

The Power of Networking and Sponsorship

Some people are true leaders and are quite proud of themselves. Some people wish to brag about their accomplishments, their abilities, and their accolades. Bubba was bragging to his boss one day, "You know, I know everyone there is to know. Just name someone, anyone, and I know them." Tired of his boasting, his boss called his bluff.

"OK, Bubba, how about Tom Cruise?"

"Sure, yes, Tom and I are old friends, and I can prove it."

So Bubba and his boss fly out to Hollywood and knock on Tom Cruise's door, and sure enough, Tom Cruise shouts, "Bubba! Great to see you! You and your friend come right in and join me for lunch!" Although impressed, Bubba's boss is still skeptical. After they leave Cruise's house he tells Bubba that he thinks knowing Cruise was just lucky.

"No, no, just name anyone else," Bubba says.

"The President," his boss quickly retorts.

"Yep," Bubba says, "I know him, let's fly out to see him." And off they went. At the White House, the President spots Bubba on the tour and motions him and his boss over. "Bubba, what a surprise. I was just on my way to a meeting, but you and your friend come on in and let's have a cup of coffee first and catch up." Well, the boss is very shaken by now, but still not totally

convinced. After they leave the White House grounds, he expresses his doubts to Bubba, who again implores him to name someone else.

“The Pope,” his boss replies.

“Sure!” says Bubba. “I’ve known the Pope a long time.” So off they flew to Rome.

Bubba and his boss are assembled with the masses in Vatican Square when Bubba says, “This will never work. I can’t catch the Pope’s eye among all these people. Tell you what, I know all the guards, so let me just go upstairs and I’ll come out on the balcony with the Pope.” And he disappeared into the crowd headed toward St. Peter’s. Sure enough, half an hour later, Bubba emerges with the Pope on the balcony. But by the time Bubba returns, he finds that his boss has had a heart attack and is surrounded by paramedics. Working his way to his boss’ side, Bubba asks him, “What happened?”

His boss looks up and says, “I was doing fine until you and the Pope came out on the balcony and the Japanese tourist next to me asked, “Who’s that on the balcony with Bubba?”

The next time you begin to feel special in your own eyes, remember that Bubba knows more people than you do! Seriously, by definition, a true leader is a person who must have a following. The leader is in a position to influence a group and/or a cause for some particular task. A leader does not believe that those who follow are to be “used” for a task. A leader is a person who believes that he or she is a part of a cause greater than themselves. They believe their team is part of a larger movement from God to accomplish His will. A leader

does not seek to develop a following to appear to be greater or more powerful. A leader develops a following for the glory of the kingdom! As a part of this intentional leadership, the leader sees himself or herself as a part of the team. Yes, leadership is acknowledged, but the leader is simply seen as part of the process of involving others to create a true cohesive effort.

Not long ago, I published a book on Nehemiah which deals with the characteristics of a true leader. Nehemiah modeled this type of leadership as he dealt with an issue of social injustice. The current leaders had truly abused the people through unfair taxation and exorbitant economic oppression. Nehemiah's sense of justice was offended: He said in Nehemiah chapter five, "*I became extremely angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints*" (v. 6). He did not act rashly, but says in verse 7, "*After seriously considering the matter, I accused the nobles and officials....*" This was not an individual effort. "*So I summoned the priests and made everyone take an oath to do this*" (v. 12b). This was a team effort for the problem was systemic and needed group action.

In fact, the entire Book of Nehemiah shows Nehemiah's team spirit and ability to work within the framework of the people of God. Nehemiah admonished the people to remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and at the same time he admonished them to fight for their brothers and other family members (4:14). Interestingly, he also said, "*Our God will fight for us!*" (4:20). While some critics may find these verses to be contradictory, the truth is that in Nehemiah's witness as to the power of the Lord, he did not neglect the need for personal and corporate responsibility. He believed God would enable the team to do His will

and His work. Nehemiah exhibited true leadership as he drew together this body to do a powerful task. The ability to focus a group of people in a singular direction shows great vision. The implementation of a plan or strategy is extremely important because the leader does not set the vision and then leave the people on their own. The leader is a team worker who does not wish to miss a single opportunity to strengthen the team.

Nothing is more haunting than a clear reminder of a lost opportunity that will never present itself again. To miss an opportunity like that is a sobering experience. Many leaders miss out on tremendous opportunities as well. Some people like to see themselves as great leaders, but at the same time they find themselves detached, separated from their people. The people whom they seek to lead simply do not want to follow them. They look back to see if others are following only to find them in the far distance. As one man teasingly said to his pastor, "Pastor, we're behind you, just way, way behind you." I am firmly convinced that a multitude of opportunities lie before us and are being missed with depressing regularity.

