

## Teaching as a Path to Servant Leadership, Part Four

Last year, I wrote a three-part essay that focused on teaching as a path to servant leadership. (These essays can be found at <http://www.purposequest.com/articles.htm>.) I felt an urgency to write these because of my commitment to the practice of servant leadership, seeing the special role that instructing others could play in anyone's leadership development. I take very seriously one of Jesus' last commands, which stated: **"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).**

I am also concerned that the church's commitment to teaching is waning in light of current cultural trends: shrinking attention spans, reduction of formal theological training that affects the skill and content of teachers, the proliferation of visual media such as videos, DVDs and television, and the infatuation of some of the church with the experiential aspects of prayer, prophecy and the miraculous.

I don't believe that the church can continue to teach, using the old "command and control" paradigm where the taught were expected to sit and listen while the teacher droned on. Modern teachers must and should use every means at their disposal to see that the teaching role of the church continue and flourish. That is why I developed a weekly email newsletter and a separate weekly Bible study, supported by a state-of-the-art website. I want to commit to teach what Jesus commanded, but do it in a relevant and dynamic way.

In this essay, I want to highlight what secular leadership and management books are saying about teaching. I have found that when the Holy Spirit is saying something specific, it is not confined in church circles. I believe there are "secular prophets" who carry an important message. We would do well to pay some attention to what they are saying, adapting their message to our world and context, keeping Matthew 28:19-20 in mind.

I start with an article from the magazine, Fast Company, one of the few magazines that I read from cover to cover every month. In December, 2001, there was an article entitled "16 Ways to Be a Smarter Teacher" by Chuck Salter. I have read and re-read this article on many occasions and I have found it to be most helpful in improving my own teaching skills. The entire article can be found at <http://www.fastcompany.com/online/53/teaching.html>, but below I list the 16 ways from the article for your consideration:

1. It's not about you; it's about them.
2. Study your students.

3. Students take risks when teachers create a safe environment.
4. Great teachers exude passion as well as purpose.
5. Students learn when teachers show them how much they need to learn.
6. Keep it clear if you can't keep it simple.
7. Practice vulnerability without sacrificing credibility.
8. Teach from the heart.
9. Repeat the important points.
10. Good teachers ask good questions.
11. You're not passing out information. You're teaching people how to think.
12. Stop talking—and start listening.
13. Learn what to listen for.
14. Let your students teach each other.
15. Avoid using the same approach for everyone.
16. Never stop teaching.

I have been especially impacted by numbers 1, 4, 7, 10, 12 and 16. Which ones are most impacting for you? Why? Keep in mind that this article appeared in a business magazine. Noel Tichy, a business professor at the University of Michigan, wrote in his book ***The Leadership Engine***:

Teaching is at the heart of teaching. In fact, it is through teaching that leaders lead others. Leading is not dictating specific behavior. It is not issuing order and commanding compliance. Leading is getting others to see a situation as it really is and to understand what responses need to be taken so that they will act in ways that will move the organization toward where it needs to be. Whether it is teaching something as simple as what concrete tasks need to take precedence over others this week, or something as complex as how to make good decisions, teaching is how ideas and values get transmitted. Therefore, in order to be a leader at any level of an organization, a person must be a teacher. Simply put, if you aren't teaching, you aren't leading (page 57).

If you are leading, how much time do you spend teaching? And what you are you teaching? What's more, who are you teaching and why? And if you are teaching, are you steadily improving in method and content?

In his second book, ***The Cycle of Leadership***, Noel Tichy talked about developing not just good teachers, but organizations that are committed to teaching at every level of leadership. Permit me to quote long passages from this book. (Remember this is coming from a business professor and is aimed at the business world. How can we apply these truths to the Church of Jesus Christ? How can you apply these truths?)

The way to do this, which we will describe in this book, is by building a Teaching Organization, one in which everyone is a teacher, everyone is a learner, and reciprocal teaching and learning are built into the fabric of everyday activities. The CEO must assume the role of head teacher. He or she must set the direction, shape the culture and share the valuable insights and knowledge in his or her head.

But while it is critical that everyone in the organization, from the top down, teach, the teaching cannot be one-way. It must be interactive teaching, where the leader who is teaching is at the same time drawing on and learning from the knowledge and experience of the students.

In the Teaching Organization, the learners at all levels are also teachers, both up to the leaders above them as well as down into the organization where they lead others. This creates a Virtuous Teaching Cycle, a self-reinforcing teaching and learning process that is what keeps winning organizations learning and improving every day.

This is not a New Age, feel-good approach to winning. A real Teaching Organization is anything but a soft, touchy-feely kind of place. The Teaching Organizations we describe are interesting, fun, enjoyable places to work, but that's because they engage the brains of the workers and allow them to contribute to a winning team.

The environment of a Teaching Organization is perhaps best described as one of controlled freedom, or disciplined fun. It is what professional athletic teams, orchestras and Navy SEALs achieve when they are at peak performance. They have freedom to be creative because they are in a flow and a process that is demanding, disciplined and energizing (page 7).

