

The Steward Leader in Relationship With Our Neighbor-Part Two

“When we view relationships as ends and not means, we must use the gift of presence. We must be with people to be in relationship with them. This requires a prioritization of time, a commitment to involvement, and selflessness about our intentions and our desired outcomes.”

Interdependence.

This gift of presence beckons us into life as community. In community, we are not just individuals meeting together, but we are interdependent and mutually accountable and trusting. **If we are the body of Christ, we are called to rely on one another, sacrifice for our neighbors' well-being and invest ourselves in community.**

We are called to reclaim the virtue and joy of sacrifice for one another and rediscover presence in a time starved world. **We do this understanding that our interdependence is a reflection of the image of our triune God.** Yet we must also understand that, for some, this level of interdependence is a liability, not an asset.

Many years ago, I was watching my eight-year old son play basketball in a recreation league. I was sitting next to an overly zealous father whose identity seemed to hang on his son's every shot and dribble. At halftime we were talking about raising kids, and he commented that his goal was to raise his son to be completely independent. Without thinking, I blurted out, "That's interesting. I'm raising my son to be completely de-pendent." The man looked at me in horror and barely tolerated my meager explanation that we valued dependence on God greater than dependence on self. He never sat next to me again.

We will be called to lead many people for whom self-dependence and independence are valued and protected. They will not take quickly to a culture of interdependence, even if it proves good for business. So, steward leaders not only

need to help create such a culture, but must also steward the limits of that culture and the expectation of those who populate it. The process of making it a reality in an organization (and even defining what that reality looks like) is the continued work of the steward leader.

According to Christ, our neighbors are gifts to us, and our relationship to them must be carefully stewarded. This stewarding is impossible without the Holy Spirit's ongoing work of transformation within us. We are being changed into the likeness of Christ, who calls us to a life of sacrificial service and unconditional love for our neighbor.

Steward leaders must make this change first and yet may be the ones who struggle with it the most. After all, we hire people to get things accomplished. We train people for better performance. We reward people for achieving measurable goals, and we fire people for their inability to perform assigned tasks. We are in the business of getting things done through people, counting on the performance of others to help us meet organizational and personal goals. So how do we embrace such a radical transition in our view of our relationships?

It all goes back again to freedom and obedient response. Let me contrast the views of relationships in our organizations as seen through the eyes of the owner-leader (OL) and the steward leader (SL).

OL: I need to hire people who are top performers so we can make our goals, because my own performance will be measured by that standard.

SL: I want to hire people who will perform well because that will bring them satisfaction in their work, affirmation of their calling and success to the team.

OL: Judy is a rising star. I need to be sure she doesn't outshine *me*, or she might take my job someday.

SL: Judy is a rising star, and I will help her go as far as she can go, even if it means

she takes my job someday. When God is ready to move me on, I will be ready to go.

OL: If Bill doesn't improve his performance, I'll fire him so he doesn't hurt the performance of everyone else and diminish my reputation as a tough leader.

SL: If Bill can't carry out his work effectively, I need to help him discern what God is saying and help him transition into a new job for his own satisfaction and for the sake of the team, which is counting on me to help all members find their areas of greatest giftedness and to support and serve them so that they can perform to the highest level of their abilities.

The change of thinking happens in the heart of steward leaders who are free toward God, free toward their own self and therefore free toward the people they serve. This freedom requires the response of obedience. We are obedient by caring first for our people, trusting God to take care of us. This is not a call to a self-abusive, burnout style of leadership. We must love ourselves before we can love our neighbor. It is a call to the kind of selfless leadership that enables us to be stewards of our people and their skills, talents, aspirations and hopes.

High expectations.

This shift has an impact on the level of accountability to which we will hold our people: it increases it! For God's people, who are called to do God's work, the stakes are high, and the expectations are significant. Our work for our Creator God must be done at the highest level. He has created and equipped us for excellence, and we should expect nothing less of each other when we come together as a community to carry out God's mission. We will know real vocational fulfillment only when we are using our best skills in the best way to serve the kingdom of God. If we are doing anything less, someone who cares for us needs to tell us so.

Steward leaders must challenge underperforming employees at the personal level first. That is, they must help the employee understand how their current performance is not aligning with God's greater story for them. Or if it is, then a leader must find out what is happening in the employee's life to keep him from fulfilling his call and working to his potential. The impact on the organization is important, but secondary.

If we believe that God is writing a greater story for every one of our people and that their work with us and for us is part of that story, performance issues need to be examined in that context. The shift from the owner-leader to the steward leader happens when we operate within that bigger picture and address issues in that context as they develop.

