



Becoming Someone To Imitate

Mentoring Emerging Leaders In Interpersonal Skills

There are two things on earth that will last forever: the Word of God and the souls of people. The Lord's servants are called upon to bring the former to the latter. Speaking about the truth of Scripture into the air is simply not enough; we must bring it to people through relationships we have forged with them. People often judge the credibility and value of the message by the credibility and value of the messenger. Leaders must, therefore, have high potency lives and refined ministry skills that enhance and provide thrust to what we say.

DEALING WITH OTHER PEOPLE

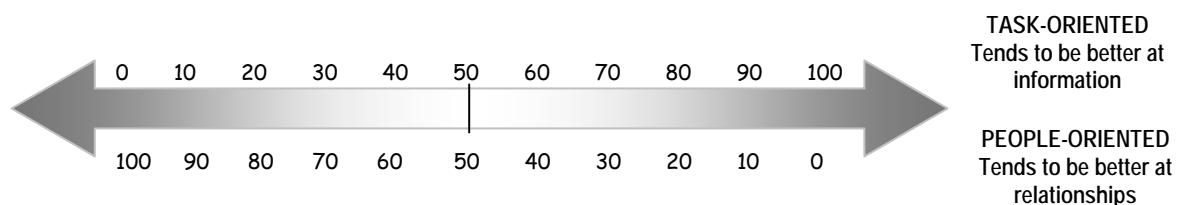
Humans are incurably selfish. Sin has made us fraught through with self-orientation and self-rule. We want to rule ourselves, rule our circumstances and rule others. No one is born deferring to others or knowing how to relate well to others. We learn (or should learn) throughout our childhood that there are authorities, structures and people outside ourselves, and that we are far happier when we learn mutual submission and others-orientation. Some children learn this lesson easily, others struggle, and still others never learn and carry their stubborn self-orientation into adulthood.

But recognizing other people exist and are valuable is only the beginning. Many of us have known people who are devoted to Christ, committed in their Christian walk, and knowledgeable in God's Word and theology ... but they are clueless when it comes to dealing with people. Some are withdrawn and backward; others are overbearing and inflexible. They are stilted in their demeanor, awkward in conversation, and out-of-reach in their ideas.

LEARNING PEOPLE SKILLS

Therefore, a necessary component of being equipped for effective ministry is learning how to relate to people, something we call "people skills." No matter how sharp your technical skills, or how refined your theological prowess, your social skills often draw the distinction between those merely "in the ministry" and those actually "doing the ministry." In the people-skills evaluation process, an emerging leader can start by evaluating where he or she is on the "task-people continuum."

WHERE DO YOU FALL ON THE TASK-PEOPLE CONTINUUM?



Hypothetical: Two emerging leaders arrive at the church building 15 minutes before an event and have five things to do before the event begins. They enter the lobby in which eight people are standing. What would you do? The first one stops at the first person and begins asking about the other person, the second gives a broad hello, looks down at his papers and heads for the office. After 15 minutes, the second leader has all five things done and is ready for the event to begin; the second still has five things to do. The first leader has ministered to six people; the second has ministered to none. Which would you likely be? Can there be a balance?

It is hard to say what is inborn personality and what is learned behavior, but most adults tend to be either task-oriented or people-oriented, and it is fun to talk among yourselves which way you tend to be. In ministry, it is optimal to have a balance between the two. Those with great people skills need to learn routine, time management, project management, etc. Those who are naturally task-oriented need to develop their people skills. Over time, a person can change and achieve a good balance. How does a person learn a balance? He or she needs a mentor

MENTORING AND COACHING

Mentors repeatedly teach, observe and give feedback. Mentoring a person in the area of interpersonal skills development requires person-to-person instruction at first, followed up with real-time observable ministry experiences to monitor their progress and give feedback.¹ It is like being a golfing or tennis coach where you are playing with them in the tournament. You have taught them much, but by playing with them, you can observe their stance, grip, energy and attitude, and make adjustments during play and afterward.

OTHERS-ORIENTED BASICS

Philippians 2:4 says that we should be concerned not just with ourselves, but also be concerned for the welfare of others. Jesus modeled this in not coming to be served, but to serve others (Matthew 20:28). Servant-leaders must be masters of others-orientation! Start with some coaching in the basics of others-orientation, and you could see some quick progress in the interpersonal skills of your emerging leader.

