



Becoming a Values-based Leader

by Harry Kraemer

Becoming a values-based leader isn't about emulating a role model or a historic figure. Rather, your leadership must be rooted in who you are and what matters most to you.

In my life, I have tried to stay committed to values-based leadership. No matter what position I'm in, whether father, son, spouse, corporate executive, professor, or board member—or, for that matter, soccer coach, volunteer parent, or Sunday school teacher—I have focused on never losing sight of who I am and what matters most to me.

When you truly know yourself and what you stand for, it is much easier to know what to do in any situation. I believe it comes down to two things:

1. Do the right thing, and;
2. Do the best you can.

That may sound simple, but it's hardly simplistic. Doing the right thing is a lifelong challenge for us all. Fortunately, there are four guiding principles that can help you in the lifelong journey of values-based leadership:

1. Self-reflectio

You identify your values, what you stand for, and what matters most to you. To be a values-based leader, you must be willing to look within yourself through regular self-reflection and strive for greater self-awareness. After all, if you aren't self-reflective, how can you truly know yourself? If you don't know yourself, how can you lead yourself? If you cannot lead yourself, how can you lead others?

2. Balance

Balance is the ability to see situations from multiple perspectives and differing viewpoints to gain a fuller understanding. You consider all sides and opinions with an open mind before coming to a conclusion. You seek to understand before being understood.

3. True self-confidenc

This means accepting yourself as you are at any point in time. Realizing that you are a work in process, you recognize your strengths and your weaknesses, and you strive for continuous improvement. With true self-confidence, you know there will always be people who are more gifted, accomplished, and successful, but you're OK with who you are.

4. Genuine humility

Humility enables you to remember who you are and where you came from, and it keeps life in perspective, particularly as you experience success in your career. In addition, it helps you value each person you encounter and treat everyone respectfully. When people ask you how you have achieved certain accomplishments, you realize that in addition to the fact that you have worked hard and have certain skill sets, your accomplishments are also a result of God-given talents.

By knowing yourself and your values, being committed to balance, and having true self-confidence and genuine humility, you can far more easily make decisions, no matter whether you're facing a crisis or an opportunity.

The real beauty of these four principles is that they can be applied by anyone, from the president of a country to the chief executive of a company, from the junior-most person on staff to the unpaid volunteer leader. You can always apply the principles of values-based leadership; you don't have to—or want to—wait until you have hundreds of people reporting to you. It is never too early or too late to become a values-based leader.

Good luck on your journey to becoming a values-based leader.

Additional Resources and Discussion Questions:

- A URJ Leadership Institute resource, based on the 2016-17 Scholar Series on Leadership, will be released in summer 2017

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