We will know in our hearts when we have made that shift, or when it is beginning to happen in us. Different thoughts go through our minds when we encounter our people in the hallway or at a meeting. We wonder what God is doing in their lives, where they are on their journey and what we can do to contribute to the work God is doing inside them. We pray differently. We ask that we might be a part of God's greater story for every one of the people we are privileged to serve. We pray for changed attitudes and for loving colleagues who will hold us accountable when we shift back into our owner leader mindset. And we look at people differently. It is as if our eyesight has been altered. We are beginning to see *them as Christ sees them*. When and as, that happens as a process that is never completed we can truly be their steward leader.

Leading in a secular environment.

A word must be said to the steward leader who serves a secular organization or business. While the words used in discussions with employees must change, the attitude must be the same. If we are free toward our people, we still must ask the personal question first. Most everyone wants to be satisfied in their work, and a steward leader can help connect people to their area of greatest giftedness. Again, the key here is the motivation. **Everyone, on this earth is on a**

journey with God in some way. And if we genuinely care about the journey our people are on, we will respond to them in that context. We will see them as Christ sees them and love them as we love ourselves. In a secular environment, while this may prove especially challenging day to day, it has incredible potential for the transformation of people. Even beyond this, it is your calling as a steward leader, regardless of the culture or spiritual context of the community in which you are called to serve.

Being present.

The gift at this level is presence, and it is the fruit of this shift. When we have a proper attitude toward our people, when we embrace our call to be stewards of our relationships with them and begin to see them as God sees them, we want to and need to be present with them. There is no such thing as absentee steward leadership.

One regret I have from past leadership roles is the amount of time I spent in my office. I was not hiding, but I let administrative work take priority over relational work. I was less present with my people than I should have been. My reports were always on time, but many relationships around me were not developed in a way that conveyed my real love for those I served. If you love your people, you want to be with them. If you care about what God is doing in their lives and pray to be a contributor to their greater story, you must be with them.

Take the time to nurture the gift of presence. There is no substitute for it. In a time-starved world (always too busy), presence always costs you something, and that is the point. You set priorities and sacrifice other things to be present with your people. They are gifts; steward them carefully.

The Temptation of **Expediency**

(suitable or useful for achieving a particular end in a given circumstance even if improper or immoral)

This temptation can be stated very briefly: if it is our desire to use our relationships with others as a means to gain something we want or need, we will move from presence to expediency in our relationships. Remember earlier that I defined the enemy's attack on one-kingdom stewards as a temptation to build a second, earthly kingdom alongside our "spiritual" kingdom. The temptation plays on our desire to be owners, to have control and to chart our own course.

We respond by separating out a few things that were previously part of our submission to Christ, [Our values begin to change] and we label these things "ours." They may be small things at first: our leisure time, our money, certain relationships and perhaps parts of our self-image. **As we build this kingdom, we get reinforcements from the values of the world, which cheer us on and promise great rewards for those with larger kingdoms.** So, we quietly add items: our self-esteem, more of our time, our attitudes and most all of our relationships. The cycle continues until we are fulltime owners and rulers of our own kingdom. When we bring our crowns to our place of employment, we immediately build our kingdoms with whatever materials we need and have available. For the most part, these materials are in the form of the people we lead.

- [If we are the body of Christ, we are called to rely on one another, sacrifice for our neighbors' well-being and invest ourselves in community.... We do this understanding that our interdependence is a reflection of the image of our triune God.](#) How is this related to us as image bearers?
- [According to Christ, our neighbors are gifts to us, and our relationship to them must be carefully stewarded. This stewarding is impossible without the Holy Spirit's ongoing work of transformation within us.](#) Without the Holy Spirit, why would this be impossible?

- [SL: Judy is a rising star, and I will help her go as far as she can go, even if it means she takes my job someday. When God is ready to move me on, I will be ready to go.](#) This was brought up as an example a couple of weeks ago? How does this idea impact that thinking?
- [For God's people, who are called to do God's work, the stakes are high, and the expectations are significant. Our work for our Creator God must be done at the highest level.](#) How can this challenge us? Inspire us?
- [Everyone, on this earth is on a journey with God in some way. And if we genuinely care about the journey our people are on, we will respond to them in that context.](#) Could this be an outreach tool?
- [As we build this kingdom, we get reinforcements from the values of the world, which cheer us on and promise great rewards for those with larger kingdoms.](#) Have you seen examples of this?