

Level 2 Trajectories

Steward Leaders Develop Whole People

I must resist the temptation to offer methods or systems at this second level of trajectory. How you personally live out freedom and joyful obedience with your people is unique to you, your organization, your culture and the specific way in which the Holy Spirit will guide you into truth. I will be brief in these sections and only offer ideas of where this trajectory might lead you.

Steward leaders who are intentional about maintaining a godly balance in their life also intentionally desire for their people to develop and maintain a holistic, balanced life. Steward leaders can truly set their people free to see themselves as God sees them and love themselves as God loves them. What effect would it have on your culture, your morale and your organizational productivity if all members of your organization saw themselves in a balanced way, not thinking any better or worse of themselves than they ought? For most organizations I know, the impact would be transformational. Steward leaders inspire in people the gift of confidence and help them avoid or unburden themselves of the self-confidence that will eat away at their soul. This requires us to listen to and care about our people at a new level.

Consider the struggles you face in maintaining this delicate and crucial balance for yourself. What would it require for someone to help you? It would likely require a presence and intimacy difficult to develop in a work setting. Yet if we are watchful, prayerful and discerning, we will see clear signs when someone's self-awareness is out of balance. Steward leaders look for those signs and seek to cultivate relationships that allow for such deeper discussion. This may take place formally, as part of a performance review, or informally, depending on the level of trust and the openness of the other person to let us pursue the issue.

Without doubt this can be risky and challenging, we don't want to appear judgmental or disrespecting someone's privacy. As a steward leader, we, are called first to model this balance, and then to be discerning in helping our people pursue that same balance. Some may not want to be healed. Others may never let us in. However, we are responsible for our own faithful obedience to be godly stewards called to lead others to freedom. Although it may prove especially difficult at this level of relationship, we are called to it nonetheless. Let prayer and a pleasant spirit lead us!

Here, as in the first set of trajectories, we cannot be different toward our people from how we are in ourselves. That inconsistency will show through eventually. This is why it is so critical to cultivate our own heart and undergo our own transformation as we seek to lead others. Max De Pree reminds us, "For many of us there exists an frustrating gap between how we see ourselves as persons and how we see ourselves as workers. We need to eliminate that sense of inconsistency and to restore a sense of consistency in our lives.

Molding versus unfolding [Opening up].

As we experience the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in us, we seek the same for our people. The process we enter into can be described as an ***opening up***, as opposed to a ***molding***. That is, steward leaders seek to help people open up the talents and character with which God has gifted them. Think of a flower. The more it opens, the more beautiful it becomes. Every small movement unveils another hidden treasure. So it is with our people. As they are freed to see themselves as God sees them, and as they find that sweet spot of balance in their self-awareness, they begin to develop before us. They become more useful to the Master, and they respond with joyful obedience.

This is in contrast to leaders who try to ***mold*** their people into shapes and sizes that best serve the organization in achieving its goals. Owner leaders

must maintain control over their people, and that includes the **manipulation** required to get them to do what the leader wants. The clever owner-leaders play on the imbalance in people to their own goals. Developing people in this way means molding them into compliant followers who will do the boss's bidding without protest. Leaders who are not free will have no other option but to mold people into roles that will not threaten them. They will seek to bring down confident colleagues out of envy and fear, and they will keep those with low self-esteem exactly where they are. Owner leaders are power brokers, and the less employees think of themselves, the more power is granted to the leader. This may seem extreme, but the temptation to take steps to rise above the people we lead is constant.

This is where our freedom is most critical to our calling. We must yearn for this freedom for those we lead. We must be so free in ourselves that we will lift up everyone who is around us. That's your obligation as a leader. When you're in the box [conventional, uncreative], people follow you, if at all, only through force or threat of force. But that's not leadership, that's intimidation. The leaders people choose to follow are the leaders who are out of the box [outside of conventional thinking]. Just look back on your life and you'll see that's so. So your success as a leader depends on being free of self-betrayal. Only then do you invite others to be free of self-betrayal themselves. Only then are you creating leaders yourself; co-workers whom people will respond to, trust, and want to work with. You owe it to your people to be out of the box for them.

