

Christ's Leadership

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Jesus Christ is my personal example in every aspect of my life. My greatest desire is to emulate him. He was an extremely effective leader and the legions of his followers are a testament to this. There are many different ideas about exactly what he did and how he demonstrated this excellence. My perspective is shared by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS).

Jesus Christ modeled many different leadership characteristics that are valuable and can be followed to create an effective team. I focus on just five I identified. These include the following:

1. Lead by example
2. Delegate and share important responsibilities
3. Love what you are doing and the people you are doing it with
4. Teach the people correct principles and let them govern themselves  
(Joseph Smith)
5. Recognize the worth of people

I explore each of these qualities and use support from LDS authorities and authors who also recognized the learning opportunity Christ's example provides current and future leaders.

Leading by example is imperative. It is difficult to be happy and upbeat when a manager is negative. The leader sets the tone required for successful organizations. If the authority figure is a hard but cheerful worker, the employees are more apt to be the same. A manager cannot criticize his or her manager or director to employees. This practice encourages workers to criticize organization leaders or the immediate manager too.

In order to lead by example the leader has to do the work expected from the employees too. A leader should never expect something from employees the leader is unwilling to do at least occasionally. This gives the leader credibility. It also helps the leader better understand the challenges faced by workers.

In Matthew, a Bible book, in chapter 4 verse 9 it states “And He saith unto them, Follow me.” The word “He” refers to the Savior (Jesus Christ). Not only does Christ specifically and consistently demonstrate appropriate action, he also specifically tells who he leads to follow him. In order for a leader to be able to incorporate this adage, the leader must work well. The manager has to be a living, breathing example of what he or she wants the workers to become. Maybe when this is done managers can also tell their new workers when they begin to just do what the managers are doing.

In the talk “Jesus the Perfect Leader,” Spencer W. Kimball writes, “We are not yet perfect as Jesus was, but unless those about us can see us striving and improving, they will not be able to look to us for example, and they will see us as less than fully serious about the things to be done (4).” *The Latter-day Saint Woman* includes a chapter on leadership:

People everywhere are looking for someone to follow-for someone to lead them. A leader is a person who goes ahead of others to direct and guide them or to show them how to do something. Leaders not only tell others what to do and how to do it, they also show them by example. Leaders help others grow. (247)

A leader is an example. Managers and library directors can model to staff the performance they hope to elicit from them.

According to N. Eldon Tanner leaders are also teachers. He said the most persuasive way to teach is by example. He added it was more persuasive than what was taught intentionally by precept.

The next characteristic shown by Christ is his skill in delegating and sharing important responsibilities. This is one of my difficulties. I am working to overcome this weakness. It is difficult for me to trust others with important duties but I am working on having faith in people as Christ did.

James E. Faust describes ancient ruins to illustrate this principle. He reveals his own fascination for determining why some columns fell and why some were still standing. He noticed the columns that remained erect bore a weight at the top. Responsibility is like the weight on the top of the columns. It helps people rise to their potential. Trusting individuals with worthwhile duties instills confidence. The employee will usually respond positively by magnifying his or her calling. An effective leader must risk the job not being completed well. The positive benefits gleaned from trusting a person far outweigh the negative consequences and ultimately result in productive work from the individual.

Christ trusted his disciples and most notably his twelve apostles to perform certain duties. Christ's ability to trust was noted by Spencer W. Kimball who stated:

Jesus knew how to involve his disciples in the process of life. He gave them important and specific things to do for their development. Other leaders have sought to be so omniscient that they have tried to do everything themselves, which produces little growth in others. Jesus trusts his followers enough to share his work with them so they can grow. That is one of the greatest lessons of his leadership. If we brush other people aside in order to see a task done more quickly and effectively, the task may get done all right, but it is without the growth and development in followers that is so important. Because Jesus knows that this life is purposeful and that we have been placed on this planet in order to perform

and grow, growth then becomes one of the great ends of life as well as a means. (6)

When we give people important tasks we are making it clear we care about them more than the work. We are more concerned with how the person will feel instead of whether the individual will perform the job quickly and well.

Kimball also recognizes Christ made demands on people today. He wrote, Jesus made sure individuals knew he believed in them and was never condescending. Kimball advises leaders to follow Christ by making reasonable but real demands on employees.

According to Tanner delegation is a vital leadership component. Tanner states delegation must be "meaningful stewardship." This connotes responsibility along with the freedom to complete duties in meaningful ways. Workers must enjoy opportunities to exercise options. They need to be encouraged to complete responsibilities in fresh methods and not bound to finish things exactly how it has been done for years or exactly how the manager thinks something should be done. Unless these conventions are removed, creativity will not expand. Newer methods will not be developed or discovered. Delegation is the key to drawing on the strengths of many different individuals.

