



Discovering Your Leadership Style: The Power of Chemistry, Strategy and Spirituality

May 2014

\$16, 208 pages, paperback

978-0-8308-4113-4

Finding the Strengths of Your Leadership

The first line from Dickens's great novel not only describes life in England and France 250 years ago but also describes the religious landscape of America today. It is the best of times and the worst of times. It is an era of great opportunities and relentless challenges. The American church is in crisis, and Christian leaders must face this crisis head-on. It is much more challenging to lead a church or Christian organization today than it was just twenty years ago. How can we learn to lead wisely in an increasingly post-Christian, postmodern and multiethnic world?

The place to begin is for each of us to personalize leadership's foundational questions:

- Am I really a leader?
- How do I know if God has given me the gifts and abilities needed to lead people?
- How can I grow in leadership?
- Does God give every Christian the potential to lead?
- What makes Christian leadership different from secular leadership?

These questions give voice to our soul's longing to be used by God, while recognizing the insecurity we often feel when evaluating our own leadership abilities. Four additional questions can help frame this challenge:

- Are people born with innate leadership gifts – Is it nature?
- Can leadership improve with experience and effort – Is it nurture?
- Is Christian leadership primarily about organizational strategy, as some Christian leadership books imply?
- Or is Christian leadership primarily about deep spirituality, as others imply?

The goal of this book is to present a simple yet robust model for Christian leadership. I believe this model will give you clarity as to how God has created you and how you can become the leader God intended you to be. The boundaries of your imagination will be stretched. You will gain a deep appreciation of your unique gifts. You will find a new frame of reference for understanding how to lead in a challenging culture with wisdom, grace, love and strength.

Let us begin with this observation: *Leadership strength is the slowest growing quality in the life of a Christian leader.* What a sad reality! Someone once defined leadership as "the ability to hide your panic from others." We all wish it was an easy course to master. Unfortunately, it is definitely a graduate-level program. Every other competency in Christian ministry is easier

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BOOK EXCERPT



David T. Olson is a religious researcher, church planting leader and leadership coach. For the past twenty years, he has served in leadership for church growth and evangelism in the Evangelical Covenant Church. Dave is also the director of the American Church Research Project. His previous book was *The American Church in Crisis*. Dave and his wife, Shelly, live in Minneapolis.

to develop. What makes leadership so difficult and daunting is that it encompasses how you respond to each ministry situation you face.

Here is a second observation: *The younger leaders are, the stronger they believe themselves to be; the more experience leaders gain, the more they become aware of how much more they need to learn.* When I talk to young or inexperienced leaders who hold an unrealistically high opinion of their own leadership ability, I remind them that if they are really that good, they have already maximized their full leadership potential. The only direction for them to go is downward!

Many people look to personality assessments to gain clarity and self-understanding about how to lead – instruments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), StrengthsFinder, the DISC Personal Profile and a host of other assessments. These tools can help leaders to understand their personality and identify certain qualities of leadership. I love them all for the self-understanding they provide. However, they are not designed to help leaders discover what type of leader they are, or how they are meant to lead, or how to grow as a leader.

It is even more difficult to find tools that will help a Christian leader learn to lead as Jesus led. Books written to describe the essence of Christian leadership abound, and many are excellent. But it is challenging to find a biblical model that provides immediate clarity and focus regarding how to lead well in the rough and tumble world of a church or Christian organization. Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was a model that was simple, clear and usable with people on all levels of leadership?

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My introduction into a focused quest to understand leadership development began twenty-two years ago when I was asked by a Christian organization to help them adapt a new and innovative model for evaluating the potential of young Christian leaders for a specific role – starting new churches. For the last twenty years, I have led eighty assessment centers that have taken almost a thousand young, gifted Christian leaders (along with their spouses) on an intensive four-day leadership evaluation process to discover if they have the character, calling, gifts, passions, habits and entrepreneurial ability to start a new church.

Each center is composed of twelve to fifteen candidates who have passed a pre-assessment screening and have submitted multiple references verifying their past ministry experience and fruitfulness. A trained assessor team of twelve to fifteen people get to know each person in depth through test results, sermon presentations, small-group simulations, interviews, group problem-solving activities and ministry skill evaluations. In addition, a professional counselor helps the candidates and spouses discern deeper issues that may short-circuit healthy ministry.

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“Leadership matters, and accordingly, there are many books on leadership. What makes this book stand apart is both its simplicity and its profundity. By focusing on the three core elements of spirituality, chemistry and strategy, this book doesn't just detail what leadership is, but rather helps its readers engage in an important journey of examination and introspection of one's own leadership style. This book is a gift to leaders and to the larger church.”

— Eugene Cho, pastor, Quest Church, Seattle, Washington, and founder of OneDaysWages.org

Over the four-day period, a comprehensive picture of each candidate begins to emerge. During the rigorous schedule of twelve-plus hours a day, some participants rise in our estimation while others decline. We may discover sterling character or uncover dubious behavior. We meet candidates with accurate self-understanding and others with delusional self-perceptions.

While our Assessment Center looks at twenty-two different ministry factors, the following questions rise above the rest and can be complex to assess:

- Is this person a leader?
- Do others follow him or her?
- Have the individual's leadership abilities been formed by Scripture, fruitful experience and the work of the Holy Spirit?
- Does this person have potential flaws that could harm the ministry and devastate the people who follow him or her?

These questions and experiences have ignited in me a deep desire to develop a Christian leadership model that can build up the kingdom of God by forming Christ-centered, healthy, missional leaders.

— Taken from chapter one, “A New Leadership Model”