We must be passionate about this balance for our people, so passionate that we take the risk of challenging the prideful in our ranks. They too are in bondage, and setting them free requires that we approach them with the heartfelt desire to see them open up under the influence of the Spirit of God. We are willing to take the hits to see our people prosper, even if it means making hard decisions for them.

Terminating someone's employment due to an unwillingness to address this imbalance may be the most ministering act we can perform if it leads him or her into a serious engagement with the root causes of the prideful behavior. Steward leaders must be able to put the well-being of their people first, even when their decisions seem to be doing the opposite.

A man I greatly admire told me the story of a moment that changed his view of leadership. He was struggling with the decision whether or not to fire a popular employee in his ministry. He had more than enough just cause, and deep inside he knew it was the right thing to do for her and for the ministry. Yet he could not bring himself to do it. Sharing his anxiety to a close friend and mentor he said, "I am so torn. I know I should let her go, but I just don't know what I should do." "If you think you should let her go, why are you struggling so with the decision?" asked his mentor.

"Well, I am just thinking about what is best for my ministry." What his mentor said next shocked him. "No, you're not. I am sorry, my friend, but your indecision is not because you are concerned about your ministry. It is because you are concerned about *you*. This is a pride issue. What you are really struggling with is that some people will not like this decision, and as a result, they will not like you." At that moment he realized that his pride *was* in the way. He considered what he would do if his reputation was not an issue, and the decision was clear. He needed to be transformed from being the owner of his reputation to being the steward of his people.

Herein lies a truth that provides more freedom than perhaps anything I have written on the steward leader. Steward leaders are not the caretakers of their reputation. In fact, they are called to be, leaders of ***no reputation***. Again, this does not mean a bad reputation or questionable reputation, but simply ***no*** reputation.

One of the greatest bondages we can experience is the need to rush around desperately and manage our reputation. If we hear a bad report about ourselves, we run and correct it. If we think someone has a negative impression of us, we are anxious until we can convince him otherwise. We worry about what people might think about us if we say we believe this or stand up for that. So we live in bondage to the fear that we will have our reputation tarnished by an inaccuracy or misunderstanding. Owning that reputation and believing our self to be its caretaker is a destructive bondage. And the enemy will use it to manipulate us and scare us away from being effective for the kingdom of God.

We cannot set our people free if we are in this kind of bondage. Remember, our commitment as steward leaders is joyful obedience. We are called to obey God, whatever that means and wherever that takes us. All he seeks is a willing heart. If in our obedience some people think ill of us, so be it. If rumors are spread about us, we leave it to God to deal with it. If we are free in our relationship to ourselves, we are also free, to let God be the caretaker of our reputation.

Owning that reputation and believing our self to be its caretaker is a devastating bondage. And the enemy will use it to manipulate us and scare us away from being effective for the kingdom of God.

This desire for opening up life in others influences our human resource policies, our hiring and management practices, our assessment and performance evaluations, our goals for our organization, and our measurements of its success, and ours.

Without balance modeled from the top, we cannot expect a transformational change, in our people. That balance has implications for how we set and achieve goals, our desire for growth, our strategic planning and our evaluation and incentive systems. I know leaders who expect their people to work sixty-hour weeks, be available on weekends and make their work their highest priority. When employees

take vacations or use sick time, these leaders carry silent anger. They would affirm that God calls us to balance, but they do not practice it in their own lives, so they do not generate it in the people they lead.

We cannot say that we value balance and then set goals and expectations that require our people to live unbalanced lives to achieve those goals and meet those expectations. Helping our people develop and maintain the balance is a systemic challenge that needs consistent guidance from the heart of a steward leader.

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