**INTRODUCTION**

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Yes, women can be leaders. Women ***are*** leaders. If you are a Women’s Ministries director—for your conference, church, or union―you are a leader. If you organize AIDS-prevention seminars, you’re a leader. If you are a Dorcas/Community Services leader, or Sabbath school superintendent, if you organize Prison Ministry or conduct evangelistic series, you are a leader. If you are a mother, you are a leader! And if you have none of these responsibilities yet, but you have dedicated your gifts to serve God and your community, you can become a leader. This course will introduce important principles of leadership. Together we can all learn to be better, more effective leaders.

**It’s Important**

**We all recognize the importance of leadership. Leadership clearly makes the difference in the success or failure of organizations**. A change of leadership can turn the tide of failure, replace stagnation with excitement and energy, and bring a renewed sense of purpose and mission. Leadership is as needed in the church as it is in places of business.

**What is a Leader?**

**Simply put, a leader is a person who leads and has followers who will follow. Unless we can inspire followers, we’re not “leaders.”** The emphasis is not on power but rather on the ability to motivate. There are two main aspects of leadership. The first is that we are going somewhere—not that we have arrived or are just maintaining status quo, but that we have a definite goal, a destination. The second is that we (the leader and followers) are going there together—you are a leader if people want to follow you. The converse is also true—you are not a leader if no one is following you. Have a goal; inspire people to work with you to attain that goal—that is leadership.

**Learning to Lead**

**One key to effective leadership is recognizing that you can learn to become a better leader.** Few people are born natural leaders. Leadership skills are developed through experience. Many great leaders freely admit that they were unsure when they started, and many more admit that they have had times of uncertainty and discouragement along the way. The great leaders also admit that they have often had to learn from their mistakes or the mistakes of others. A lot of effective leadership relies upon the use of specific skills—and these can be learned. If you are serious about being an effective leader, take time to analyze your leadership behaviors:

* by self-reflection,
* with honest feedback from those who work with you, and
* through objective assessment (leadership tests).

Having done this, you will have a better understanding of your strengths and where you need improvement. We can learn to become more effective leaders. As Kenneth Gangel says, “Make no mistake about it—leadership is *learned* behavior.”

Being a sincere Christian does not automatically mean that one will be a good leader, nor does being given a position of authority mean that one will be a good leader. Do not think that Bible knowledge and spiritual lifestyle somehow substitute for competence in leading a Christian organization. But with a commitment to God and a willingness to learn and improve, each of us can grow as Christian leaders.

**EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS**

What are the characteristics of effective leaders? Think of a woman whom you respect as an outstanding leader. What characteristics make her effective? Which of your talents and abilities help you to serve as a good leader? As we consider the following eleven traits, which ones do you already have? Which can you develop? Let’s look together at these important characteristics of good leaders?

1. **Be Committed to God**

**As a Christian leader, first and foremost you must have a commitment to God. That commitment will be revealed in your words and actions and the way you interact with people.** Spend time with Him. Your commitment to God and your desire for the salvation of those you lead is your motivation. Commit your life to God, pray about your work constantly and ask for His blessing. If you become discouraged, remember to pray. Take the problems and discouragement to Christ. The strength of Christian character and the high values you model will mark you as a Christian leader

**2. Have a Vision**

**Leaders need to have a strongly defined vision of what their organization can and should accomplish. This vision needs to be clearly articulated to their team or department. This means that as a leader you need to know where you are going, and what you are trying to achieve.**

This vision has to be shared, and it has to be meaningful and make sense to the people who are involved. As a leader, involve your group in developing a clear statement of the vision and mission. People are more willing to work toward a goal when they have shared in its creation.

Help your group keep the goal in mind. If people do not have a clear goal in sight, you can be sure they won’t achieve it! If we are not focused, we spend our energies doing many things and then end up wondering what we have accomplished. An effective leader keeps the team focused on the goal.

***“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other”***

*John F. Kennedy*

## Be a Learner

**If you wish to be an effective leader, you must be a continual learner. Not one of us has enough knowledge and skill for the tasks that lie before us.** Learn through reading, taking classes and seminars, through discussion with others. Ask questions. Expand your competence and ability. Develop new skills and interests. Observe effective leaders. What do they do that makes them effective? What can you learn from them? What can you learn to avoid by observing an ineffective leader? Learn from your own mistakes and those of others.

## Be Honest and Trustworthy

**Leaders have to be honest and accountable. They’ve got to be seen as trustworthy human beings. They have to be open in their communication, be fair and sincere and show that they care.** Along with trust comes respect. If leaders want to be trusted and respected, then they must be honest and respectful. When people are treated with trust and respect, they are far more likely to be honest and respectful. Our behaviors need to be so open and honest that people instinctively know they can trust us. If people ask difficult questions, we must give honest answers, without becoming defensive, evasive, critical or harsh.

