

PRESIDENTS & VICE-PRESIDENTS

Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God. William Carey

defining the vision

Have you ever tried working in a team, but without a leader? Chances are that even if no one was specifically designated as team leader, someone emerged or took it upon themselves to fill that role. If not, accomplishing the team's tasks successfully was probably far from smooth and stress-free. Leadership is something that no team or organisation, no matter how large or small, old or new, how seemingly important or unimportant, can do without. We see this very clearly in society and in the church today. Bands have their front men, businesses have their chief executives, churches have their ministers, countries have their monarchies or presidents, governments have their prime ministers, sports teams have their captains and coaches, rowers have their coxswains, orchestras have their principal violinists and conductors... and CUs have their presidents and vice-presidents!

Given the necessity of leadership in life, it's not surprising that there are countless descriptions of and theories on what leadership is and what makes a good leader, not to mention the huge variety of role models (good and bad) available. Faced with this melting pot of ideas you need to be sure that your take on leadership is thoroughly Biblical. So what does God look for in a leader?

[Check out 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-4.]

♦ **character: holiness... growth in Christ-likeness**

Many of the qualities mentioned in the passages above concern the character of a leader. Titus was trying to choose leaders, Timothy was to instruct them, Peter writes directly to encourage them and Paul gives testimony as a leader. Some of the issues that come up time and again are **integrity** (*blameless* living), including **purity** (moral uprightness), leading to **respect** (from those close to them and by non-Christians). It is essential for leaders to practice what they preach both to avoid the charge of hypocrisy from non-Christians, but also to be an example to those they lead. It is very clear that leaders are not to be deceitful, pushy and bullying, always wanting their own way, harshly enforcing their status or rights, or trying to make some selfish gain. Instead, Christian leaders need to be driven by a desire to please God, not people or themselves, having glimpsed something of what doing so will mean in eternity. They are to be stable people who welcome and relate well to others, people who love what is good and have enough of a grip on themselves to be able to strive for that. They must display a **servant's humility** and a **shepherd's heart** (gentle, sensitive, sacrificially loving & caring). Jesus, of course, is the ultimate example of a servant-leader and Shepherd-King!

♦ **convictions: truth... lived with courage**

Leaders need to be living their convictions with courage. If you hold deeply to a certain belief you can, for whatever reason (out of fear or cowardice, or concern for your comfort or reputation) choose not to let that show. Alternatively, if you have the courage of your convictions, you can choose to live by them. Paul is very clear in his letters that Christian leaders need to be convinced about gospel truth and committed to living according to God's word. Hopefully you are also convinced that *God* has *entrusted* this work of leading to you. A firm belief that he has called you to serve in this way and that it is a privilege to be given such an important task will aid your ability to *serve* with *willingness*.

♦ **capabilities: specific & general... learnt and practised**

A couple of the passages refer to being able to encourage others to live for God or being able to encourage and refute others with sound doctrine. The ability to

articulate what we believe is a great quality for leaders (especially CU presidents and vice-presidents) to possess, but a wider principle is also evident: you need to be able to fulfil the specific demands of the job (more on these the **defining the role** section). In addition there are some general capabilities that it's important for CU presidents and vice-presidents to have, such as a vision for their role and the CU (see the section on **vision**), an awareness of what a CU is – its doctrinal basis, purpose and values (see the article **what is a CU?**), the ability to lead and care for a team, and the ability to see the 'big picture' of CU life. Not all of these things will come naturally or immediately to you but taking the time to assimilate the appropriate information and learn and practice the skills really will make a difference!

How do you handle this? A leader should be someone who **LEADS** (funny, that!)...

L is for **Leadership**, which implies working with a *team*. Many mistakes are made either because the leader fails to give direction to the team, so nothing ever gets done, or because the leader takes over and tries to do everything themselves resulting in burnout and demoralisation. Guide, empower and trust your team.

E is for **Endurance**, which implies hard work and not giving up. Leading a CU will sometimes *require* hard work and sometimes *seem* like hard work; there will inevitably be occasions when you want to give it all up. But endurance and perseverance are part of the Christian experience – not to weigh you down but to refine you, to cause you to trust in God and to see God alone glorified.

A is for **Accountability**. We have been cleansed by Christ's death on the cross, but we live in an unclean world and it is all too easy to become contaminated by the values expressed by the people around us. Make sure that you have an older Christian to whom you can be fully accountable, someone who will pray for, teach, rebuke, guide and generally look out for you. Ideally this will be someone who knows you reasonably well and who can read the Bible with you thus ensuring ongoing spiritual growth.

D is for **Dependence on God**. *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:5)*. A leader – as all Christians – must be prayerful. This means *communicating* with God. Not just bringing a shopping list of needs before him, but rather actively listening to him; telling him your plans, desires, frustrations and joys, and seeking his ways, his blessing and his glory.

