

Bad Dogs And Leadership

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O.K.. Last week I was a "bad dog". Feel free to roll up a newspaper and slap your hand while saying with a stern voice *"Bad dog! Bad dog! Stop that!"*. There. I feel duly chastized. What did I do to earn such opprobrium (OK, you'll have to look that one up)? I attended the annual Willow Creek Leadership Summit. It was one of those "live via satellite" deals which originated from the Willow Creek campus outside of Chicago and was beamed around the world to various locations. An estimated 80,000 people worldwide were registered for the Summit. I was able to attend because a local pastor/friend arranged a scholarship for me to go (and after reading this he may have second thoughts for next year!). I wasn't able to attend all of the sessions (life happens) but I was able to attend enough to get the flavor of what was happening. In the first session Bill Hybels, the founder & senior pastor for Willow Creek, spoke on the "Life Cycle of a Leader" and his talk was quite good. I've heard Bill before (at a Vineyard conference in Anaheim several years ago) and NO one can doubt his love and passion for God. I missed James Meeks speaking next on "Enemies of a Growing Church" because I had to duck out to record a radio program (like I said, life happens). Next up was Andy Stanley (yep, son of Charles Stanley of Atlanta, GA) speaking on "Focused Leadership." Again, his talk was excellent. Good points about such things as "play to your strengths, delegate your weaknesses" and working at a "sustainable pace" - ministry is a marathon, not a sprint and the importance of prioritizing your family over your ministry. Good stuff.

But it wasn't long before the wheels began to come off my wagon. (OK, I've given up on the "bad dog" metaphor. I've been scratching my head with my back paw, but just can't seem to dig up enough bones to make it work). I don't think the next three (or more) speakers were even believers. They were, in fact, business and corporate consultants. Peg Neuhauser, a "management and organizational consultant," spoke on "Tribal Warfare" and resolving staff conflicts. I was bored 5 minutes into her talk and can't remember anything she said. Sorry. The next morning opened with Ashish Nanda, an Associate Professor in the Harvard Business School who teaches the "Willow Creek Business Model" (among others). He spoke on "The Risky Business of Hiring Superstars." His talk was based on a study of brokerage companies which he analyzed to learn the success or failure rates of companies which hire "superstars" away from other companies. Again, interesting stuff, but . . . (?).

It was roughly at this point that I realized something (I'm slow, but I do catch on). The operative definition of "leader" or "leadership" which was functioning throughout this Summit was one of "leadership = corporate management". If your goal is to "lead" (or "pastor") a church with a large staff, if your goal is to captain the Christian cruise ship "S.S. Megachurch", then this Summit was for you. This was all about how to lead a large and successful organization/corporation. But it wasn't really about biblical leadership. The Willow Creek/Mega-Church model of leadership is all about how to run a big organization. In order to lead (note how I carefully avoid using the term "pastor") such an organization you really do need to read the latest corporate management books (which were conveniently available on the book table in the lobby) and attend the annual leadership summits. The problem I see isn't that the material is necessarily "bad", it's just that I don't think the Apostle Paul would be qualified to lead such an organization - not enough experience in corporate management theory, plus he wasn't a "team player" and would have a difficult time getting along with other staff (the whole "tribal warfare" thing again). But is this really biblical leadership? As I shared with my wife afterwards, within the context of the corporate mega-church paradigm it all made sense. But once you step outside of that paradigm, as the ol' boys back home used to say, "That dog just won't hunt" (sorry, old metaphors die hard).

The reason all of this seems relevant right now is because I'm working to finish my workshop on leadership for the upcoming National House Church Conference in Denver. The workshop, entitled "Of Hobbits, Heroes & Spiritual Leadership: 5-Fold House Church Leadership Lessons That Frodo Taught Me," will examine biblical 5-fold (Eph. 4:11) leadership principles and how they work in our Post Modern culture. In contrast to what I experienced at the recent Leadership Summit, these will be anything but "corporate" (you can leave your copy of "The One Minute Manager" at home). We will ask (and try to answer) questions such as: 1) "If God wanted to plant 10,000 house churches in your area, would your current understanding of 5-fold ministry

be an obstacle to what He wants to do?"; 2) "Are you worshipping the 'golden calf?"; 3) "What's the relationship between character and 5-fold gifting?" Intrigued yet? My goal in this workshop is not to make you a better "corporate leader" but to explore what genuine 5-fold leadership should look like if it is going to lead tens-of-thousands of multiplying house churches in the coming move of God in spiritual renewal.