

What Size Are You?

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Organizations improve when leadership improves. If this is so, how can we improve our leadership so that our sponsored ministries will improve? By leadership here we include specifically board members and chief executives (called by various titles in our system: President, Principal, Head of School, Director, Executive Director).

First, we need to decide what great leadership is. Then we need to figure out what this has to do with us.

Characteristics of Great Leaders

We will look at two examples for help in describing great leaders.

Our first example is taken from extensive national studies of great US presidents that have identified critical characteristics of presidential leadership.

Great presidents are people of ideas and conviction. They have an inspiring and compelling vision of America that they are able to articulate in clear, consistent and vigorous terms. They pursue this vision tenaciously despite obstacles. They neither tire of calling others to the vision nor miss an opportunity to instill commitment to the vision.

Great presidents know how to take risks and to cut their losses. Their confidence about achieving the noble and best outcome gives them the ability to lead their people into fire and convince them that it is right for them to be there.

Great presidents shine the light of success on others and take responsibility for failures.

Great leaders listen and hear everything. Because they don't think they have all the answers, great leaders are able to really absorb others' input. With great artistry, they can pull divergent thoughts together into new ideas and figure out how to move them forward.

Our second example takes us in a different direction. A great deal has been written on the occasion of the bicentennial of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark's Journey of Discovery. Jack Uldrich ("Leading into the Unknown: How Lewis and Clark Built a Great Team" in Leader to Leader, No. 33 Summer 2004) writes that Lewis and Clark were able to achieve their extraordinary goal because of their – in a single word - leadership. "The one constant over their 863-day odyssey was the captains' steady leadership in pursuit of their mission. At every phase and juncture of the journey the captains kept their team focused on its mission and led them across 8,000 miles of forbidding terrain and surmounted, by

one count, 56 separate life-threatening situations."

Linchpins for their leadership on the treacherous journey were: building a cohesive team (selection based solely on merit); leading by example; caring for people as individuals; adapting their leadership style to the situation (e.g., changing from command-control approach to a more participative and flexible mode); focusing on moving forward with optimism and confidence rather than on placing blame for the mistakes of the past; and grooming each team member for leadership.

Learning from Great Leaders

Authentic governance of a nonprofit organization requires the type of leadership found in great presidents and in Lewis and Clark. To fail to provide this leadership is shortchanging our ministries. What is it within great leaders that holds the many leadership characteristics together? What do they flow from that we might be able to emulate?

I believe it is magnanimity - greatness of spirit – that distinguishes great leaders. It is their depth and breadth as spiritual and emotional human beings. Leaders are people of **size**, as described by the theologian Bernard Loomer.

By "size" I mean the stature of a person's soul, the range and depth of your love, your capacity for relationships. I mean the volume of life you can take into your being and still maintain your integrity and individuality, the intensity and variety of outlook you can entertain in the unity of your being without feeling defensive and insecure. I mean the strength of your spirit to encourage others to become freer in the development of their diversity and uniqueness. I mean the power to sustain more complex and enriching tensions. I mean the magnanimity of concern to provide conditions that enable others to increase in stature.

To emulate their size means we must steadily and purposefully increase our interconnectedness and stature as responsible, respectful, relational persons through a lifetime of serving others. What size are you?

Great leadership in our ministries calls each of us to magnanimity and nothing less. If we can provide this type of leadership in our ministries, they will increase in **size** too.