

MONDAY MANNA

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WHO COMES FIRST – THE LEADER OR THE FOLLOWERS?

By Robert J. Tamasy

Perspective. It makes a tremendous difference in how we approach life in many ways. If you view life from an optimistic perspective, you can usually find positives in even difficult circumstances. However, if you take on a pessimistic outlook, even good things that happen can be viewed with cynicism and anxiety. It is like the person who woke up one morning and thought, “Well, everything has gone well so far today. But I have not gotten out of bed yet.”

From a leadership standpoint, perspective also can have a strong effect on how we approach our daily responsibilities. If leaders view themselves as “the boss,” with everyone reporting to them obligated to perform their bidding, this can affect morale, productivity, respect, and even the ability to retain workers who are important to the organisation’s success. There is a very different perspective a leader can possess, one that has served many executives and managers very well.

Max De Pree, a respected businessman and author of acclaimed books on leadership, “How do you as a leader see yourself? You know, from the follower’s perspective, it is vitally important that a leader have a self-perception faithful to reality. Leaders belong to their followers. A director should refer to employees as ‘the people I serve.’ What a different reality that is! And what a different effect on followers.”

Can you see how the approach De Pree describes differs from an “I am the boss” view in which employees – followers – are perceived as servants? Certainly, there have been many domineering, hard-charging executives who have coerced productivity from their people. But what a difference it would make if more leaders saw their staff as “the people I serve.”

This concept, popularly known as “servant leadership,” is not new. While it may not be the primary emphasis for most MBA programs, it is an idea that has been utilised with great effectiveness for thousands of years. Even the Bible underscores its importance, with none other than Jesus Christ making it a high priority. Here are several examples of what the Scriptures teach:

The best leaders come to serve. True greatness, from God’s perspective, is not based upon position or power, but the willingness to put others first. *“...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:45).

True leadership follows a different standard. In some circles, leadership is perceived as the ability to dominate and control. But there is another way: *“...The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them.... But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.... But I am among you as one who serves”* (Luke 22:25-27).

Leadership involves mutual submission. Subordinates obviously must report and serve those who have authority over them. However, leaders also should strive to guide those they oversee. *“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.... And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he is both their Master and yours in heaven, and there is no favouritism in Him”* (Ephesians 6:5-9).

Postal Address:

PO Box 8168,
Woolloongabba, QLD, 4102

ABN: 42 005 622 515

Office Address:

Suite CBMC,
Sung Do Lawyers,
14 Annerley Road,
Woolloongabba, QLD 4102

Email:

admin@cbmcaustralia.com.au

Phone:

07 3172 9365

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

What other examples can you think of that show how perspectives can make a significant difference in how a person approaches his or her life and work?

When you hear the word, "leader," what thoughts immediately come to your mind? Do you have positive or negative conceptions of what leaders are, especially in terms of how we typically see them in action?

Max De Pree stated, "Leaders belong to their followers." What do you think he meant when he said that? How common is this perspective in today's marketplace, based upon your own observations and experiences?

Based on what you've read in this "Monday Manna," what steps could you take in becoming a better and more effective leader – or future leader?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 28:2

Matthew 20:20-28

John 13:3-17

2 Corinthians 5:21

Colossians 3:17,23