, but one's performance that ultimately confirms a person as a leader" (p. 148).

The authors emphasize the role of prayer in a leader's influence, calling it "the single most important thing leaders should do" (148). They elaborate on the role of the Holy Spirit in a leader's prayer, saying, "prayer is essential because to be a spiritual leader, one must be filled with the Holy Spirit" and explain "the condition of being filled by the Holy Spirit comes through concentrated, fervent, sanctified prayer" (p. 149).

Interaction with Point #5

I strongly agree with Blackaby and Blackaby on the importance of prayer and hard work in influencing followers. Specifically, the infilling of the Holy Spirit is crucial to empowering leaders to influence people into God's agenda. Every semester we teach on the Person of the Holy Spirit and the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Experience tells us that student leaders baptized in the Holy Spirit are stronger small group leaders.

I loved the authors' assessment that leaders work hard. I was raised by a logger in the Pacific Northwest, so hard work was our culture. I am routinely challenged by a generation of digital natives unfamiliar with hard work. Blackaby and Blackaby state, "If leaders find that their organizations are filled with selfish, lazy employees, they need to understand that each employee

is ultimately a microcosm of the organization, and a reflection of its leader" (p. 155). They state a painful reality that attitudes of followers reflect the attitudes of the leaders. I model hard work to model a strong work ethic to students.

Point #6. Leadership Disqualifications Delineated

In chapter ten, Blackaby and Blackaby explain ten pitfalls of leadership. Pride is lethal to leaders. Genuine praise builds people and organizations. "Wise leaders rightfully acknowledge the efforts of their followers as critical to their organization's success. Leaders…can be generous with the generous praise and gratitude they express to their people" (p. 231). Sexual sin is a specter over the church. "If pride is the most insidious pitfall of leaders, sexual sin is the most notorious" (p. 237). Cynicism is unacceptable in spiritual leadership. The authors say, "Without question, a critical spirit in spiritual leaders reveals that their hearts have shifted from God" (p. 241). Mental laziness and spiritual lethargy are strong temptations for ministers. The authors state that good leaders are constant learners, learning from the living and the dead through biographies and writings of past leaders (p. 244). Good leaders fight spiritual lethargy knowing "if they aren't careful, they'll view their Bibles as a textbook rather than as the living Word of God" (p. 250).

Interaction with Point #6

I agree with Blackaby and Blackaby's assertion that leaders face many and varied pitfalls. I strive to surrender pride when I sense it rising. I deflect praise to my staff whenever possible to build them up and make myself smaller. The "Damocles' sword" of sexual immorality is a motivation to diligence with women and with devices. I disabled search capabilities on Google Chrome to prevent temptation from bearing its evil progeny of sin and death (James 1:14-15).

To combat mental laziness and spiritual lethargy, I enrolled in this Master of Organizational Leadership cohort. I read Christian books by "old dead guys" to expand my thinking about God and the church. Pitfalls are numerous, but with God's help, I will navigate through them to a long and fruitful life.

Personal Interaction with the Video on Influence

Point #1. Humility

Dr. Blakney emphasized the need for humility in leadership. He said our lives should elevate Christ and deflect praise to Jesus rather than letting it settle on us.

Interaction with point #1

I agree with Dr Blakney on the importance of humility in leadership. Without humility we easily become prideful and take credit for successes that may not be entirely ours. Often a team accomplishes a goal, and a primary leader takes credit. Morale suffers when leaders lack humility.

Point #2. Why Spiritual Leaders Fail

Dr. Blakney stressed the importance of knowing your weaknesses as a leader. He said leaders who think they are immune to fail in a specific temptation are more likely to fail in that temptation. Dr. Blakney recommended an exercise to emphasize the consequences of moral failure. He suggested leaders annually rehearse what they would say to their families if they failed morally.

Interaction with Point #2

I agree with reservations with Dr. Blakney regarding the likelihood of failing in areas of temptation that do not seem significant. I believe our greatest challenge as spiritual leaders is self-awareness of our weaknesses. With knowledge comes responsibility. When we identify an

area of temptations, we must take steps to guard ourselves. We build our defenses against the greatest threats first but cannot neglect lesser temptations.

Dr. Blakney startled me with his suggestion to rehearse a "moral failure monologue." Thinking further on the idea, I realized its brilliance! Facing the horror of confessing moral failure to friends and family at Thanksgiving over turkey is an exercise in prevention.

Point #3. People are not Interruptions

Dr. Blakney insisted that people are not interruptions to our workday. He stressed the importance of allocating up to half of our workday for unplanned interactions with people.

Interaction with Point #3

I reluctantly agree with Dr. Blakney on prioritizing people over tasks. I am naturally task-oriented, so consequently, setting aside tasks for people challenges me. People are our priority in ministry, but I still I am briefly annoyed when interrupted.

I was shocked when Dr. Blakney indicated that half a workday could be classed as an interruption. Looking deeper, I was forced to admit that I often experience that level of "interruption" to my workday. I would benefit from taking Dr. Blakney's advice to intentionally plan for significant interruption in my schedule.

I, Ryan A. Ribelin, have read 100% of the book.