

FOLLOWERS AND LEADERS

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for giving up 24 hours of your time (the currency of your life) to be here. We believe that through this retreat you will grow in your relationship with God and with other leaders here this weekend.

We expressed our purpose for this leadership retreat in the invitation you received back in June:

- 1) **Increased understanding of what is expected of servant leaders**
- 2) **Greater clarity of how we can transform lives through Worship, Grow and Serve opportunities**
- 3) **Leave excited and committed to fulfilling God's purposes in Schweitzer**

I hope that the next several minutes will begin to fulfill those three goals as we talk about servant leadership and the importance of being good followers and good leaders.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Servant Leadership is one of seven values of Schweitzer **7 Values Graphic**

We may initially think that the two words are an oxymoron. Check out these definitions of the two terms:

SERVANT “A person hired to perform services for another, a person ardently devoted to another or a cause or creed.”

LEADER “A person who leads; a directing, commanding, or guiding head, as of a group or activity.”

The two terms may not seem to go together but the guiding head of the church—Jesus Christ embodies both. Jesus is the suffering servant (Isaiah 53) who is wounded for our transgressions, the self-effacing servant (Philippians 2) who puts aside his rights as being God and the ultimate servant leader (John 13) who takes a towel and washes the disciples' feet.—

Washing feet was the most menial task of the lowest servant in that day--equivalent to cleaning toilets on behalf of others. (The rumor is true: there are two primary questions you are asked now if interviewing for a position at Schweitzer: The second question is: “If you were asked to clean toilets, would you do it?” Only the first question is more important: Which baseball team do you root for?)

Jesus is the ultimate servant leader. If we as leaders follow Jesus the word servant will be joined at our hip! A servant leader is someone who both serves others and leads others. Jesus was serving and Jesus was leading and Jesus was following simultaneously. He said that he didn't do anything except what he saw the Father doing. He kept paying attention to how his Father was leading him and he led others through his teaching in his words and in his actions. Jesus our ultimate example of a servant leader followed the direction of the Father.

The scriptures inform us that Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave...being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." We cannot become Christian leaders if we aren't willing to be Christ followers and true Christ followers emulate the one we profess to follow.

FOLLOWERS

During the preparation of tonight's message there was a shift in a direction I didn't expect. As I listened to what God is leading us to think about, I was impressed with this basic concept:

We grow as servant leaders by becoming better followers.

Jesus in his leadership taught us first how to be a great follower.

Not all followers are leaders but all leaders are followers.

The first requirement of being a good leader is to be a good follower! All leaders first learn to follow well and follow wisely. And leaders never stop following. The president—the leader of the free world—switches back and forth between the roles of leading and following the advice of others and the will of the people. That's how it works in a democracy.

In a theocracy...in a church...we come to that place where together we are seeking to follow the will of God! That's one primary reason why we asked that you read DRAWING NEAR TO GOD before coming this weekend and why we are spending time together practicing some of those spiritual disciplines together tomorrow. Our focus is on following Christ and leading others to do the same.

There are all kinds of books on leadership...few on followership. (followership is not even a word!) Yet, to become great leaders in the church we must be great at following Christ. **If we aren't following in the way we need to follow, we aren't leading in the way we need to lead.**

Let's take a quick look at two scriptures which are about leading and following:

Luke 5: 27-29

I Corinthians 11:1

“Follow me” Jesus said to him and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.

“Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.” --Paul

A new follower of Jesus (Levi) and a seasoned follower of Jesus (Paul) are both following Jesus and making an appeal in leading others to Jesus. What was Levi doing in this passage? He has discovered something...what he had discovered was the life that Jesus offers...new life from being in relationship with Jesus and what does he do but wants to connect the One who gave him this new life with his friends and colleagues. So he invited Jesus to hang out with his friends.

Part of the vision at Schweitzer is to create life groups where people through life groups hang out together with Jesus and learn to do life together. If you want to learn more about this concept talk to Mark McKnelly. We hope life groups begin to formulate in 2010!

What is life groups about? They are about discovering or restoring your spiritual passion as we do life together. We see new passion of new believers in the church and sometimes we just shake our heads and think: They'll get over it! Yet, there is also renewed passion of long term believers. Sadly, we often witness in too many believers little or no passion at all.