1. **INITIATE CONVERSATION.** Young adults can be reticent to strike up conversations with older people. Shy or task-oriented people prefer to simply watch others, or they get involved in a task so they won't have to speak to others. The natural tendency is to merely speak when spoken to. Leaders must learn to take initiative; they must be proactive in greeting others, introducing themselves and asking questions.
2. **BE A GOOD LISTENER.** James 1:19 encourages us to be swift to hear and slow to speak. This is tough for some outgoing leaders, and made more difficult by a culture that tends to see leaders as talkers. On the other hand, emerging leaders who are good listeners are typically not assertive enough to start conversations. Herein is the beautiful balance of servant-leadership – to initiate conversations, draw people out with your questions and then listen and learn.

A good leader encourages others to talk about themselves and their ideas. Often when we're nervous talking to other people, we hide it by talking incessantly about ourselves. Other people then interpret this as being arrogant. If your protégé struggles with this, have him *memorize a list of ten questions* that he can ask in an initial conversation – about where the other person is from, their family, what they do, how they like their work and job, their health, what they do for fun, etc.

A good listener really doesn't have to say much at all. People love to express their opinions – just ask an open-ended question and let them begin talking. While listening, he should also focus on the follow-up skills of looking them in the eye, nodding his head, and mildly reflecting their emotions with his facial expressions. The other person will walk away having had an encouraging talk with him, when he has done little but listen. Optimally, a leader will help a person by asking the right follow-up questions to get the person thinking correctly – “And how are you responding to this situation emotionally and spiritually?” or “So, how do you think God views all of this?”

3. **REMEMBER NAMES.** “A person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.” Salesmen are taught that you can almost never say someone's name too much. In fact, this is one way of quietly communicating humility. You are repeating someone else's value over and over again. If you are constantly using others' names as you talk, they will know you care enough to remember this important fact about them. They also will know you are thinking about them first and yourself second. It is said of President Jimmy Carter, that due to his own personal technique, he never forgot the name or face of a person.

In Acts 26:2-23, Paul addresses King Agrippa and uses his name four times in the discourse! He didn't need to use it at all, but he did. Task-oriented people, because of their focus on the circumstances and the ensuing topic of conversation, tend to forget immediately a person's name when he has introduced himself, or if they remember his name, they don't use it. Leaders must devise their own technique to remember names, or be bold enough to ask soon if they have forgotten.

¹ Hey, as mentors, we should be open to their feedback to us in these areas. If you're a task-oriented person, your greatest fear may be that they'll become like you, loving computers and books and hiding away from people! ☺

4. **SMILE.** Now before you dismiss this as cheesy, consider Barnabas, the son of encouragement in Acts 11:23. Although "smiling" is not exhorted by Scripture, when Barnabas saw the progress in Antioch, "he was glad and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord." Smiling seems very simple, but it's amazing how people's moods and words are misjudged because someone looked too serious. If leaders are stoic, the tone of a class or meeting becomes boring or serious.

Am I a hypocrite if I smile without being happy? You're assuming that smiling is just to reflect your own emotions – that is self-oriented. There are two good reasons to smile when we're not necessarily happy – 1) for the encouragement of others, communicating our love for them, and 2) to provide a suitable partner for the wonderful truth that we're communicating. Have you ever lovingly rebuked a church choir for singing about a joyous topic with grumpy faces? Why? Their expression should communicate their message, not their feelings.



5. **BE CONSCIOUS OF NON-VERBAL INTERFERENCE.** "An extroverted accountant is one who looks at your shoes while he is talking to you instead of his own." People of precision often have more fears than those who are laid back. Insecurities and fears can often manifest themselves in non-verbal ways – what some have dubbed "body language." Task-oriented people can get so lost in ideas that they fail to look at the person to whom they are speaking.

What does a person do with his arms and hands when there's nothing in them? Crossing arms communicates superiority or skepticism. Hands in the pockets can communicate insecurity – especially bad if one jingles change or keys! It takes training and mental focus to help some emerging leaders to stand naturally and gesture normally, but the skill must be developed to keep others at ease.

6. **DRESS CREDIBLY.** 1 Samuel 16:7 reminds us of two truths – people look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. An unrepentant man dressing up for God is about as useful as a man presenting eternal truth to people when he looks a mess. Dress is a reflection of one's personality, culture, budget and the event one is attending.

Recent generations of church-goers have been trying to break free from the European value of dresses, and suits and ties. Should emerging leaders "just be themselves" or buck the culture of the older generation? Older generations believe that "your clothes say it for you." Younger generations love to throw people off by having a total genius looking "like something the cat dragged in."

So what are some good rules of thumb for emerging church leaders?

