

Values for Healthy Leadership among Friends

By Colin Saxton

***Leadership flows out of our experience of Christ**

Knowledge and training can be very helpful in leading but what ultimately matters is our rootedness & growing intimacy with Jesus Christ. When George Fox established Meetings in the early days he instructed folks to choose one or two who were most “grown in the power of God” to exercise helpful ministry.

What am I doing to grow in the power of Christ?

***Leadership points to Christ**

Being a leader is not about us or our program...it is about helping people see, know and obey Christ's leadership.

How am I pointing others to Christ in and through my ministry?

***Leadership listens**

We listen for the proceeding Word of God—that comes to us inwardly, in Scripture and within the communities we serve.

Am I an active listener? How might I improve?

***Leadership is servant-minded**

We are called to lay down our lives for other's sakes. Leadership is not about power or glory but about going to the cross for others. This is easy to say but living it is much harder—especially when we are repeatedly told that leaders deserve special privileges and ought to have special perks.

How do I keep my focus on serving others?

***Leadership is mission-minded**

Good leaders also serve by keeping the mission/vision focused in their minds and in the mind of the community. They work to help others see it clearly. Jesus did not “serve others” simply to help them feel good about themselves but by directing them toward the Kingdom of God.

Do I know and articulate the mission of Christ and the vision of God's Kingdom in how I lead others?

***Leadership is relational**

One of the primary ways we live up to our calling as Friends is when we love one another—just as Christ loved us. People are not a means to an end. The best leaders model this quality, build up others and practice honesty, integrity, confession and forgiveness. Rather than being an elite group that is separate from others, good leaders learn to “lead from the middle” of community.

How am I tending my relationships with others? Are there broken ones I need to mend?

***Leadership is courageous**

It is humbling to read Early Quaker writings and to see their courage, risk-taking, and adventurous spirits. Helpful leadership springs from courage rather than fear. If we are fearful of being disliked, labeled a failure, worried over resources or shrink at conflict it will hinder us and the community. Good leaders learn over time to be appropriately self-differentiated.

What do I fear and how can I overcome it?

***Leadership and followership go hand-in-hand**

Friends recognize leaders are also always called to be followers and part of the whole community. No one is always called to be in leadership and so we must simultaneously cultivate the skills and attitude of a follower.

As I work to cultivating the art of leadership, what I am doing to learn followership?

***Leadership seeks to duplicate itself**

A primary goal of leadership ought to be nurturing others who can also lead. Identifying, encouraging and equipping others is a gift that serves both the individual and supports the future well-being of the community.

Who am I nurturing as a future leader?

***Leadership does not confuse difference of function and equality of status**

In our tradition, we put a high premium on the priesthood of all believers and the equality of all people. Being a leader is not *better ministry or more important work*—it is just different. It is a different function within the greater Body to accomplish God's work. At the same time, genuine leaders do not need status, titles or positions to fulfill the work God has called them to do. Simply having the status symbols of leadership does not necessarily translate into useful leadership.

Do I treat people as equals even as I am called to exercise leadership? Am I being faithful to my call to serve/lead—even if I am not recognized by others?

***Leadership articulates the essential spirit, experience and understanding of Friends**

Friends have a particular story and a unique shape to our shared life.

Do I understand who we are called to be and can I communicate it to others?

***Leadership is faith-full**

Often we talk about vision & mission statements. The truth is God often only shows us enough light for the next right step. Good leadership sometimes builds the bridge as we walk on it. We move ahead in faithful dependence upon Christ—not running ahead or lagging behind.

How am I modeling this kind of faith?

***Leader is self-aware**

People who serve well in leadership know their strengths and weaknesses. They are able to distinguish what is their work to do and what is not. Healthy leaders recognize when they have reached their limits, need to say “no”, and need to hand responsibilities off to someone else.

How well do I pay attention to what my limitations and needs?

***Leadership has integrity**

Integrity in leadership means the words we profess are matched by the life we possess. It also means more than this and extends to the community that we serve. Healthy leadership faces both the lack of integrity within our personal lives and within our “system.” Furthermore, it looks at more than whether we achieved our stated goals, but did we do so in light of the values/testimonies we hold to be true.

Am I willing to have God search my life as a leader and our life as a community to see if we live with integrity?

***Leadership is shared**

There are no doubt times when God gives one person the vision or the call to lead in a particular situation. Most often, however, we need others to see the way forward more clearly. Leadership is not diminished when it is shared. Usually, it is enhanced.

Do I practice shared leadership? Is our community set-up to encourage this? Do I make room for others to lead?

***Leadership is legitimately accorded power but it is power for, rather than power over.**

Leaders cannot give their gift if they are not accorded appropriate power to get the job done. They cannot lead if folks refuse to follow. Friends can be ambivalent about power and tend to be rebellious about following. Leaders do well to use their power and authority *for others* rather *over others* by bullying, manipulation or coercion.

What power do I have in my context? Am I using it appropriately for the sake of others?

***Leadership thrives in an atmosphere of respect and goodwill.**

Good leadership is stunted by a constant diet of criticism and mistrust. In those situations even the best leaders are apt to give up or respond in unhealthy ways. In healthy communities, we recognize and release leaders—allowing them to serve without mistrust or by sabotaging their work.

Are we the kind of supportive community that allows leaders the freedom to serve well and grow in their abilities?