



HARD TIMES. HARD DECISIONS. BIG HEARTS.

Three Keys to Leading As A Christ Follower in Challenging Seasons.

By: Michael Sipe

“Just because I’m big of heart, doesn’t mean I am slow of mind or weak of hand.”

That’s the somewhat offhand comment Patricia Asp made to me in a recent 10 Talent LeaderTalk Podcast interview (ForbesBooksRadio.com/10x) when I asked her about how she reconciled her Christian faith with the demands of senior leadership. Pat’s had a stellar top executive career in the public and private corporate sectors. She’s President of Compass Executives (CompassExecutives.com) and also a independent board member of 4WordWomen.org, a nonprofit organization providing leadership training and mentoring to women in the marketplace. And she’s a devoted follower of Christ.

Her comment prompted me to reflect on the three most essential components of leadership, regardless of your faith, but certainly for Christ followers.

Leadership is Tough. Anyone who says leadership is easy, hasn't done it. Leaders are charged with the three-fold challenge of learning from the past, assessing the present and declaring the future. The risk of being wrong in making those distinctions is enormous. Lives, cultures, organizations, and economies are at stake based on the competence, character and actions of our leaders.

A leader's greatest challenges and opportunities involve the wise deployment of assets and resources: people, money, equipment and tangible goods. Deployment involves the anticipation and projection of how and where resources can best be placed and how they must be employed in order to achieve the highest and best outcome. Excellent leadership requires a broad, big-picture, global view, with a rightly motivated desire to assess the full consequences of any course of action or inaction.

Delivering on that leadership challenge requires us to engage all three of the core attributes of truly wise and effective leaders: heart, head and hands. Let's take a look at how they work together and how an absence of any one of these attributes diminishes the others.

Guard Your Heart. Job number one for a leader is to guard your heart. By heart, I don't mean the physical organ. Heart is also more than emotion, although emotions and feelings are part of it. Your heart includes your mind, will and emotions. It's your soul. It's the very essence of who you are as a human being. So, the state of your heart is at the center of your leadership.

One version of an ancient proverb reads: "Above all else, guard your heart..." Another reads, "Above all else, guard your affections, for they influence everything else in your life."

Your affections are what you desire, the things that you most deeply care about. They inform the motives that direct your actions. Unfortunately, our hearts are fickle. In Jeremiah 17, the Bible discusses the deepest motives of leaders and says: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? 'I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.'"

When leaders fail to guard their hearts against the inherent human tendency to

drift toward deceitfulness, their hearts become shallow, hard or evil. Followers will suffer and the leader's declared outcomes will be thwarted or diminished.

Each of us is not only a leader, we are also followers. Therefore, to be wise followers, and thus the best leaders we can be, we must look closely at the heart and the motives of those to whom we would grant authority to lead us.

For Christ followers, the motives and heart of Jesus are proven. They are true, pure, righteous, loving and noble. Therefore, Christ-following leaders must hold, as our deepest motive, the desire to be like Christ. And the evidence of that is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...modeled for those we lead.

Without the component of a good heart, a smart leader becomes shrewdly manipulative. An action-oriented, but hard-hearted leader is just a bully.

Sharpen Your Mind. Having a big heart is not sufficient. You must also be capable and smart. I'm sure you all know sweet, delightful people with a great heart, who are incompetent to lead. It's also not good enough to just be willing to take action. Stupid actions, no matter how bold, are still foolish. In the memorable words of Forrest Gump: "Stupid is as stupid does."

If we aspire to lead as Christ-followers, we must do what He commanded: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind." Thus, we must continually strengthen our minds, build our skills and develop our competence to lead. What are the components of a sharp mind?

First, we must pursue, as the Apostle Paul writes about in 2 Corinthians, "the mind of Christ." We must desire and seek the revelation of the plans, purposes and perspectives of God. Since leadership involves the anticipation and projection of how and where resources can best be deployed in order to achieve the highest and best results, we need to discern God's desires and His highest outcomes, which only happens by seeking the mind of Christ.

Simultaneously, we must build leadership skills: critical thinking, analysis, planning, communicating, delegating, hiring, firing, promoting and demoting...all toward the achievement of the highest and best outcomes for all we serve.



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"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Proverbs 4:23

Strengthen Your Hands. Finally, the job of a leader requires work. We must act, not just talk. A softhearted person who's unwilling to act is not a leader. A smart guy who's unwilling to act is simply a hypocritical blow-hard, not a leader.

We've all heard the saying, "Talk is cheap." Our true heart is revealed by what we actually do. The Apostle James said, "... faith that doesn't involve action is phony...faith without good works is dead."

To lead effectively in challenging times, we must build the habit of effective action. We must act out of good motives. We must act wisely. And we must act courageously, promptly and decisively.

Hard Times. Clearly we are living and leading in hard times. Consequently, we must make hard decisions about the wise deployment of assets and resources: people, money, equipment and tangible goods. It's a time for exceptional leaders. Leaders who guard their hearts; who temper tough decisions with love and compassion. Leaders who sharpen their minds and grow in competence. Leaders who go to work with strong hands and an indomitable will to serve others and to help all we serve to come out the other side of this challenging season better in every way: spiritually, mentally, emotionally, relationally and physically.

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