There are many important issues regarding leadership and followship. Many of these issues are also expressed as one becomes involved in the relationships necessary to develop followship. This brings us to the subject of networking and sponsorship. When one, as a leader, becomes involved in implementing vision with people, it becomes important that he or she see themselves as someone who is involved in a mentoring or networking process.

To recognize the power of networking and sponsorship is an easy task. A relationship in which networking and sponsorship occurs is based on the powerful relationships which are found in biblical relationships of mentoring and friendship. One cannot mention this topic without thinking of persons such as David and Jonathan, Paul and Barnabas, Jesus and His Disciples, James and John, etc. The power of relationship is one in which power is released in two ways. The sponsor, mentor, or more mature party unleashes the power of experience, wisdom, as well as a love for assisting the generations yet to come. The recipient also brings an element of power in that this person brings vision, energy, and a hunger to learn and grow which is exciting.

In a relationship of networking and sponsorship, following are several steps to be taken in order to see this relationship become truly effective.

- **Identifying** – this refers to a variety of practical ways of identifying potential relationships which would unleash power and assist both parties.
- **Engaging** – this describes how to begin the process of solidifying a networking relationship.
- **Discovering** – this provides both parties with an opportunity to discern needs. There needs to be an understanding of God-given strengths and abilities on both parts. There also needs to be an honesty about weaknesses, needs, and areas which show lack of experience.
- **Matching** – There must be a clear process whereby those who have certain needs are matched with those who can best meet those needs. There needs to be great discernment at this point. There are mentoring and coaching relationships which are doomed to failure because of the mismatch between two parties at the very beginning.
- **Coaching** – This part of the process involves the ongoing relationship of networking and sponsorship. Through a clearly delineated process, there are regular meetings, accountability, implementation and regular, personal contact.
- **Celebrating** – There must be a celebration of the relationship in which both parties recognize progress made and needs yet to be met. Any kind of relationship involves an ebb and flow. In a recognition of spiritual warfare, the evil one wants for the negative to be accentuated and the positive forgotten. Regular celebration is necessary in a networking and

sponsorship relationship so that victories can be recorded, built upon, as well as celebrated.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul exhibited this kind of celebrating spirit when he said in Philippians 1:3-5, *“I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now.”* Paul spoke of the partnership in the Gospel that he had with the dear people in the church at Philippi. True leaders will always recognize the need to be partners with the people of God and to work alongside them in spreading the Gospel. They also know how to celebrate this relationship.

God never calls leaders to be lone wolves. If we are going to be leaders of spiritual fruitfulness, we are to be team workers. In the Old Testament Book of Numbers (13:17-33), we see the people of God, weary of wandering, send twelve spies into the Promised Land. They were sent from the desert area of the south to the north of the land of Canaan. Their instructions were primarily to bring reports about the land and the way it was built up and cultivated. As a part of the report, they were to find out whether the inhabitants were strong and numerous, or weak and few. They went from Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran and on to Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath at the northernmost boundary of Canaan near Dan. The report of the land was a glowing one. The fruit they brought back was luscious as it came from the valley of Eshcol, which was famous as a grape producing area. (The word itself means *cluster*.) The land literally flowed with milk and honey, the foods and goods to make a land most desirable in the eyes of the people who had been traveling in the wilderness so many years.

The story does reveal a difficult time for the two spies who brought back an encouraging and positive report. While everyone who went into the Promised Land recognized that the land was worth taking, only Joshua and Caleb expressed their belief in the possibility that the land could be taken successfully by the people of God. The others all spoke of the ferocity of the Anakites and Nephilim, inhabitants so big the Jews stood no chance taking possession of the land. Ten out of twelve scouts balked at the mission. They even exaggerated somewhat in their report! *“To ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and we must have seemed the same to them”* was how the ten spies lied (Numbers 13:33b).

However, note the leadership expressed by Caleb in verse 30 of the text. *“Then Caleb quieted the people in the presence of Moses and said, ‘We must go up and take possession of the land because we can certainly conquer it!’ ”* God blessed the kind of spirit Caleb exhibited.

“None of these men in this evil generation will see the good land I swore to give your fathers, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh. He will see it, and I will give him and his descendants the land on which he has set foot, because he followed the Lord completely.” Deuteronomy 1:35-36

Caleb had a big vision, and an undisputable sense of call. At the same time, he was a team worker. He did not have a lone ranger perspective. He did not say this was something a small group could do. His confidence was in the larger team. He could see God’s hand lead them to victory together. That’s how leaders work.