Admittedly, I have been in all three categories.

Probably there is nothing sadder than to see a person in a leadership position who has lost their passion for Christ...persons who once were passionate but no longer are. Somewhere along the way they have stopped following Christ. Think for a moment where you are tonight...are you a relatively new Christian who still has “it,” a Christian who once had “it” but has lost “it”, or someone that is regaining it?”

Our focus this weekend is not about trying to force you to taking on some leadership role in the church (many of you are already doing that and we will be talking about what is expected of spiritual servant leaders.) But it's really a call for all of us at Schweitzer to get “it” – to become fully devoted followers of Jesus. If we get “it”, all things are possible. If we don't get “it”, nothing we do really matters!

Why would I as a Christian leader want people to follow me if I am not following Christ? Why would I want to subject people to follow me if my heart isn't where it needs to be?

One of the most intriguing books I have read this year is The Seven Faith Tribes by George Barna. It is from this book I used the language in the recent Jonah series in describing the difference between Casual Christians and Captive Christians. The chapter I enjoyed the most was entitled: Empowering Values-Driven Leaders. It is in this chapter that Barna challenges us as leaders to look at leadership through the eyes of followers. It is when we become committed to being great in following that we can lift each other up as leaders as we follow the head of the church—Jesus Christ!

So tonight I want to use the outline Barna gives in naming the twelve commitments of great followers. We're going to *Schweitzerize* what Barna says in calling us to become fully engaged Christ followers through Schweitzer.

(HAVE EACH ITEM APPEAR ON THE SCREEN AS I TALK ABOUT IT)

The Twelve Commitments of Great Followers

- 1. Know what you're looking for in a leader**
- 2. Live and die for the vision**
- 3. Refuse to settle for anything but the best**
- 4. Provide constructive feedback**
- 5. Hold leaders to the highest reasonable standards—and expect them to do the same with you**
- 6. Always place community interest above self-interest**
- 7. Be proud of your leaders**
- 8. Become a great team player**
- 9. Perform your duties with excellence**
- 10. Add value all the time**
- 11. Focus on the future**
- 12. Keep growing personally**

As we talk through these 12 commitments, we are looking through the eyes and heart of a follower.

1. Know what you're looking for in a leader

Who are the non-negotiable qualities you look for in a leader?

Name on the screen as people name characteristics

CHARACTER is the currency of a leader. What is non-negotiable in Christian leadership? Here is a listing of what we expect of leaders who become a part of the Schweitzer ministry staff. This is what we also expect of non-staff leaders who are placed in positions of leadership. Take a look at these expectations:

Is a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ, committed to a Christ-centered lifestyle of continual spiritual growth.

Is a member of Schweitzer and is fulfilling the membership covenant through their prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.

Shows and earns respect as a leader; is able to work harmoniously with subordinates, peers and congregants.

Keeps and maintains confidentiality.

Leads boldly to make the right things happen.

Seeks continual improvement in ministry.

**Aligns tasks and responsibilities with the mission of Schweitzer:
Transforming lives by making disciples of Jesus Christ.**

This is what we expect not only of our directors and pastors on staff but what we expect of everyone who assumes a leadership position at Schweitzer.

VISION is another important component of leadership. Vision is the air a leader breathes. As followers choose leaders, we need to ask the question:

Is this the kind of leader who will lead us to where God wants us to go?

Great leaders are passionate about leading people toward a vision to which they will commit their lives. The leader doesn't receive the vision single-handedly like Moses coming down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments. But the leader does need to articulate the vision. The articulation of the vision needs to be a compelling description of a preferable future, based on common values that we work together to achieve. The vision is so compelling that it is something I will give my life for!

TEAM PLAYER is another key component of leadership. No individual has all the skills and talents required to implement visionary change so leaders must also be great team players; able to work with other leaders whose gifts and abilities supplement and complement their own.

We tend to elect political leaders who are the best looking, who are likable and who have charisma. However, the trump cards in choosing leaders from a Christian perspective include Character, Team Play and Inspired Visionary leadership.