- *Adapt.* Paul said that in matters of preference, he became the servant of others; he was all things to all men for the sake of communicating God's Truth effectively to them (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Paul wasn't out to "just be himself." Young adults can often be caught saying, "clothing styles don't matter," but let one of them show up in a suit and watch how the others react!
- *Clean and Neat.* Frumpy may be cool but not credible. Clean and wrinkle-free still holds sway.
- *Modest and Affordable.* We should all pay attention to Paul's admonition to women not to dress in expensive or immodest clothing (1 Timothy 2:9). Too often the wardrobes of women are driven by the desires of men; we must follow the biblical principles whether fashion follows us or not. Label consciousness is often a shallow covering for a love for the praise of people.
- *Top of the Class.* Beyond that, you should dress at the top of whatever dress level is dominant in the group you lead. For example, don't wear a tee-shirt if they're wearing polo shirts, or polo shirts if they're wearing suits.



7. **SPEAK CLEARLY AND GRACIOUSLY.** Your communication skills determine how people will perceive you. You can easily look like a million bucks, but if you're unable to stitch together a few words to make up an adequate sentence, you'll lose major credibility. A person who is quiet and asks questions is considered wise. Fools speak too quickly and prattle on without stopping for breath (Proverbs 29:11, 20). Wise people avoid making categorical statements unless the Bible does; speaking your opinion as fact is a reflection of personal pride.

Further, opinions and exhortations must always be with grace (aimed at helpfulness), seasoned with salt, not salty seasoned with grace (Colossians 4:6). How does your emerging leader handle the sovereignty/free will debate? A servant-leader must not be quarrelsome, or argue about words, but be gentle, patient and humble (1 Timothy 6:4-5, 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

8. **WORK AT UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE.** An emerging leader must grow to understand that people have different upbringings and cultural backgrounds. Europeans tend to refuse an offering the first time you ask, even if they want to say yes. They are not as extroverted. They have a smaller circle of good friends, and become friends before doing things together. In America, we can see these marked cultural differences when comparing people from New England with those from Georgia, with those from, like, California. A person saved in his 30s can be remarkably different in his presuppositions and ideas from someone saved in early childhood.

How well does the emerging leader mingle with unbelievers? Openly displaying shock at someone's dress, tattoos, body piercings or opinions is to reveal that he lives in a nice box and doesn't get out much. Leaders bring truth to people, and some people live in distant and interesting places! Cloisterism is an increasing problem in the Church. Many missionary candidates face a personal crisis when they break with isolation. They come from churches that have admonished them to stay away from unbelievers and distance themselves from the wicked culture, and join a mission organization that tells them to blend with the culture and build relationships with unbelievers!

Understanding people does not push us to water down our position or dilute God's truth. Understanding a person – their sin, their way of life, their wrong ideas – *does not mean accepting* those things. You don't have to agree with someone; just listen and try to understand. People are usually more receptive to our ideas when they feel understood.

9. **MANAGE EMOTIONS CAREFULLY.** This is not something learned overnight. An emerging leader's tone of voice is important, especially when emotions get intertwined with logical arguments and seem to blur his sense of clarity (Proverbs 15:1). If he feels his blood pressure rising or his adrenaline kicking in during a discussion, he must learn to take a second to breathe and put his emotions aside, since they can clutter his logical train of thought. He must learn to take the time to respond rather than react.
10. **VALUE TEAMWORK.** There's no "I" in the word "Team." An emerging leader must learn to be a team player if he isn't already, and he will get a lot more done. Leadership is influence, not title or organizational authority. Leaders start with ideas, float the concepts during discussions to flavor the thinking of people, build the need for change, and then solicit input from others in an effort to build consensus. Does he defer to others for ideas, or implement things without input? Does he compliment others on their good work, and give them credit whenever possible. Even if he has done something well, does he use the pronoun "we" instead of trumpeting his success? Does he see himself as part of a team, and ultimately as depending on the Lord for his next idea and his next breath?

Remember, these are specific interpersonal skills that an emerging leader should be working on to effectively lead God's people as a servant-leader. A comprehensive process of learning involves acquiring knowledge, realizing the applications of that knowledge, simulating an environment for practicing the skills, and then implementing those skills in real life. As a pastor, you can provide all four levels of learning for an emerging leader.

ASSESSMENT: MY EMERGING LEADER

How do the men you're developing perform in each of these areas? Use the chart below to see where they could improve.

Initiates Conversations	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Notes:
Good Listener	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Notes:
Remembers Names	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Notes:
Uses A Smile	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Notes:
Stops Non-Verbal Interference	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Notes:
Credible Dress	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Notes:
Speaks Clearly and Graciously	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Notes:
Works At Understanding People	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Notes:
Manages Emotions	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Notes:
Values Teamwork	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Notes: