

The Challenges 360° Leaders Face

*"And David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him.
Therefore, when Saul saw that he behaved very wisely, he was afraid of him."
1 Samuel 18:14-15*

If you are a leader in the middle of an organization, you have a challenging job. Everyone who attempts to serve effectively as a 360° Leader faces common challenges. At times you may feel like you are banging your head against a brick wall. In this lesson we will discuss seven challenges faced by middle level leaders.

1. The Tension Challenge: The Pressure of Being Caught in the Middle

One of the greatest challenges of being a leader in the middle of an organization is that you are often unsure just where you stand. You have some power and authority and can make some decisions. At the same time, you lack power and authority in other areas. If you overstep your authority, you can get yourself into real trouble.

Here are five suggestions for relieving the tension challenge:

1. Determine how much authority and responsibility the person above you has given to you.
2. Accept the fact that you may receive limited recognition and appreciation.
3. Know what is expected of you by your senior leaders.
4. Never violate the trust of your leaders.
5. Take initiative without overstepping your boundaries.

Biblical Case Study: Joab (2 Samuel 3:6-39, 1 Kings 2:28-33)

Joab was one of David's mighty men and a very successful army commander. For many years he served David with devotion and effectiveness. However, on a few occasions he overstepped his boundaries and forgot whom he was serving. When David extended mercy to Abner, a former enemy, Joab strongly disagreed with David. Without telling the king his plans, Joab plotted to kill Abner. Eventually Joab's actions cost him everything. Joab violated trust by:

1. Ignoring the _____ of the senior leader.
2. Taking matters into his own _____.
3. Taking action in _____.
4. Overstepping his _____.
5. Serving his own _____.

Discussion:

- Can you identify with the tension challenge—feeling caught in the middle of your organization?
- What steps will you take to relieve the tension associated with being a 360° Leader?

2. The Frustration Challenge: Following an Ineffective Leader

There are many kinds of ineffective leaders. Some of them are as follows: Insecure Leaders, Visionless Leaders, Incompetent Leaders, Selfish Leaders, and Controlling Leaders. John Maxwell suggests the following steps when you find yourself following an ineffective leader:

1. Develop a solid relationship with your leader.
2. Identify and appreciate your leader's strengths.
3. Commit yourself to adding value to your leader.
4. Tactfully share good leadership resources with your leader.
5. Publicly affirm your leader.
6. Remember that you also have blind spots.
7. Bring your leader solutions, not problems.

Biblical Case Study: Daniel (Daniel 1:4-19, 6:3-23, 9:3-19)

Daniel's character and courage are obvious as he faithfully served God in a foreign land. This caught the eyes of the Babylonian officials and Daniel became a man of influence in the kingdom. Even though he served three kings who were less than ideal leaders, he left a legacy of powerful influence. Here are some keys to his effectiveness:

1. Daniel was a man of _____.
2. Daniel served with a commitment to _____.
3. Daniel was a man of _____.
4. Daniel identified with the _____ of others.

Discussion:

- List your leader's strengths.
- How can you add value to him or her?

3. The Multi-Hat Challenge: One Head – Many Hats

When people are starting at the bottom of an organization, they often have few tasks. When someone is in the top position, he or she has the luxury of choosing which tasks they will do. They can determine their priorities and focus on their strengths. Anything else they can delegate. Leaders in the middle, on the other hand, must perform countless tasks, often with shifting priorities and limited time and resources. The 360° Leader usually faces the Multi-Hat Challenge everyday.

Here are some suggestions for dealing with this challenge:

1. Always remember which hat you are wearing in a given situation.
2. When you change hats, don't change your personality.
3. Don't neglect any hat you are responsible to wear.
4. Remain flexible at all times.

Biblical Case Study: Joseph (Genesis 37:1-50:22)

Joseph wore many hats when he was placed in a high position in Egypt. In each situation he acted according to the hat he was wearing at the moment.

1. As second in command, he faithfully served _____ with solving problems.
2. As a _____, he extended forgiveness to those who mistreated him.
3. As a _____, he demonstrated compassionate concern for his father.
4. As a _____, he endeavored to instruct his sons in the ways of the Lord.

Discussion:

- List the “hats” you are required to wear.
- What tools can you use to keep track of your various responsibilities?

4. The Ego Challenge: You Are Often Hidden in the Middle

It’s normal for any person to want recognition, but leaders in the middle of the pack rarely get the credit or recognition they desire or deserve. This fact can be a real ego buster. The challenge is to be a team player and remain content while contributing. Here are some suggestions for doing that:

1. Focus more on your duties than on your dreams.
2. Appreciate the value of your role in the organization.
3. Find satisfaction in knowing you did your job well.
4. Remember that good leadership always gets noticed in due time.

Biblical Case Study: Joseph and the Chief Butler (Genesis 40:9-23)

The statement in Genesis 40:23 is quite heartbreaking. It reads: “*Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.*” How very painful this must have been for Joseph, but his servant’s heart surpassed his need for fair treatment or recognition.

