

LEAD
OR

FOLLOW?

BY DAVID W. HILL

LEADERSHIP IS NOT A CHOICE—IT'S A CALLING. TO TRULY LEAD, WE HAVE TO SERVE. MY FATHER TAUGHT ME THAT TRUE LEADERSHIP "GIVES AWAY CREDIT AND TAKES BLAME." THIS IS NO FUN. I HAD ALWAYS THOUGHT LEADERSHIP WAS POWER, CONTROL AND PRESTIGE. PLUS, IT LOOKED REALLY COOL TO BE A LEADER. EXPERIENCE HAS PROVED ME WRONG. DAD WAS RIGHT—IMAGINE THAT!

I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE, SINCE GRADUATING FROM BAYLOR ALMOST 25 YEARS AGO, TO WORK IN MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, PRIVATE EQUITY, INVESTMENT BANKING AND CORPORATE AMERICA. IT HAS BEEN AN AMAZING RIDE RELIVING MY MBA MANY TIMES OVER. I HAVE SEEN THE BEST AND THE WORST. HIGHS AND LOWS. GOOD AND BAD. A LOT OF SCAR TISSUE IS LAYERED ON MY BACKSIDE. I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN A NUMBER OF BUSINESSES, INVESTMENTS AND CORPORATE TRANSACTIONS, BIG AND SMALL. SOME WERE SUCCESSFUL, MANY WERE NOT. THESE EXPERIENCES GAVE ME THE CHANCE TO SEE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION AND TO PRACTICE IT.

As a banker, I am constantly working to refine my approach to due diligence and understand what factors lead to success. Interestingly, in the unsuccessful ventures I've experienced, failure was never a result of the "deal," the opportunity, the structure, the terms and conditions or the value. Rather, I am disappointed to report, in 100 percent of the cases, the failure was due to the people—namely, the leaders. Not the transaction. Not the price. Not the employees. Not even the market conditions. The leaders were the problem. In the end, bad leadership kills good opportunity. Ouch!

What about a leader destroys a deal? When determination outweighs truth—failure is certain. Call it hype, excitement or shooting for the stars. Getting caught up in the "dream" can offer as much harm as motivation. Every deal I have seen crumble has been, in the end analysis, due to a lack of truth. A failure to disclose, determination at all costs, hidden inexperience or weakness, and most disappointingly, misrepresentation, lies or a willful ignorance of what is real. Again, it is dangerous to let persistence justify "white lies."

This set me on a mission. How can I figure out a process, a paradigm that yields the truth? What produces a quality deal? Who can I trust? What calculus can I use to figure people out—avoid the torpedoes of failed leadership? How can I determine if what a leader says is real? How can I know that I am given the truth?

Organizations, big and small, are great at espousing their mission and corporate values. They all typically include words like integrity, honesty, trust and quality. Does that really reflect how the leaders behave? There is also the "goal." We are taught to have a goal and be goal-focused in order to achieve success. There are many leadership and management consultants that work to help companies and organizations "align" their mission, values and goal. Experts craft business plans, presentations, offering circulars and strategic initiatives all with a promise to achieve the mission, values and goal of the organization. Even so, most fail. Just ask any investment banker or private equity executive

how many business plans that are "promised" actually come true. Is the leader's aim really the same as the organization's or are there other motives like power, control and prestige—wanting the credit? One early morning it hit me.

The "promise" IS the problem.

Leaders are typically great at talking the talk. I have sat through

many business plan presentations, corporate pep rallies, conference calls, budget meetings and investment pitches promoting the mission, values and goal of organizations. Big plans! There is nothing like the collective excitement. But usually, the energy dies down and things get back to normal—reality sets in. I have found that it is easy to talk but much harder to walk and actually practice what you preach. The revelation? Without the promise of truth, a commitment to "walk the walk" and a pledge of trustworthiness, the mission, values and goal are, in the end, worthless. The leader has to live it.

The "promise" of an organization is found in the truth and trustworthiness of the leader. Are you the same person at work, at home and in your community? Do people, your employees, vendors, customers, spouse, kids, family, neighbors, friends and community trust you? Do you tell the truth? When the leaders are truthful and the organization trusts them, deals work. The mission, values and goal drives the organization toward success and the promise insures the success. It works.