***“*Setting an example is not the main means**

**of influencing others; it is the *only* way*.”***

*Albert Einstein.*

1. **Believe in Yourself**

**Believing in yourself is not arrogance or boasting; it is recognizing your value as a daughter of God and recognizing that He has given you talents, gifts and abilities to use to His glory.** To be successful, you must have self-confidence. Believe in yourself and your ability to lead others, to help them reach important goals. Believing in yourself will enable others to believe in you. And you will be modeling an important trait to younger women, showing them that women can serve as strong, effective leaders. As a confident leader and role model, you will be helping to strengthen both your church and your community.

1. **Be Enthusiastic**

**Enthusiasm is one of the best motivating behaviors a leader can display. Remember this and stay positive. When the difficult times come, as surely they will, take it to the Lord in prayer and He will renew your courage and enthusiasm.** Having a cheerful, pleasant, and happy countenance along with a positive, optimistic attitude and hopeful, believing spirit will set the pace for everyone around you.

Remember there are ways to boost your enthusiasm quotient. Hard as it may seem to do this, take time for fun. Make time for exercise, rest and relaxation. Don’t work to exhaustion. Delegate.

### Be a Problem Solver

All leaders have to face problems at some time, in some cases frequently. Recognize this and remember that the leader is not yet born who didn’t have to deal with problems and misunderstandings at some time. **Always take your problem to God first; He will guide you as you work through the solution.**

**Be flexible.** If the special music or the handouts did not arrive, find a way to improvise. Plan well; do your best, and then relax. Things don’t always go as planned, but remember—it’s not really a catastrophe.

**If conflict arises, try to resolve it with a win/win solution.** A person who approaches conflict determined to win will probably lose—at least respect. Remember, people who disagree with you are not necessarily the enemy! In many cases their observations may lead to improvements in your programs.

**Don’t forget your sense of humor;** sometimes it’s better to laugh than to cry. If the errors are your own, don’t become discouraged, but see them as opportunities to learn and do things better the next time.

Don’t forget that many of today’s best procedures and inventions started out as problems, but there were people determined to solve them. Without the problems, there would have been no improvements.

## Communicate Well

**A leader must be able to communicate well, and she must be able to listen just as well.** Practice communicating—both orally and in writing. Seek feedback from those with whom you interact, those whose skills you admire and those with professional knowledge. Accept their suggestions and continue to practice!

If your position calls for frequent public speaking, ask a mentor to coach you. It is often helpful to videotape yourself in a realistic speaking situation so you can spot needed improvements. If you are a novice, you might consider taking a public speaking course, if available. If grammar is a weakness, ask someone to check your speeches, especially before important occasions.

Show in your communication that you are a genuinely caring and sensitive individual. If your communication does not convey that you are a caring person, seek advice on how you can improve. Take time to listen. Often that is the best gift you can offer someone who is hurting or discouraged.

Discretion is also extremely vital. Leaders must always be discreet. Never spread gossip or criticize others. If an issue arises, speak directly with the person concerned. And always respect confidences. Many will look up to you and will share personal problems. They must know that you will never break their confidence. However, the exception is when there is mention of abuse or of doing harm to oneself or others.

***“Everyone thinks of***

***changing the world***

***but no one thinks of***

***changing himself”***

*Leo Tolstoy*

## Be a Change Agent

**Leaders are always moving toward a goal. As a leader, be proactive, taking the initiative to tackle new projects, constantly striving to improve the way things are done. Identify needs—within your church or your community.** What can your department or group do within the range of your responsibilities? Together make a plan, set a goal. You will need courage and conviction to do this, but you can have confidence if you have prayed and committed the task to God. As you initiate plans and projects, seek feedback, consider Biblical guidelines, and move forward with your team.

***“We must be the change we wish to see in the world.”***

*Ghandi*

1. **Be Organized, Efficient and Competent**

There are fine people who have great ideas but who accomplish little due to lack of organization. The effective leader needs to be well-organized and an efficient time manager. She needs to be both people-oriented and task-oriented. That is, she is one who can relate well to people but still get the job done. Or, to put it another way, she is able to get the task completed well, but also cares for and manages people.

***“The final test of a leader***

***is that he leaves behind***

***in others the conviction and the will to carry on”***

*Walter Lippmann*

**Today’s busy leaders must be organized. Planning and organization go hand in hand, and even the most disorganized of us can learn to be organized and efficient.** Planning and organization (including tidiness) greatly reduce the stress in our lives, enabling us to delegate to our team as well as offer support.

# Make Time for Personal Growth

**It is important that we regularly “exercise” the four dimensions of the human personality: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.**  Make the time to get regular physical exercise. This is a great stress reducer and energizer. Exercise your mind through reading, creative problem solving, writing and so forth. To build up you emotional health, make an effort to be kind and patient, to listen to others with genuine empathy, and to be kind to yourself also! To exercise spiritually, spend daily, consistent time in prayer, scripture study, meditation, and fasting when called upon by God.

