

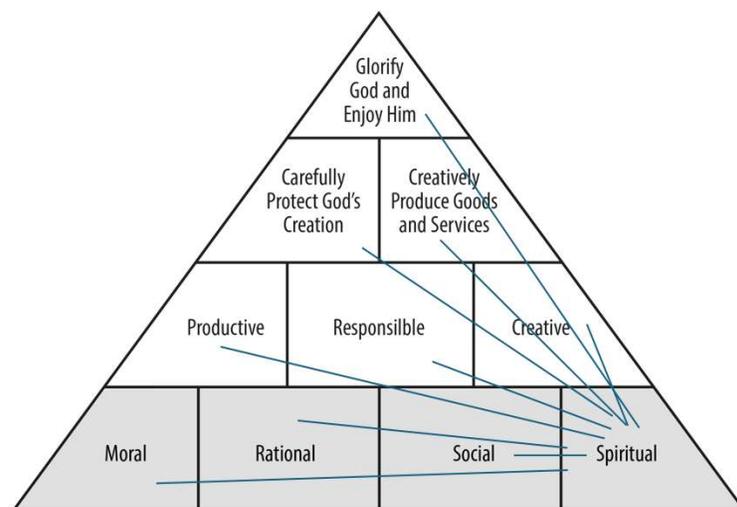
The Distinctiveness of the Steward Leader – Part 3

Comparisons and Contrasts

While not complete, this brief outline of primary theories frames the key questions of leadership and highlights the distinctive features of the steward-leader approach. A difference of direction. The first and perhaps most fundamental distinction is that these leadership approaches start with a working assumption or concept for successful leadership and from there seek to identify the traits required of such leadership.

I have been very careful not to use the term "steward leadership," because my idea of the steward leader cannot be reduced to a general theory, nor does it offer a specific set of fixed, measurable qualities.

My [Scott Rodin] focus in this book is on the person of the steward leader in relationships. How the steward leader leads will vary significantly according to individual personality and giftedness, and the environment, organizational culture, specific challenges and vision into which he or she is called to lead. Most importantly, this leadership is influenced by the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the steward leader and his or her responsiveness to that leading in every situation. For that reason, I will not talk about traits of leadership but focus on the heart and dynamic journey (activities) of the steward leader.



This relational focus is very different from secular leadership studies, which start with effective leadership and look back to then find the traits necessary to bring it about.

- The Great Man or Charismatic Leadership theory are dependent on the inherent traits of charisma and vision.
- The Transactional Leadership theory is geared to a series of transactions dependent on the skills of the leader.
- Transformational Leadership regards effective leadership as primarily bringing about change in an organization.
- Servant Leadership sees effective leadership requiring the service of the institution and its people, in order to be successful.

In each case the model is built on what we do to be successful. Each focus on the skills, traits, aptitude, natural abilities or character of the individual leader that brings about “success.”

The steward leader model starts with God’s call for us to be godly stewards and then asks what the work of the godly steward looks like when it is lived out in the life of one who is called to lead. The steward leader does not derive his/her identity from being a leader, even being a steward leader, but solely from being a godly and faithful steward. So, we do not start with leadership as the focus of study; instead, we start with the call from God, independent of individual traits, to be a godly steward.

Leadership is only one, dimension of the outworking of the life of faith and obedience as a steward under the call of God. Even the servant leadership model begins with leadership and ends with servanthood. The steward leader

starts with the call to be a godly steward and ends with the heart of the godly steward, open to transformation, called to lead.

To understand why this is so important we must return to the question of being versus doing. I offered earlier the idea that who we are is more important to God than what we do. Our transformation into godly stewards is the *modus operandi* of the kingdom of God. The term steward is a descriptor of who we are. Stewards obey, and steward leaders are called to obedient and joyful response.

This response is an indication that steward leaders do not act independently out of their own resources. Their actions are not their own. They are connected to their source, directed by their master and wholly dependent on their savior. In this way the steward leader does not put confidence in personal goodness or giftedness in order to act benevolently. Quite the opposite. Steward leaders understand their complete and utter reliance on God as the source of the goodness, wisdom and justice to which they are called.

A difference of philosophy.

The second distinction lies at a more philosophical level: the root belief that produces the direction and content of each of the leadership theories. **These theories depend on a secular humanist belief that there is a basic goodness to human nature that most successful leaders have tapped into.** Indeed, the belief in the basic goodness of the self-sufficient human spirit and its inherent capacity to draw from that goodness consistently and reliably is the philosophical basis for every influential nonfaith-based theory of leadership that was developed throughout the twentieth century.

In assessing leadership studies, we see a basic conflict between this sense of innate goodness and the Christian doctrine of original sin. It is the conflict between the idea of the pursuit of happiness and what I will call the pursuit of faithfulness. To illuminate this comparison, I will return briefly to Burns's Transformational Leadership, Wheatley's groundbreaking work on leadership and the new science, and Greenleaf's Servant Leadership.

Transformational leadership.

Burns has been credited with moving leadership studies beyond the Great Man idea and also beyond the Transactional Leader era. Both were shown by him to be inadequate to describe the effective leader. In their place he suggests the idea of transformational leadership, which, at the beginning, appears to place the values of the leader at the top of the theory. “Leadership is not a neutral, mechanical process,” he writes, “but the transforming human moral factor in converting values into outcomes.” [Motivation]

These values are shared between the leaders and the people they lead. The clarification and articulation of these values and the action taken in light of these values are the basis of transformational leadership. Burns writes, “Transforming leaders define public values that embrace the supreme and enduring principles of people. Transforming values lie at the heart of transforming leadership, determining whether leadership indeed can be transforming.”

The problem in this view is not so much with the emphasis on values, but in the presumption of what those values are. “The pursuit of happiness must be our measurement. . . . It encompasses the highest potential for transformation both in people’s situations and in themselves”. [The Goal]

And it shows, as perhaps no other phrase, what it is that many most profoundly lack; the opportunity to shape and direct the quality and meaning of their own lives.

All humanity is driven by a basic desire for happiness. By tapping into that common drive and giving it a voice and a vision, the leader can be effective in bringing about transformative change. Burns understands this is a process, but the end result is clear: “The ultimate attainment of happiness is a cherished dream, but as a goal of transforming leadership we must view it more as a process, a pursuit.”

Here we see the great divide between Burns’s understanding of the pursuit of happiness and the biblical call to the pursuit of faithfulness. The key is whether the human condition is basically good or sinful. If it is good, we can

know what truly makes us happy, and we can pursue that happiness in ways that do not cost our neighbor his or her happiness.

If human nature is basically sinful apart from redemption in Christ, the pursuit of happiness is a self-serving quest that will bring only bondage to self-preservation at all costs. Even the concept of service becomes a search for personal meaning in which relationships become means and not ends. The best we can hope for in this case is a mutual pursuit of self-interests that don't come into conflict. In contrast, in the kingdom of God, relationships can only be ends, not means.

Burns's Enlightenment values are based on a false idea that we both know and can pursue those things that bring us happiness and that there is a value system common to all people that allows us to undertake that pursuit without harming our neighbor. Christian doctrine and the daily testimony of the world around us (current events) render this idea baseless.

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