OK. Having figured out the problem, I had the painful task of self-assessment. Had I been guilty of not fulfilling my "promise"? Had deals that I was involved with failed because I failed to deliver or even worse, ignored the truth? What are my personal mission, values, goal and promise? I had to take the blame. In many cases, my leadership had indeed failed and missed the opportunity for success. Then I realized that, as a Christian, I have a higher calling. I have to give the credit to God. His plan is eternal. In order to be an effective leader, my promise, mission, values and goal must align with those taught in scripture. This would make me a true leader and give me the focus and consistency that others can trust. I must simply be a Christian—in all that I do.

Are you a true leader or are you a world follower? Do you set the standard and stick to your plan or do you work to be accepted and approved by your peers? Are you leading the way? This is a loaded question because as Christians, we should be leading others to the truth of scripture in all we do—setting an example regardless of the consequences. I was inspired to develop the "Real Pyramid" model based on a real view of my mission, values, goal and promise to give me a guide to activate my faith in my daily life. It has changed the way I look at my family, my business ventures and my community.

MISSION

As Christians, we have been given a clear mission: to make disciples, baptize them in love and teach them to obey. This is a high calling. We have to activate our mission. Most business missions hang on the wall in the foyer. And that is as far as the mission goes. As Christian leaders, our mission has to live and drive our business vision and venture. We have to make sure that the mission of our organization is ultimately aligned with our personal mission.



GOAL

Our goal should be to glorify God. As leaders, we are regularly challenged with driving down a road that follows that which is directed and guided by the world. Whatever is popular; whatever is wanted; whatever brings immediate satisfaction—or the least resistance. In truth, we are called to seek what God wants for our lives, in all aspects of our lives. As Christian leaders, we should not conform to the ways of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This renewal makes us better—in everything—focused on His good, pleasing and perfect will. The renewal comes from recognizing that God has more for us and for those we lead.

VALUES

Our values have to be based on Biblical principles. We are tricked into believing that we should follow a certain belief, political group or pattern. The truth is, we have been called to live under a different pattern. Being transformed means that we are changed, we are different (see Romans 12:2). We stick to values, not dictated by the norms and popularity of this world, but of what is God's will.

We must focus on our needs, the needs of our organization and the needs of others. We have to use our skills to meet these needs.

And our time, our most precious resource, must be used in a way that is focused on the right challenge. As noted, the values of the organization will always reflect the values of the leaders. Live and operate in truth and service to others.

PROMISE

Renewing our minds allows us to lead in a different direction—live and lead in truth and trust. This leads to true success. It allows us to guide others, our families, our business colleagues and our communities, in love, to places they believed that they could never go—true service. It gives us power to lead.

Remember:

God has a plan.

If I am a Christian, then everything I do should be for His Kingdom. Everything. When I go to work, I am in kingdom business. When I take my kids to school, serve at church or lead a school volunteer group, I am in kingdom business. When I take a business trip or go on vacation, I am in kingdom business. When I coach a team, go fishing or even take out the trash, I am in kingdom business. I am called. You ARE called. The beauty of your life in Christ is that He lives in and through YOU. IF you are a Christian, THEN you cannot separate yourself from HIM—or His plan for YOU.

2 Timothy 1:7 - For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Lead in a way that takes others down the road of power, of love and of self-discipline. Be the source of transformation for those you influence in all you do.

James 2:17 - In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Our faith has to be active in all that we do. Even as a banker. In the end, in trying to find out why everyone else was causing failure, I really found out that I'm the one to blame. The real credit for my success goes to God, who has had a plan for me from the beginning. I have to lead in truth and live out my faith—following His plan. Take the blame and give away the credit. Again, dad was right.

David W. Hill is co-founder and chief executive officer of BancAssets, LLC, providing loan syndication servicing and administration through a proprietary network of more than 700 community financial institutions. He is the principal of Hill Asset Management, LLC, responsible for strategic and financial business guidance to companies engaged in complex business transition, growth, and development. Hill is a managing director for Innovation Capital and holds Series 79 and 63 securities licenses. He earned an MBA from Baylor University in 1989, and a Bachelor of Science in Economics-International Trade from Texas Tech University in 1987. Hill offers the promise of servant-leadership. He has a mission to encourage, lead and empower Christian business leaders to serve their businesses, families and communities with active Christian faith. Hill promotes this ideal through his blog at www.ServantSpeak.com.



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