Christians as Managers Part 2

Written by K B Napier
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My superior is an atheist and has little time for Christian things. She thinks Christians are 'nuts' but has admitted to me that if everyone lived by the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus Christ, the world would be a better place. In these elements she sees everything for good and nothing to harm.

Yet, she lives and works and manages by a different creed: the belief in dog-eating-dog, and in looking after number one. Disturbingly, many *Christian* managers live by exactly the same creed. They read the first paper for managers (O/101) and, like my superior, said *"You're nuts!"*

Those who consider themselves to be 'professional managers' and who work in the higher income bracket (meaning they have 'high-powered' jobs) tend to follow one of two broad avenues of approach to managing: they either enjoy being 'individualistic' or they follow this or that management theory. In the first, they revel in the fact that they 'do their own thing', 'flying by the seat of their pants' and working mainly by instinct. (The one who loves to be 'individualistic' can only do so, of course, because he is in such a high-powered position... those who manage in the lower stratum do not have such a luxury!). In the other, they usually try to emulate a particular theory, moulding themselves to fit whatever it says he or she ought to be like.

Both are problematic. The one who is individualistic tends to be bombastic, often 'steam-rollering' people into carrying out their every whim. They *tell* rather than ask or encourage. It is likely they will not realise they are doing it... my own superior, only recently, moaned that maybe the reason people did not carry out her wishes 'properly' was that she was 'too easy going'. In reality, she is the exact opposite, forcing people to work under gruelling circumstances with the promise of much grief if they dare not to comply! How can a person get it so wrong? Easy – by being so self-centred as to ignore all the signs.

Often, the individualistic manager will create 'double-binds', which cripple both the motivation and the output of a workforce. That is, he or she will say one thing but mean another. Such a person will, for example, offer an 'open door policy'. In truth, that person usually attacks anyone who uses it and, by his or her attitude, repels the very thing being 'offered'. Thus workers are always perplexed, anxious and fearful. The manager who is like this will rarely praise – and if

praise is given, it is mixed with a warning or an attack; workers do not know how to take the manager, day to day.

To be individualistic with the above qualities is to be selfish, self-centred and totally insensitive to other people's needs and feelings. It is NOT 'getting things done' – it is making the lives of others a misery and this causes poor quality and low productivity. The Christian who is a manager must not be like this. In my own work I am known for being 'laid back', but I get the work done. I insist on total professionalism, but I do not force people to do anything against their wills to get it that way. They respond better to being trusted. You might say this will lead to being duped or to work not being done. Yes, at times. But, this is rare. Mostly, those who work for me do so willingly and they are proud of their own professionalism. The only time I get a problem is when my superior interferes and imposes impossible tasks on my Unit.

Working as I do means that someone, at some time, will try to pull the wool over my eyes. Frankly, the possible one-off problem is worth the risk, because the majority of the work is superb! A manager has to be mature enough to expect a failure or two. To keep striving after utter perfection, when such striving involves putting others down and making them miserable, is simply not worth it. In the end this approach only leads to demotivation, lower standards and decreased productivity. But, it takes a courageous man or woman to accept this, because of the small failure factor.

Look at it this way – which is better: to always have an unmotivated workforce who always work just below what is top-rate? Or, to have a much higher professional output with just a few isolated problems? I prefer the latter. Partly because any problem is easier to diagnose and easier to put right again, more quickly. And, partly because it is more human to do so. It is also more Biblical for it treats people like people and not like slaves or automatons.

Conversely we then have the manager who tries to fit himself to a particular theoretical model. Some read all the books and take courses, and they adapt to different models as time goes by! What they are doing is making themselves into what they are not. Psychologically this creates much stress, which leads to persecution of the workforce, lower productivity and much more. A man who tries to fit into a particular model of management subverts his own personality and personal beliefs, which is unhealthy and ultimately counter-productive. These managers think one thing but do another, and the tension is always there, sometimes ending in the same 'double-bind' situations as are experienced in the case of 'individualistic' managers. At any rate, they are unhappy, and this is passed on to others, making them miserable and anxious.

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For the Christian this is a bad move. Basically, a Christian must be himself and not what others want him to be. If you want to avoid days off with sickness, working under stress, or always feeling disgruntled, try being yourself! It could be argued that when you do this, you fail as a manager, because you need some guidelines about what is 'good management'. My friends, don't get deceived by that one! We can divide management up into two major areas: technical and personal. 'Technical' means you have the know-how. This is necessary to get your job in the first place. It is the latter, the personal aspect, that we are concerned with... and in any management scenario it is the most important, because it is the 'man-management' side that makes or breaks a business or a department. Treat people badly and you will get very little in return.

A Christian will make an excellent manager if he or she lives as a Believer, according to scripture. That is all it takes. Company procedures etc., all come under 'technical'. But, if those procedures blatantly crush the life out of workers or treat them like animals, well, as a Believer you are in the wrong place and must not uphold the regime.

Treat people with respect *even if they do not return the courtesy.* Does this bother you? Well, read scripture and see what we are told about turning the other cheek. Also, you must have a standard disciplinary procedure in place, which you must use impartially at all times. You must not be tempted to use it like a club to beat people with just because you 'do not like them'!

Awkward people who do not give good service must be counselled as per procedure without any sign of favouritism or dislike. If this means a long period of being hassled and being constantly opposed, then so be it – always act within the law and within your own procedure. And always be impartial. Coupled with this must be Christian compassion. That awkward person might have personal or personality problems to contend with. Try to sort it out, within reason. Don't just lash out!

The Christian manager will also give credit where it is due. Honest praise is necessary in any work situation. When my own workers go off duty I *always* thank them for their efforts, *every* time. They thus go off duty with a feeling of self-worth and that their manager has appreciated their efforts. Even if I have had to discipline someone, I thank them for their day's work at the end of the shift. This is not a sham. I mean it, because without them I could not possibly get on with my own duties. The shift is run by the workers, who know their jobs. I ignore minor infractions and upsets, for the sake of the greater task. Many managers think they have to automatically get on the backs of workers who make mistakes or who create a temporary problem. Not so! This just makes matters far worse. A relaxed atmosphere is more conducive to good work.

Let minor upsets go by without a fuss. Everyone makes mistakes! Counsel someone who makes continuous mistakes... but make it very brief. Don't 'make a meal' of it or make yourself feel important by 'downing' the person. And NEVER tell someone off in front of others... that is most unprofessional, and very unChristian. Indeed, rather than tell them off, find out why they did what they did and see if you can persuade them to act differently in future. If that does not produce the desired result, use the formal procedures.

If you search scripture and live by its precepts, personally, you will automatically apply those standards to your workforce. And whilst they might not believe as you do, they will appreciate being treated properly. Yes, they will certainly not live up to every one of your expectations, nor will they always be 'perfect', but at least the general atmosphere and productivity will be good. Obviously, there is nothing 'Christian' about allowing a bad worker to continue in employment. He must be dealt with properly... but never, ever, drop your Christian approach to everyone and everything.

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