

The Distinctiveness of the Steward Leader

Distinctive synonyms: Unique, Characteristic, Distinguishing.

This chapter is not intended to be an exhaustive survey and comparison of secular and faith-based leadership theories. Its intent is to create the context and frame the key questions at the heart of the contemporary leadership debate within the community of believers in Jesus Christ. My purpose is to frame the question of how the theology behind the steward leader is distinct from - and also built upon - and related to - the work that has come before it.

To do this I will compare and contrast a few key representative examples in both the secular and the faith-based approaches to leadership.

Secular Leadership Studies.

Let's begin by considering several models of leadership--the Great Man theory of leadership, Transactional Leadership, Transformational Leadership and Servant Leadership--and identify their key differences from the Steward Leader model.

Great Man and Charismatic Leadership.

The Great Man theory of leadership states that a great leader is born with the traits and character necessary to "bend history's course to his own will." It is a traits-based approach to understanding why some leaders are simply "eventful" while others are "event-making." The moral flaws of great leaders

have rendered this theory an unsatisfactory method for defining effective leadership. It was the "who" (quality of character) question that undermined the greatness of the accomplishments of men like Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin, all powerful leaders but scarcely the models you would want to lift up or copy.

This theory was developed further by Max Weber in the 1920s as charismatic Leadership which rests on devotion to the sanctity, heroism or exceptional character of an individual person, and on the normative patterns or order revealed and ordained by him. The emphasis was on the character and innate skills of the leader but added an almost divine component that endowed the leader with the ability to bring about remarkable change not only in circumstances but also within the hearts and attitudes of his followers.

The charismatic leader is rare, and almost entirely driven by the strength of his or her personality. Some of the ethical collapses witnessed in our most trusted leaders can be traced to the limitations of this type of leadership, including a lack of accountability and a tendency toward narcissism. A charismatic personality may have the hardest time embracing the call to be a steward leader, though he or she may be the type of leader who needs it the most. [When I read through this, people like Joel Olsteen, and prophet T.B. Joshua come to mind].

Transactional Leadership

The Transactional Leadership theory is based on a mechanistic view of the world that emerged from the scientific worldview of the Enlightenment. It

believes that all nature can be dissected and understood as a series of causes and effects, including human organizations. Therefore, leaders must successfully negotiate a series of causal transactions that bring about the desired organizational effect. Transactional leadership is a low-risk pursuit of limited but clear goals. Transactional leaders are brokers, coalition formers and consensus builders. They bargain with their followers for mutually beneficial actions. Their focus is on managing public opinion through a series of negotiated actions that please both the leader and the followers.

This is similar to a related theory called the Leader-Member Exchange, which placed leaders in the position of enacting quid pro quo instead of leading with vision. The transactional leader has something the people want and, reciprocally needs something the people have. So, transactions are undertaken, and value is exchanged. The value may be power for the people and applause for the leader. It may also be power for the leader in exchange for opportunity for the people. In whatever form, transactional leadership is based on this exchange of valued commodities.

Ministry leaders can fall into transactional leadership with surprising ease. Leaders who seek public favor will watch the direction of the wind and lead accordingly. Give the people what they want, and you will have their love and support-- at least temporarily. **There is no inner transformation required of the transactional leader. Nor is there any desire or need for the transformation of the people he or she leads.** Yet something that sounds so far from the transformed heart of a steward leader remains so very near to our need as leaders to be loved and accepted by the people we lead.

As leaders, by definition we have power. As soon as we use that power as a bargaining chip to get what we want from our people, we become the transactional leader. This understanding of transactional leadership illustrates the important link between a leader's character and his actions. Power leads to transactional behavior when there's no controlling center to guide it in another direction. That is why ongoing transformation of the heart is the fundamental characteristic of the steward leader.

- [The Great Man theory of leadership.](#)
- [The charismatic leader.](#)
- [The Transactional Leader.](#)