I visit a lot of churches, but I can qualify very few as places of controlled freedom or disciplined fun. I think we have the control and discipline to varying degrees but the freedom and fun that releases a dynamic of learning and personal growth are sadly missing. That is because there is little "flow" between lower and upper echelons of worker and leadership.

Tichy suggests several ideas to promote this flow of information to develop the Teaching Organization. I think these can and should be applied to the modern Church so that the benefits of everyone's gifts, insight and experience can be captured and passed on for the cause of Christ. These ideas are:

1. Set aside time for learning, reflection and teaching. Most churches I work with are too busy for this and truthfully, don't see the need for this to take place. Leadership believes that as long

as the top few leaders are in communication, that is all that is important.

2. An informal environment. I'm not sure teaching opportunities are maximized in a formal, title-conscious environment.
3. Use of authority to promote flow of knowledge. How is authority being used in your organization? How do you use it? I realize that leaders have power and I have never advocated that this power needs to be eradicated. But I am appealing that leadership power be used to build others up and to make the organization a meaningful entity not just for the top few, but for everyone.
4. Nurturing a healthy self-confidence. Many people don't have the confidence that they can learn and teach with reasonable effectiveness or even some measure of anointing. Leaders must work with others to build this confidence in situations where people can grow and develop. I have often said that one sign of an organization characterized by servant leadership is that everyone, not just top leaders, are free to make mistakes (pages 62-63).

Stephen Covey, noted author of ***The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People***, devoted some space to the role of teaching in his classic book. I think it is interesting that this topic appeared as part of the seven habits. Let's look at what Covey had to say:

As a teacher, I have come to believe that many truly great classes teeter on the very edge of chaos. Synergy tests whether teachers and students are really open to the principle of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.

There are times when neither the teacher nor the student knows for sure what's going to happen. In the beginning, there's a safe environment that enables people to be really open and to learn and to listen to each other's ideas. Then comes brainstorming, where the spirit of evaluation is subordinated to the spirit of creativity, imagining, and intellectual networking. Then an absolutely unusual phenomenon begins to take place. The entire class is transformed with the excitement of a new thrust, a new idea, a new direction that's hard to define, yet it's almost palpable to the people involved.

Synergy is almost as if a group collectively agrees to subordinate old scripts and to write a new one (page 265).

There are some church leaders who are concerned about such teaching dynamics. They would maintain and I would agree, that biblical truth is not some subjective search that can be determined by consensus. At the same time, no

teacher, no matter how trained, educated or experienced, knows it all about any subject. That is why every teacher can create the teaching cycle where he or she is learning while teaching.

I walked through the halls of a Christian institution for higher education recently and I observed the dynamics or lack thereof in each classroom. I saw enough boredom and lack of “connection” between student and teacher to tell me that something was wrong, wasn’t working. When people came to listen to Jesus, the great Teacher, Mark reported: “David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?’ The large crowd listened to him with delight” (Mark 12:37). If you are teaching, can you honestly say that people enjoy listening to you, or do they tolerate you?

As we close, let’s turn to Tichy one more time to lay out a plan that will improve your teaching and consequently your servant leadership:

1. Depth of learning. The crowds listened to Jesus with delight because He had good insight into God’s word. He taught as one who had authority, an authority that comes from knowing what He was talking about. Remember when Jesus was 12 years old and his parents left Him behind in Jerusalem? They found him in the Temple asking questions and learning. I have no reason to believe that was just a one-time event. I think Jesus was always learning and he incorporated this learning into His teaching.

When I was 37, I went back to school to earn my doctorate so that I could improve the content of my teaching. While I no longer pastor, I spend a great deal of time teaching and those eight years of study added an important dimension to my teaching.

Now I read 80 books per year, also reading magazines, newspapers and other publications. I attend one special seminar or conference per year that will add some depth to my areas of expertise. What you are you doing to add to your teaching knowledge? Don’t just rely on anointing, experience or humor. Use all those, but keep on learning.

2. Commitment. Tichy states, “Teaching entails a serious commitment on the part of the leader to nurture individuals and a serious commitment on the part of the followers to wrestle with the teacher’s point of view and develop their own.”

Teaching requires a commitment to the subject matter and those who are being taught. If your heart isn’t in your teaching, it will

show and affect your teaching outcomes. If you aren't willing to make this commitment, then perhaps you should consider not teaching for a while or finding new subject matter or students to whom you can commit.

3. Time. Tichy writes, "It takes little time to command and much time to teach." Are you in touch with your students? Do you care? It does take time to build relationships that enhance teaching. Are you willing to pay the price?
4. Continuous generation of leaders. It isn't enough to teach; a good teacher enables and empowers others to teach. This is an area that I am trying to improve in my own teaching as I endeavor to certify others who can teach the purpose message as I have developed it (***The Cycle of Leadership***, pages 59-60).

As we conclude, I hope that you will listen to the secular prophets who are calling us to be more effective teachers and learners. I urge you to take Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19-20 seriously and find ways to instruct someone else concerning what Jesus commanded us to do. As you do, I trust that you will discover new strategies and techniques that will allow you to maximize your teaching impact. As you do, may God make you the servant leader that He wants you to be.