**TEAM BUILDING**

**As a leader, you will be responsible for creating a strong team. It is recognized in many companies and organizations around the world that having one leader with supreme decision-making power is no longer effective.** More and more we are seeing the use of Team Leadership. That is, having many people in the organization who take responsibility in sharing the leadership and forming part of a strong, decisive team. This requires good communication, vision sharing, and strategic planning, but the results are worthwhile. A leader who desperately hangs onto a position and the power it carries, who does not mentor, empower and train new leaders, and does not plan for those who will take their turn at leading, is both narrow-minded and foolish, for the work will be held back under that style of leadership.

In your role as a Women’s Ministries leader, become a “talent scout.” Look for women who have leadership capabilities, mentor and encourage them, give them tasks to develop their skills, and rejoice in their growth for God. You will never make yourself obsolete but will continually see new ways for your strengths to be used.

The excellent leader recognizes she can do only so much on her own, and that the work will be far more effective when done by a team. Leaders encourage and support shared decision making and collaboration. Leaders ensure that team members are trusted and given responsibility, and are ready to offer support as needed. Do your team members feel significant and valued? Leaders share the credit with the team and celebrate with the team when successes occur. Effective leaders model collegiality and support, and they encourage others to do the same.

A team builder believes in others. She will strengthen her team. The leader will not overreact to negative behaviors, criticism, and human weaknesses. She will not feel built up when she discovers the weakness of others. She will remember that *potential* and *behavior* are two different things and will believe in the unseen potential of all people. She will feel grateful for her blessings and will naturally be compassionate and forgiving toward her team. She will not carry grudges and will refuse to label others or to stereotype, categorize or prejudge.

### A strong leader empowers her team. She constantly provides opportunities for others to develop leadership skills by encouraging them to be creative, to take on responsibility and empowering them with information, as well as support and encouragement to achieve successful outcomes. She will coach team members in particular skills, or organize others to coach the team and then articulate her pride in the team to build their self-esteem. She has high expectations for others’ success and lets them know that. She will value creativity and avoid being a controller. Your task as a leader is not to do everything yourself, but to equip, inspire and empower ordinary women to share your leadership.

 *[See handout for a list of “Team-building Principles” by Barna]*

**STYLES OF LEADERSHIP**

**Leadership styles vary widely. There is no one perfect style of leadership. Do not be discouraged if you feel that you are not a “natural leader.” You can develop leadership skills through study and practice.**

Leaders may display different styles in different situations—ranging from one that is highly supportive in personal relationships if needed, to an authoritarian, decisive style when a decision has to be made quickly. We will consider first a general observation about women’s leadership style and then outline the major classifications of leadership style.

**Women’s Leadership Style**

In recent years, considerable attention has been paid to the question of how women’s leadership styles vary from men’s leadership styles. Much of the earlier literature on ‘good’ leadership was based on a masculine style of leadership. But there has been a gradual change in the way people view leadership and what is now considered desirable.

* **“Popular notions of successful leadership now encompass characteristics traditionally associated with women.” (Smith and Smits. p. 43.)**
* **“Women tend to exercise leadership through strong interpersonal and communication skills.” (Smith and Smits. p. 46.)**

The leadership skills that many women display are based on years of organizing a family, obtaining obedience from children without a fight, talking through issues with older children and/or their husbands, and constantly showing love and caring. These skills are highly valued today in the workplace as being very effective in true leadership. So if you are not a trained, highly educated career woman, do not feel inadequate. You probably already have some of the most desirable “leadership” skills.

However, it is important to remember that being quiet, self-effacing, or hesitant are not effective leadership skills. They are signs of weakness and will mark you as incompetent and unqualified. If possible, educate yourself on the habits, mannerisms, and communication styles of women that decrease their impact and effectiveness. Work to overcome any of these traits that may be holding you back. God has given you talents and has called you to be a leader. Be strong in Him.

**Basic Leadership Styles**

Leadership styles vary greatly; however a look at the five main styles will be helpful.

* + 1. **The Autocratic style is forceful, determined**. The leader has complete control and imposes directions regardless of other viewpoints. It may be appropriate when initially setting forth the vision for the group and the norms of the group or organization, or when there is movement away from agreed-upon goals. However, the leader may dominate and prevent contributions from other, leading to deep frustration and resentment.
		2. **The Authoritative style is definite yet responsive.** The leader has significant control but listens to other viewpoints and suggestions. It is helpful in three situations—early on as healthy group patterns are modeled and established; when intentional or unintentional challenges arise; or during group evaluation and problem-solving. However, it may stifle input from others and can inhibit the development of others’ gifts and contributions.
		3. **The Democratic style is group-centered, with a focus on consensus building.** There is shared control with the leader as a guide. This style is almost always appropriate, especially when empowering members to express their opinions and test their own understandings. It encourages all to develop their gifts and leadership, but must not allow the group to lose focus, make poor decisions, or allow forceful individuals to dominate.
		4. **The Laissez-faire style is passive and non-directional.** The leader offers minimal control. Though rarely appropriate, it is, however, useful to reduce dependency or challenge people to take responsibility. Problems arise when the leader fails to give adequate direction so that little is accomplished.

