

# Personal and Organizational Clarity

I have run into it quite a few times in the last several weeks. I see it played out in the lives of leaders I coach as well as in the organizations, ministries and groups they lead. It muddies the waters, abates progress, causes misunderstanding, miscommunication and misgivings. It causes people to bail out in frustration and dissatisfaction rather than work with a sense of contribution and satisfaction. I am speaking of a lack of organizational and personal clarity.

While having breakfast with an associate pastor this past month, I found myself listening empathetically and thinking “déjà vu ” as he alluded to the fact that the top leadership had no clear sense of where it was going or what the vision really was. It was constantly changing; a sort of flavor-of-the-month church. I am in communication with yet another pastor who, for weeks, has been trying to get a handle on what his job should be, what authority he has and what the expectations are for him. It is still unclear to him.

When I run into an issue over and over again (as has been happening) and realizing how pervasive it is, I begin to do some serious thinking and studying on the subject. Two books that have shed some light on this subject of creating personal and organizational clarity are: “The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive” by Patrick Lencioni and “Winning” by Jack Welch. Some of the ideas that follow have been adapted from their books.

In any business, church, ministry or group there needs to be cohesiveness at the top leadership level; the presence of which, according to Lencioni, is “The greatest indicator of future success that any organization can achieve.” Howard Hendricks, of Dallas Seminary, reminds us that , “When there is mist in the pulpit, there is fog in the pew.”

In my coaching of pastors, as well as working with several churches here in Seattle, I am seeing how big a problem this is. Having a clear sense of values and direction at the top is critical to creating esprit de corps throughout a church. Author Bill Hull refers to it as “Purity at the leadership level.” If the leaders are not on the same page as to values, vision and purpose, you are inviting widespread chaos and confusion leading to everybody doing what is right in his own eyes.

In my work with leaders and churches, I help them enter a process of strategic planning that begins with agreement as to values, vision and purpose, making sure that all present leaders are on the same page; while, at the same time, being careful that future leaders (staff, elders, deacons, ministry leaders) “buy in” to the direction and values before joining. A lot of power plays occurring among leaders in churches are due to leaders being added who have a different agenda and are not on the same page with the existing leadership team. Pastors are often called to serve in churches that don’t share their purpose, values and vision and the new alliance is doomed from the start. Desperation to fill a slot can lead to very unhealthy and costly choices.

Once the top leadership of a group, business, church or ministry is together and clear as to direction and values, the next step is to create shared ownership at every level.

Everybody needs to know where the ship is sailing and what their part is in helping it reach its destination. It makes no sense to me to bring people on board in any capacity

and give them a role if they don't know how their responsibilities fit into the big picture. Having clarity at the top and communicating it effectively at every level will create a sense of unity around everything being planned. Having clarity that seeps through to every strata empowers people to do their jobs, creates a firm foundation for communicating, hiring, training, releasing and decision-making and provides a basis for accountability. Organizational clarity should be communicated often, simply and through multiple mediums. You can't say it too often.

The stated purpose for the Community Group ministry (in which I am a coach) at my home church in Seattle, Mars Hill, is "*To connect, and grow authentic relationships with God, brothers and neighbors.*" It is clear, biblical and covers the gamut. I communicate it as often as I can and in as many ways as I can with all the conviction I can muster. When I read my Bible, it seems to me that Moses, Noah, Nehemiah, Jesus and Paul (to name but a few) had clarity as to what the mission was, convictions about getting there and were able to communicate it in such a way that people joyfully decided to journey with them.

Lorne Sanny, President of the Navigators for 30 years used to hand out small business-size cards that had four points under the title, "What every employee (follower) should be able to expect from his employer (leader)." I am not sure of the exact words, but they were something along these lines:

1. Will you tell me what you expect? Make it clear for me, don't keep me guessing;
2. Will you let me do it? Don't micromanage me;
3. Will you help me if I need it...be there if I have issues/questions?;
4. Will you tell me how I'm doing...give me feedback, regular progress reviews?

I have ideas with numerous people over the years—in sermons, at seminars, in small groups and in my life-to-life coaching of leaders. I am still amazed at how few people regularly receive this from their leaders. Many, if not most, are left to sink or swim, figure it out for themselves, or live in a continual state of confusion and frustration. Do you have a written job or ministry description? Do you have freedom to do your job in reaching agreed upon goals without being a puppet on a string? Do you have access to someone when you have questions or issues? Does somebody let you know how you are doing. Often the answer is *no* to all four questions.

When I am ready to bring a person into a leadership role, I clearly communicate what they are being invited to join, what their role, responsibilities are, what authority they have to make various kinds of decisions and what I am expecting from them. Many in leadership roles fail because the job is not a good fit; which they didn't know due to lack of clarity and communication on the front end. Jim Collins in "Good to Great" speaks of the value of getting the right people on the bus and in the right seats—that is, the right people who share the values and vision and in the right fit given their talents, experience, expertise and passion.

For your use, here are eight basic traits that Welch looks for in bringing leaders onto his teams. I am thinking about these traits and cross-referencing them with scripture as I lead and coach other leaders.

1. *Integrity*-Telling the truth and keeping their word
2. *Intelligence*-Having a strong dose of intellectual curiosity with a breadth of knowledge.

Don't confuse education with intelligence

3. *Maturity*-Handling the heat, stress, setbacks; confident, but not arrogant

4. *Energy*-Thriving on action, enthusiastic

5. *Energizes others*-Inspiring and empowering their team to dream the impossible

6. *Edge*- Making the tough decisions; led by principles not politics

7. *Execute*- Implementing and getting things done; having a bias for action

8. *Passion*- Having a heartfelt, deep and authentic excitement about work, people and life

In summary: As you lead your group, ministry, organization or church, do you have clarity as to direction and values? Do those you bring into your leadership teams share your vision and values and exhibit leadership qualities such as Welch suggests? Do you help those you lead make their maximum contribution by creating personal clarity so that they know their role, have freedom to perform it, get help when they need it and are informed as to how they are doing, Implementing these ideas will greatly help you avoid unnecessary conflict and confusion .