2. Live and Die for the vision

There is a vision being developed by an architectural firm having to do with bricks and mortar—the restructuring of our physical facilities. We look forward to bringing before the congregation in town hall meetings next month specific information which will address our most immediate pressing needs. I hope you will attend one of those meetings and offer your input and feedback and are able to embrace the ultimate vision that is adopted.

Yet, the vision is not primarily about bricks and mortar but about changed lives. The vision is how to bring clarity and focus to the mission of transforming lives. Your ministry staff coordinates and collaborates continuously in leading the congregation to implement the vision. The vision needs to be stated in a compelling way with clarity and simplicity. We are placing before the congregation the vision of being fully devoted Christ followers through three simple and profound words:

WORSHIP GROW AND SERVE

The Staff-Parish Relations Committee has provided excellent leadership in hiring three individuals to lead us in providing oversight of this discipleship map which we ask everyone at Schweitzer to become engaged.

This weekend everyone in worship will receive a description of how to connect to these essential actions of every Christ follower. Each of our three Directors is going to say a word about the vision in these three areas:

(Stephanie, Denny and Mark will give explanation pertinent to the information in the bulletin so participants clearly understand the vision of getting everyone to Worship, Grow and Serve.)

Now that's a vision as a follower I can give my life to and I am excited how these three persons and others around them are going to bring this vision into reality!

3. Refuse to settle for anything but the best

If you embrace mediocrity from the start, you can expect nothing less than mediocrity throughout the process.

Leaders have the responsibility to get the right people on the bus...people who have a heart for God and who possess the talents and gifts which match up with the service required.

What do you do when someone is not fulfilling what is needed?

Three options which were stated in a recent leadership event I attended are:

Retrain or Re-position or Retire

All who lead and all who follow need retraining to do roles in new and different ways. When the retraining goes well, everyone wins! When it doesn't go well and there have been several failed attempts, repositioning the person to a new role that more closely matches their talents and interests is also a win/win situation. If a person cannot be retrained or re-positioned, retiring is a final option. Retiring someone—letting someone go—is not easy but sometimes necessary. Yet, it can always be handled with grace, preserving the dignity of all involved.

4. Provide constructive feedback

It is our obligation as followers to give constructive feedback to our leaders. And leaders need to be approachable and as non-defensive as possible. It sure helps in receiving feedback when followers speak positively and kindly, seeking to promote favorable outcomes.

As a follower before speaking, it is important to consider the effects of what I wish to say and how I plan to say it. I need to THINK FIRST! Before I speak, I ask myself...

Is it...

T rue?

H elpful?

I nspirational?

N ecessary?

K ind?

Constructive comments add value to the situation. You and I have an obligation to speak up if our intent is to provide helpful insight without injuring others. There is also the needed recognition on the part of the speaker to take into consideration that we may not know the whole story.

5. Hold leaders to the highest reasonable standards—and expect them to do the same with you.

The non-negotiable character traits we named earlier in choosing a leader...do these same traits apply to followers?

Here's something I have shared with the staff numerous times over the years...as you grow in leadership, you have fewer rights and more responsibilities.

The higher you go in leadership, the more rights you give up! You often have to give up the right to speak your mind...to people who speak harshly to you or rush to judgment

about you, you do not have the right to respond to them in the same way. But we do not do anyone any favors if we do not hold everyone accountable for their actions and their words.

What are needed in today's culture are good followers—persons who do follow the golden rule...we need persons who don't remain silent when others aren't playing fair. Good followers hold leaders accountable and good leaders call followers to accountability...And it helps when good followers don't remain silent when good leaders are under attack! We'll say more about this in commitment # 7.

6. Always place community interest above self-interest

“To be a great follower, you must make up your mind that you will not grab for all the gusto and possibilities that exist; gluttony is not a virtue.” --George Barna

Our being good followers is tested when the vision God is leading us to requires sacrifice on our part...requires us to give up some things that we hold dear. Yet, we are willing when we recognize that the mission of the church is being advanced.

7. Be Proud of your leaders

Every leader is responsible for their own character. That's true of all of us—leaders and followers alike. Yet, even the best of leaders are vulnerable when it comes to their reputation. I am responsible for how I conduct myself—my character. But what people choose to do regarding my reputation is beyond my control.