Perhaps the greatest leadership strength or characteristic you can possess is love. Christ loved the people he worked with daily. Typically we spend the most time at work. I am a firm believer in doing what you are passionate about. We need to love everything about work. We have to love what we do, who we are doing it with and who we may be serving or working for. To do anything else to me would be drudgery. I cannot imagine doing something I don't love every day just to get a paycheck.

This love is not the romantic type of love I am proposing we acquire. We do not have to be "in love" with our coworkers but we should show them respect and

consideration. This respect and regard for them is love. We can love people we may not like.

Tanner said the following about love:

To be an effective leader or teacher, one must show love and actually feel love for the person he is trying to instruct. No power is as motivating as the power of love Christ loved everyone-the weak, the sinner, the righteous. Sometimes, the ones who need to be loved most are the ones who deserve it the least. (2)

We love those we serve. Leadership is the opportunity to render service and bless the lives of others. If we maintain this leadership outlook, we will show love automatically.

When we love our workers we can help them improve by telling them what they might need to change. If a relationship is already established the worker will be more receptive to suggestions. If I know someone cares about me, I will want to improve my performance for the good of the company. There are rewards for caring about individuals. I'm not sure who coined the phrase "I don't care how much you know until I know how much you care," but it is an apt description of human nature and the benefits to loving the people we work with.

Kimball called Jesus a patient, pleading, loving leader. He also describes Christ as a listening leader who loved others and was never condescending. He reproofed Peter who grew from this reproof because he knew Christ really cared about him. Peter could have taken offense but because he knew Christ loved him and wished for the best for him he listened and developed positive changes.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell said "leadership is love in action." The Savior himself said in John 13:34 in the *Holy Bible*, "Love one another; as I have loved you." I bristle

with force. No one likes to be forced to do anything. When I hear force I think about tyranny. Elder Spencer J. Condie said to lead is to serve. By serving we are showing love.

If we love people we will allow them the space to grow and serve. The next characteristic Christ showed was stated by his first Latter-day prophet Joseph Smith. A prophet's mission is to bring others to Christ. Joseph Smith was asked how he was such a successful leader. His answer was, "I teach the people correct principles and let them govern themselves."

Christ does this through his many teachings recorded in the *Holy Bible* and the *Book of Mormon*. He is constantly teaching people the methods he knows can bring them happiness. He does not force anyone to do what he says.

We need to resist the urge to micromanage. In *The Latter-day Saint Woman* agency is recognized as a major gospel principle. There is no growth if people are simply given the method. Part of our development requires us to stretch and learn. Kimball said:

Jesus' leadership emphasized the importance of being discerning with regard to others, without seeking to control them. He cared about the freedom of his followers to choose. Even he, in those moments that mattered so much, had to choose voluntarily to go through Gethsemane and to hang on Calvary. He taught us that there can be no growth without real freedom. One of the problems with manipulative leadership is that it does not spring from a love of others but from a need to use them. Such leaders focus on their own needs and desires and not on the needs of others. (6)

N. Eldon Tanner admonished leaders not to do the work if the leader has given the assignment to someone. He encourages leaders to let the individual do everything they can to accomplish the task. Leaders are supposed to stand in the background and teach how to fill responsibility but only if this is needed.

Often it is difficult to hold back our own wishes and opinions about exactly how something should be done. If we want to develop leadership in others however we should learn to hold back. We don't know the absolute best way to do everything. Many methods have not been developed yet. We can stifle creativity if we don't learn to let others make and learn from their own mistakes.

Each Christ-like leadership characteristic overlaps the others and helps us develop the rest. The final characteristic encompasses all the others. When we recognize the worth of people we will naturally incorporate the rest of the characteristics.

If we do nothing but try to develop this attribute we will be infinitely more successful. To recognize the worth of people is to put them first in every decision we make. People always matter much more than any task that should be accomplished.

Christ showed this best with his aversion to sin. He despised sin but was able to separate the sin from the sinner. He never stopped loving the individual or trying to help them even when who he tried to help was not interested in his aid.

The Savior never forgot our immense possibilities. As managers or directors we too should never forget the potential of our employees. If we treat people how we know they can become, they will respond by moving closer to this ideal.

We can improve our productivity if we just put people first. We do this by concentrating on relationships rather than the actual busywork that often needs to be completed. By recognizing the worth of people, by putting them first always, we will ultimately witness a more efficient work team.



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