**Servant-Leadership**

In addition to these common classifications, another term has entered the leadership vocabulary—the term *servant leader*. Great leaders see life as a mission, not a career. They have a sense of responsibility, of service and contribution to others. In his writing, Robert Greenleaf, who gave the term prominence, has defined the servant leader thus: “The servant leader is servant first… It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first…The leader first and the servant first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.” (“The Servant as Leader,” 1970, as quoted in Wikipedia)

**Servant leadership differs from other styles. “Unlike leadership approaches with a top-down hierarchical style, servant leadership instead emphasizes collaboration, trust, empathy, and the ethical use of power.** At heart, the individual is a servant first, making the conscious decision to lead in order to better serve others, not to increase their own power. The objective is to enhance the growth of individuals in the organization and increase teamwork and personal involvement.” (“Servant Leadership,” Wikipedia)

**Think about it**. Leadership styles vary from person to person. Which style do you tend to use most often? Do you vary your style depending on circumstances or the group? Can you think of an instance when a leader’s style seemed inappropriate for the occasion or group? How did this effect the group’s ability to be productive?

**DELEGATION**

**One vitally important talent of a leader is the ability to delegate. Share responsibilities according to the gifts of your team members, and their level of capability and responsibility.** Then let them carry out their duties according to their personal creativity and individuality. When possible, give a person tasks that are slightly beyond their previous experience; this will allow them to grow.

The most successful leader will learn the art of recognizing the gifts and talents of others, giving them appropriate tasks and then supporting them. The two things leaders most often fall prey to are a reluctance to let power slip from their own hands and feeling threatened by a capable team member. Failure to delegate authority makes it more difficult for team members to accomplish their tasks and it is often seen as a lack of trust.

As a leader you cannot do everything. **Delegate!** Hand tasks out to your team members and then have confidence in them; offer mentoring where it is helpful. The team member will not accomplish the task in just the way you would, so don’t expect that. Communicate clearly what your expectations are and set any boundaries that are important; then let team members do what they are capable of. (It is important to define the responsibilities in writing. Or you may often find yourself saying, “But I said I wanted…” and the team member will respond, “But what I heard you say was….” Put it in writing and let the team member ask for clarification. Support her in her failures just as strongly as you do in her successes. Always keep in mind that the person is more valuable than the results.

Do not be tempted to think that there is virtue in doing more than your fair share of the work! God wants us to live balanced, temperate lives. In Exodus 18, we find Moses’ father-in-law Jethro teaching Moses a valuable lesson in delegation. Moses was spending all his time dealing with disputes that arose. Jethro advised him to select able men to handle groups of individuals and then refer the harder cases to Moses.

**Consider the principles taught by Jethro:**

* “The work is too **heavy** for you; you cannot handle it **alone.**”(Ex 18:18).
* “You and these people will only **wear** yourselves out.” (Ex. 18:18).
* The results will be more **satisfying** to all if you delegate. (“If you do this…all these people will go home satisfied.” Ex.18:23).
* Moses would still be the **leader**; he would teach spiritual principles and exercise legislative leadership (Ex. 18:19-20,22).
* “If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to **stand** the **strain.**” (Exodus 18:23).

**Look at the benefits Moses would receive by delegating:**

* Less physical and mental **exhaustion**
* Those ministered to were more **satisfied**
* He was able to **focus** on the larger issues
* He put to use the **gifts** of others
* He developed a team of “allies” all determined to **accomplish** the same **goal**
* He put a system in place that would be **effective** once he was no longer the leader

Remember that by delegating tasks you are not shirking your duty. When you trust others with appropriate responsibilities, everyone benefits—and you will be growing more leaders.

**CONCLUSION**

Leadership is a calling, a mission. It is an opportunity to be a blessing to many. At times you may feel overwhelmed by your responsibilities. But remember that the skills of an effective leader can be learned.

You are a leader. You can become a better leader. Pray often. Commit your talents and abilities to God. Learn constantly. Observe effective leaders. Delegate. Be kind to yourself—take time for rest, relaxation, and fun. And know that God will give you strength and wisdom for the task.

***“If you are a woman and you sometimes grow weary of the battle, know that the church needs you! For the church to go into the future with half its members sitting on the leadership sidelines is like soldiers going into battle with one hand tied behind their backs.”***

*John Ortberg*

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