

Steward Leaders Build and Value Community as Its Own End

LEVEL THREE TRAJECTORIES



This trajectory may present one of the greatest challenges for a steward leader. I have not written a great deal about the impact a steward leader may have on "organizational effectiveness," but here we must take on the challenge. Consider the following two scenarios:

Scenario 1: An executive director succeeds in creating in her organization a sense of true Christian community. People genuinely care about each other, and relationships are valued above everything else in the ministry. Time and resources are dedicated to maintaining and building this sense of community. As a result, employee morale, job satisfaction and retention are high, mutual respect and teamwork thrive, and a high level of trust and loyalty exists between employees and leaders. Yet overall, the organization fails to meet its goals, suffers financially and is rated low on organizational effectiveness.

Scenario 2: A school superintendent has failed to create a sense of community in his school. People look out mostly for themselves, and everything is oriented around whether or not behavior and decisions will positively impact the school's bottom line. Employee morale is minimal and employee turnover is high. The employees know that their jobs are secure only

as long as they produce and contribute to the school's financial health and further its mission. They are mostly concerned for their jobs and lack trust in leadership. Yet overall, the school meets its goals, is financially stable and is rated high in organizational effectiveness.

How realistic are either of these scenarios? If we believe there is a significant contributing link between a healthy community and organizational effectiveness, neither scenario seems likely. Of course, one major factor in deciding on this contributing link is your definition of organizational effectiveness. And therein lies the challenge.

Defining success.

Your ministry will be driven to a great extent by how you and your board, your staff and your clients define organizational effectiveness.

However you define effectiveness, everything you do will be designed to serve that definition. Whether achieving mission goals, gaining an increase in your number of graduates, seeing a decrease in the homeless population or any number of measurable outcomes, your definition of *success* is a critical determining factor of your organizational life.

The question remains whether a leader will cultivate healthy communities as a **vital component** of organizational success, or only if it can be shown that it **leads** to organizational success. If scenario two is viewed as plausible, community will be regarded as secondary to the outcomes. If the development of community is not important to those outcomes, it will be regarded as nonessential or at least as a low priority in the use of time and resources.

For the steward leader the question is **not whether** building and valuing community as its own end will **lead** to organizational effectiveness, but whether we are caused to build and value community as its own end **regardless** of whether it leads to organizational effectiveness. We may even take the next step and say that if our

definition of organizational effectiveness does not include such a community, perhaps it is our definition of effectiveness that needs to change, not the value we place on building such a community. We must ask ourselves what is our guidance in determining our definition of organizational success.

If we can agree that scenario two is an impossibility (especially in the long run) for a ministry **whose greater purpose is to serve the kingdom of God**, then what of scenario one? Is it possible to achieve this level of community health yet fail to succeed as an organization?

Theoretically, we may say yes. However, in my twenty-seven years in not-for-profit life, I have never seen it. Perhaps the reason is that vibrant, trusting, healthy communities produce behavior consistent with almost every definition of organizational effectiveness. However, whether or not this is a provable position, we must force this discussion one step further.

Building community out of obedience.

The reason steward leaders build and value community as its own end is not because they can prove that it creates organizational effectiveness. It is not even because they have been able to include community as one value in their definition of organizational success. **In the end, steward leaders build and value such communities because they are committed to joyful obedience to God's call to be godly stewards.**

They are not called to build such communities **so that** something may be achieved that looks like success. Steward leaders are obedient, period. That obedience compels them to love their people and to work in and through their people to develop communities that value relationships as ends. **Success is measured in terms of obedience, not by a definition of organizational effectiveness or another standard of measurable effectiveness.** If this sounds detached from the reality of running a successful ministry, we must think again.

Do we really believe that if we are obedient to God in building such a community, he will not bless it? He is the one who calls us as godly stewards to lead as steward

leaders. He does not ask us to justify our obedience by human standards, but just to be obedient and to trust him for the increase.

But we must take this a step further. Do we believe that God created us to be at our very best when we, are living in obedience to him? If so, shouldn't we expect that the most effective organization in kingdom terms will have this kind of community at its center? Why would God call us to build and value community as ends if he did not intend for such communities to be the very vehicles through which he would build his kingdom? **If a kingdom definition of organizational effectiveness includes the development and maintenance of a healthy culture built on kingdom values, then we have proven scenario one to be an impossibility.**

When we develop definitions for "success" and "organizational effectiveness," we must be very careful to ground them in thoroughly kingdom terms and according to kingdom values. Otherwise, if we borrow worldly standards, our misguided definitions of success might end up placing us in direct conflict with the very work we are called to do as steward leaders.

- [However you define effectiveness, everything you do will be designed to serve that definition.](#) Can you give a real life example to support this idea?
- [If we can agree that scenario two is an impossibility \(especially in the long run\) for a ministry **whose greater purpose is to serve the kingdom of God**, then what of scenario one? Is it possible to achieve this level of community health yet fail to succeed as an organization?](#) This section poses many questions designed to lead us to a point, and really understand it.
- [In the end, steward leaders build and value such communities because they are committed to joyful obedience to God's call to be godly stewards.... Success is measured in terms of **obedience**, not by a definition of Organizational effectiveness or another standard of measurable effectiveness.](#) How does this compare with secular or 2nd kingdom views of success?
- [If a kingdom definition of organizational effectiveness includes the development and maintenance of a healthy culture built on kingdom values, then we have proven scenario one to be an impossibility.](#) What outcome is the author saying is impossible?