1. Joseph showed genuine concern for the other _____.
2. Joseph interpreted the _____ of the chief butler.
3. Joseph proclaimed his _____ to the chief butler.
4. Joseph asked the chief butler to _____ for him before Pharaoh.
5. Joseph was _____ by the man he befriended.
6. Two years later Joseph received the _____ he deserved.

Discussion:

- How can you find satisfaction in your work even if you do not receive the credit you deserve?

5. The Fulfillment Challenge: Leaders Like the Front More Than the Middle

Wherever people find themselves in life, they usually possess the natural desire to move up. They want to advance and improve. Leaders are no different. They want to make a greater impact. There are some advantages to being out front:

1. There is more recognition at the front.
2. The view is better at the front.
3. The leaders in front determine the direction.
4. The leaders in front can set the pace.

John Maxwell teaches that with the right attitude and skills, a 360° Leader can influence the entire organization wherever he or she is in the organization. He says the leader can do five things to enhance his fulfillment in the middle of the organization:

1. Develop strong relationships with key influencers in the organization.
2. Define winning in terms of teamwork.
3. Put the team's success above his own success.
4. Engage in continual communication with the organization's leaders.
5. Accept responsibility and keep growing.

Biblical Case Study: Caleb (Numbers 13 and Joshua 14:6-15)

Caleb was Joshua's friend and partner in ministry. Caleb was a man of great faith, courage, wisdom and devotion. When Joshua was named to succeed Moses as the top leader, Caleb did not complain that he had been overlooked. He continued to serve with excellence. Here are some lessons learned from Caleb:

1. Leadership is not a matter of _____, but disposition.
2. Leadership is not a matter of _____, but attitude.
3. Devotion to duty will eventually be _____.

Discussion:

- Are you more committed to team success than to personal success? Explain.

6. The Vision Challenge: Championing the Vision is More Difficult When You Didn't Create It

If you are to become a highly effective 360° Leader, you must become the champion of a vision other than your own. In fact, the reality is that all the people in an organization other than the top leader are going to be asked to fulfill a vision they didn't generate. Vision begins with one person, but it is accomplished by many people.

Middle level leaders sometimes respond negatively when the top leaders cast vision and attempt to enlist them to fulfill the vision. Sometimes middle level leaders even attack and criticize the vision for one or more of the following reasons:

1. They didn't help create it.
2. They don't understand it.
3. They don't agree with it.
4. They feel unneeded to achieve it.
5. They aren't ready for it.

Truly effective and fulfilled 360° Leaders embrace and champion the vision of the senior leaders. They add value to the vision so it becomes their own vision. They do four things exceedingly well:

1. Place the organization's needs before their needs.
2. Help keep the vision before the people.
3. Understand their roles in seeing the dream become reality.
4. Stay focused on the vision.

Biblical Case Study: The Apostle Paul's Associates (Acts 9:1-30, 11:25, 13:1-29:30)

Paul received a God-given vision to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentile world. Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, John Mark and others embraced and championed the vision. They invested their lives in Paul's dream because:

1. The dream was from _____.
2. It was compelling in _____ and _____.
3. It was of _____ importance.
4. It would change the _____.
5. It was important enough to _____ for.
6. It was important enough to _____ for.

Discussion:

- Can you clearly and positively communicate the vision of your organization to the people around you? How can you champion the vision?

7. The Influence Challenge: Leading Others Beyond Your Position Is Not Easy

If you are leading in the middle of the organization, you must learn to influence many who do not report to you. That is why 360° Leaders work to change their thinking from *"I want a position that will make people follow me"* to, *"I want to become a person whom people will want to follow."* If people won't follow you where you are currently, then they won't follow you where you're going in the future. John Maxwell states that people follow the kind of leader described below:

1. People follow leaders who _____ about them.
2. People follow leaders they trust – leaders with _____.
3. People follow leaders they respect – leaders who are _____.
4. People follow leaders they admire – leaders with _____.
5. People follow leaders they can approach – leaders who are _____.

Learn to think INFLUENCE, not position. Grow your influence by:

- Building relationships on trust
- Caring about people as individuals
- Believing in people
- Listening to what others have to say
- Understanding from others' points of view
- Helping others become better
- Assisting others through difficulties
- Initiating positive relationships
- Giving others the power to lead

Biblical Case Study: Samuel (1 Samuel 4:1, 7:1-17, 15:10-27)

Rarely has anyone without an official position had as much influence as Samuel, the prophet. The Israelites sought out Samuel to speak words of direction for their future, to help retrieve the Ark of the Covenant, to offer strategy to defeat their enemies, and to select their king. His influence grew so vast that when King Saul failed in his leadership, Samuel removed him from office. Imagine, having the sole authority to kick out the reigning king!

Samuel was a man of impact because:

1. He identified with the people, knowing when to be tough and when to be tender.
2. He was not motivated by power, but service.
3. He spoke with both conviction and compassion.
4. He was a faithful steward of all God had entrusted to him.

Discussion:

- Describe the qualities of a leader who you would want to follow.
- If you do not possess all these qualities, what steps can you take to improve?

Assessment and Application

Assessment:

Of the seven challenges in this lesson, list the two that are the most difficult for you.

Application:

List two or three specific steps that you can take to overcome these challenges.