



HR Connect

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Principle-Centered Stewardship



Although it has often been said that “we’re Church and not a business,” it would be foolish for us to not learn from some of the more successful business leaders. When you think about it, we really are about the “business” of providing ministry to and with the people of God and are called to be good stewards of the resources He has given us to work with (both human and fiscal). Being good stewards requires that we exercise good leadership, that we utilize good management practices, and that we provide quality ministry to all.

In his book, Principle Centered Leadership, Dr. Stephen Covey described some of, what I consider to be, the essential qualities of stewardship. The concept is relatively simple. The practice, however, is difficult and time consuming and requires extraordinary amounts of patience with others, as well as, ourselves. It makes little difference if we work at the chancery or a parish, if we are a bishop or a pastor, or if we are a DRE or catechist, the same principles apply to all of us who work in the church.

Let me explain a little further.

Simply stated, there are four principles that apply to four levels of human activity:

<u>Level of Activity</u>	<u>Principle</u>
Personal -----	Trustworthiness
Interpersonal -----	Trust
Management -----	Enablement
Corporate -----	Alignment

Now, let’s think about these for a moment and apply them to our experience in the Church. You may not want to, but I urge you to be brutally honest with yourself and think seriously about each level of activity and each principle. As you do it, an important key to the thought process is that they are each listed in sequential order and that one flows from and is integral to the other.

Trustworthiness --- at the personal level is absolutely critical to the whole concept of ministry. Dr. Covey observes that trustworthiness is the result of two primary factors: character and competence. To



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paraphrase his example, one wouldn't go to or accept ministry from someone with a "not so good" character. In practical real life terms – one wouldn't spill their heart out or discuss the depth of their faith with someone who has a reputation of being the parish gossip. On the other hand, you wouldn't trust someone who has had no training or skill in a particular ministry either. Having a good heart, as many ministers do, cannot make up for the lack of competence. Both are required to be trustworthy.



Trust --- at the interpersonal level is essential as well. However, building trust is very difficult and time consuming. Covey, in describing trust, makes reference to building or establishing an "emotional bank account". With this image, we obviously need to make more deposits than withdrawals and always maintain a positive balance. When thinking about trust, it's also interesting to ponder the fact that trust is earned only by giving it away. Trust is crucial to all relationships.

Enablement --- at the management level is also related very closely to trust. If there is no trust in an organization, people have to be controlled. If there are high levels of trust, on the other hand, people can supervise themselves and the leader becomes more of a source of help, encouragement, and affirmation. Ministry is very labor intensive and all that we do in ministry depends on who we have to do it.



Alignment --- in a sense, is where it all comes together. With trust and enablement an organizational culture can be built around a common vision to which people can be committed. Because of this commitment and participation in the formation of the vision, there is little need for constant individual supervision and management. It is important, however, to maintain alignment between that vision and all that we do. In short, we need to constantly strive to "practice what we preach". All too often, there are slips in alignment that damage our trust account. Our zeal for ministry, for example, sometimes overpowers our sense of fairness and justice in the workplace.



Although Covey's focus is on leadership, I see close parallels with ministry, stewardship and all that we do in Church. Trustworthiness and trust aren't just the result of credentials or ordination. They are qualities we each need to consciously develop and nurture. Enablement and delegation don't take place just because of job title; they are the result of recognizing and respecting the unique gifts we are each given. Alignment is simply making sure that all of what we do is true to our calling and that we exercise principle-centered stewardship.



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