S is for **Servant-hearted**. *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)*. The Christian life is a self-sacrificial one. Christ calls us to deny ourselves and follow him, and your CU committee and members need to see you doing this. Their needs come before your own, just as your needs came before Christ's.

developing a vision

In order to *lead well* and with **integrity**, it's important to **understand** and be personally **convinced** of the *role* and *importance* of the CU. Hopefully, as you work on having a right and deep personal understanding of the CU this will help to convince and envision you about it, which in turn can be **infectious!** So here are some ideas on developing a vision for CU leadership:

You could read about the CU movement and leadership in general

Share stories with other presidents and vice-presidents, and keep track of what's happening 'on the ground' in your CU – allow yourself to be encouraged by this!

Try to develop a local as well as general vision for CUs and leading them

But as well as this *visionary* side to being a president or vice-president, there's also a highly *practical* aspect – it's important to **know** what is **entailed**, and seek to *fulfil* that with **excellence**.

defining the role

'The lesson... is one that we must learn again and again:

God's servants do not have the same gifts, the same tasks, the same success, or the same degree of divine intervention. It is partly a matter of gifts and calling, it is partly a matter of where we fit into God's unfolding redemptive purposes. Has he placed us in times of declension, for example, or of revival; of persecution, or of major advance?

Let God be God; let all his servants be faithful.'

Don Carson, *For the Love of God Vol.2*, meditation on Nehemiah2 & Acts 2

The **president's role**: Assumes overall responsibility under God for the CU. People inside and outside (e.g. Students' Union and university staff, local churches) the CU will look to you for direction.

The **vice-president's role**: Supports, complements and balances the president in the overall leadership of the CU; often plays a significant part in the pastoral care of the committee, staying 'tuned-in' to the needs and impressions of CU members, and welcoming visitors.

The CU's overall leaders have the responsibility of ensuring that Christians are nurtured through the Bible being taught, through an inclusive programme, through ensuring that people are praying for each other and that all are made to feel welcome. There is also the responsibility of helping people to get involved in CU life and settle in a church. So keep your ear to the ground (being a leader can seem lonely and isolating) and try to be as accessible and available to people as possible e.g. by spending time talking to people before the meetings. As well as this, being a president or vice-president may entail dealing with more difficult issues such as a committee member who gets drunk in the bar, a powerful group in the CU taking a particular line on a secondary issue, or an entertaining but unbiblical Chaplain who is hurt that he is never invited to speak... As they come up, you may need to decide whether your approach to each of these situations should be 'prevention' or 'cure'. Some issues will dissolve easily and quickly, others may be ongoing and unpleasant to deal with, but whatever it is remember to cover it in prayer and chat (albeit confidentially) about it with trusted and wise advisors.

The core aim of both roles is to “Lead the team to lead the CU”...

1. Build the team

- * *Know* them: their personalities, church backgrounds, passions, strengths and weaknesses.
- * *Pray* for them: thankfully and faithfully.
- * *Empower* them: make sure that they know what they are meant to be doing and that roles within the team are clear.
- * *Spend time* with them: just having fun and enjoying each other, as well as in prayer, Bible study and business.
- * Make sure they are *supported* spiritually. (Perhaps organise them into prayer triplets?)

2. Develop the vision of the CU

This is done with the team and is a question of taking responsibility for the CU you will eventually hand on in a year's time – where do you want it to be by then? (See the section on *vision*.)

3. Leading committee meetings (regularly – weekly or fortnightly)

- * Set a timed agenda and make others aware of it.
- * Begin with, or include, time for Bible study and prayer.
- * Look after people – allow time to hear how your team members are personally, as well as for regular feedback on what they have been doing (ensure the work is evenly distributed).
- * Be aware of the group dynamics – draw out the quieter ones and don't let those who are talkative dominate.
- * Every so often take time to review the direction and progress of the CU in terms of its vision.

4. Pastoral care of the team

On top of studying the Bible together in committee meetings and praying together or organising prayer triplets, do seek to meet up with members of your committee one-to-one once a semester (this is probably best done on a same gender basis). This will help you to get to know them better and find out in more detail how they are both personally and in their role. This goes hand in hand with...

5. Encouraging and developing others

4. Delegate tasks that you know you can do but which will appropriately stretch others, giving whatever help and encouragement is needed in the process. Remember that people will flag, get ill, fall in and out of love, wobble spiritually, make mistakes, forget things; some may have work struggles, spiritual struggles, moral lapses, fall out with fellow committee members or lose their vision. Do not lose heart and do not take over, but get alongside your committee and strengthen them.

a few resources...

- ◆ *Developing the Leader Within You* – John C. Maxwell (Thomas Nelson)
- ◆ *Courageous Leadership* – Bill Hybels (Zondervan)
- ◆ www.ifesireland.org, www.thecumovement.org.uk and www.ifesworld.org

Finally, one invaluable resource: your Staff and/or Relay workers will of course be more than happy to help whenever they can!