

Differentiated behavior:

Definition: *Differentiation means the capacity of an individual to define his or her own identity, sense of well-being, goals, values, likes and dislikes independent from other members of their “system,” while still staying connected to others. From the Christian point of view, it includes acting out of God’s unconditional love and acceptance and in the freedom that comes with being a child of God.*

The ultimate example of this is Christ...seen especially in Philippians 2. Jesus did not act out of fear or in an effort to protect his turf or to impress others. Rather, he modeled servanthood out of his own value system and in integrity with the call on his life.

Differentiated people pay close attention to issues of responsibility. This is especially important in leadership and pastoral roles—which sometimes draw people with low-self esteem, who may be co-dependent/rescuers, suffer from a Messiah-complex, or who do not establish and maintain healthy, personal boundaries. Differentiated behavior keeps in mind the critical distinction between “responsibility for” and “responsibility to.” Example: I am **responsible to you** as a brother in Christ...but I am **responsible for myself**. Similarly, when I am acting in a healthy way...I allow you to maintain **responsibility for yourself**.

A good question to ask one’s self is: “Do I have to give up being me to be loved by you?” If the answer is “yes”—then I am giving someone else the power to define who I am. It is also helpful to consider the same in my interactions with others. Am I trying to take control or responsibility for others when it really belongs to them?

Being differentiated includes the capacity to maintain a “non-anxious” presence in the midst of a stressed system, and to take responsibility for one’s own choices and emotional well-being. Therefore the differentiated person can take strategic, independent action and bring helpful change to the system. This does not mean they do not care...rather they can “stand back” from their own emotions and other’s anxiety to make positive, strategic choices that have integrity and, in the end, benefit the community.

In the face of change, even change which is welcomed, people in community often naturally revert to old behaviors. This is called “homeostasis” and is seen as systems and relationships either intentionally or unintentionally move toward the familiar, stable, “normal.” Differentiated people are able to maintain focus, consistency and act with integrity toward desired change, overcoming resistance and helping others work through this barrier.

In stressed or anxious circumstances, a differentiated individual is most able to:

- Take faithful, thoughtful action
- Risk conflict and tension to act and speak the truth in love
- Stay committed to one another and stay engaged throughout the process
- Take responsibility for his/her self and exercise self-control

Those who struggle in this area are often likely to:

- Act and speak out of fear and anxiety
- Lose courage and try to “make everyone happy” for the sake of momentary peace
- Opt for a quick fix to a problem along the way, rather than getting to the root of the issue
- Find someone to scapegoat or blame things does not go right or match their expectations or preferences.

Some reminders in the work of being a differentiated leader/person:

- I am responsible for all my thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- I am responsible for the consequences of my thoughts, feelings and actions.
- I do not have to offer excuses in order to justify my behavior. If I am wrong I will admit it. If not, I will not become defensive.
- I am not responsible for how others think, feel or act. They are responsible for themselves. To try to take this responsibility from them is harmful to them and me.
- It is acceptable for me to change my mind.
- It is acceptable for me to make mistakes or being wrong.
- It is acceptable to say: "I don't know."
- I am responsible to make choices for my own well-being.
- I can invite other, trusted people into my discernment/decision-making process to help me see more clearly the issues in my life and the options ahead.
- When others do good things for me, I can accept them without any pressure to "pay them back." I will reciprocate if I choose to.
- I do not have to give up myself to be loved by others.

As leaders in the church, it is important for us to also learn to function as a team of differentiated people. We do this best when we know who we are as a community— understanding our common purpose, acting in integrity with our shared values, are moving toward the vision we have received from God, and are strongly committed to staying in relationship even when it is difficult. Healthy, differentiated leadership helps welcome, host and incorporate new members of the community and maintains the vitality and direction of the church as they articulate and model who the community is called to be and what it is called to do with integrity.

Differentiated people are most likely to thrive as they intentionally develop mutually supportive relationships with people who have a kindred spirit and common concern for individual and communal integrity.