The reputation of leaders is under attack in this culture. The politics of the day is about destroying a leader's reputation if he/she is bringing about change that threatens the status quo. The logic is clear: Destroy the leader's reputation and you bring down the change he/she is proposing.

A follower has the obligation to protect the reputation of a leader who is acting in good character. When a leader's reputation is being assaulted...when things are being said in my presence, I need to speak up. As I hold my leader to the high standards of character, I also need to protect my leader's reputation when it is being unduly tarnished.

In a more positive vein, **I need to be a cheerleader!** When I see leaders and followers performing well, I need to let them know about it and lead others in cheering them on as they are letting the light of Christ shine through them to the glory of God.

What I am primarily called to do as the lead pastor I can count on one hand...and one of those is cheer lead! Yes, sometimes I am leading the leaders but more often I am following their lead and cheering them on!

I'm going to move more quickly through the remaining commitments and then name the quality that I think distinguishes leaders from followers.

8. Become a great team player

It's an often repeated statement but one that bears repeating:

“It's amazing how much you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit.”

Good followers don't often get the credit they deserve. Great followers don't care.

The marks of great followers is knowing what our role is, taking direction from the leader and being the best teammate I can be: “encouraging, supporting, pulling your weight and reaping the joy from the team's accomplishments and disappointment from the team's failures.

9. Perform your duties with excellence

Followers give the leader the right to push us to a higher level and followers have the right to ask for better guidance from their leader.

Take pride in your work. Hardships and complexities will come our way but they aren't excuses to do shoddy work.

10. Add value all the time

George Barna has a great statement in his book on this point:

Imagine what would happen if the majority of people in our nation were committed to depositing more value into their communities than they withdrew. That's one of the reasons why America became great—and that's what it will take for us to return to greatness.

I think the greater work and greater good that is happening at Schweitzer these days has to do with the majority of us depositing value into our community of faith.

11. Focus on the future

“Great leaders appreciate the past, live in the present, and think in the future.”
--George Barna

Good followers are open to participating in the development of the future.

I think it was Peter Drucker who said that when an organization lags behind the culture in making changes the organization will begin to die. 90% of congregations are in decline in this country. I suspect there are several dynamics behind that decline but I think it

largely has to do with methods and not the message. As the culture changes its communication methods and as the brains of younger generations continue to be rewired, the way the church communicates the greatest message in the world has to change.

Change is difficult. Some changes I will not personally see the need for and others I will readily embrace. The real trick in the church is how to make the changes necessary to speak in the language of people who are under 40 and not alienate people who are over 60. There has to be considerable selflessness on the part of a majority of followers who understand it isn't about us!

12. Keep growing personally

Life becomes stale when we consider ourselves fully mature. We lose our spiritual passion and the heartbeat of life when we want to just settle in. Growth is about new discoveries and engaging in new experiences.

Good followers grow in their desire to learn. Another meaning of the word disciple other than follower is student. Any one who is following Jesus is a student of Jesus...is learning from him...and we never will stop learning even in eternity.

Not all followers become leaders but all leaders are followers! **What is it that distinguishes leaders from followers?** I think that it has largely to do with people taking on the responsibility in leading themselves. Bill Hybel's in a message about 360 leadership cites _____ who makes this insightful observation about leadership:

50% of leadership is about leading yourself
25% of leadership is about leading those over you
20% of leadership is about leading peers
5% of leadership is about leading followers

The most important person you lead in life is yourself. Jesus is looking for people who will take on the responsibility of feeding themselves spiritually...who will claim responsibility in practicing the spiritual disciplines we will practice tomorrow...who will lead themselves to follow Christ and can say with the Apostle Paul:

“Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.”

Schweitzer is in need of a congregation full of followers...and in the midst of followers; we need the kind of servant leaders who will lead people to follow Jesus Christ. Yet, ultimately there is a deeper reason why we are experiencing Leadership Schweitzer:

“The church has a stake in developing people, not because we want something from them, but because we want the best for them.” --Dan Entwistle

This is the heart of what it means to be a Christian leader. This is the heart of why we are here this weekend!