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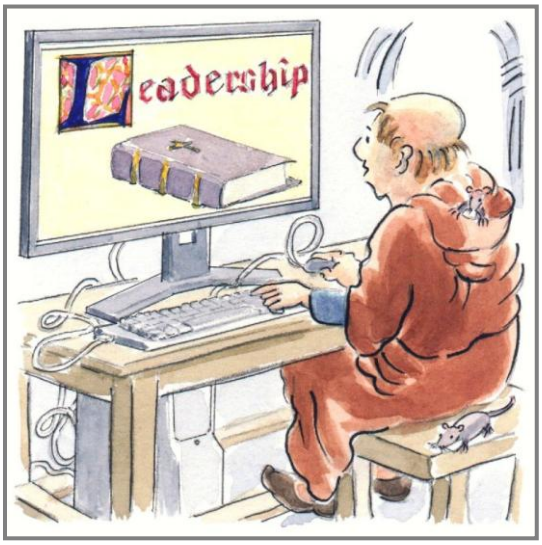

What to look for in your leaders

TN87 Training Notes series: Leadership

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Churches select leaders in several different settings. These include:

- **the choice of a new Minister;**
- **the selection of a leadership team of some kind;**
- **the election of office-holders such as Elders, Deacons or Church Council;**
- **the appointment of paid staff;**
- **the finding of co-ordinators for various areas of church life;**
- **the selection of leaders for particular church groups or activities.**

In my experience few churches provide clear guidelines for the kind of people to look for if they are to hold any kind of leadership position. I am thinking here of matters of character and competence rather than legal requirements.

Without such criteria we are in danger of reselecting or electing anyone who offers or those who have served for many years in the past. Guidelines for new Ministers are common but even these may be based more on what the congregation want rather than what Scripture requires. It is not just the choice of new people at concern here. What standards do we set for all our leaders as a challenge to live up to?

I often point out that the New Testament is far more concerned with person profiles than with job descriptions, but we tend to give such documents the opposite priority. Church leaders should be regularly checking themselves against the requirements for the post, scary though that may be.

These notes seek to summarise some of the biblical criteria for church leadership and then apply these. They are presented here to help you devise your own, particularised and probably simplified, list for elections at annual church meetings, for the choice of group or activity leaders, for the requirements for a new Minister, and in other settings.

Passages to draw from

Last week I was in a church where, I was told, the same people get voted back onto the Church Council year by year. There are no criteria to help church members make their selection and little encouragement for others to stand.

At another church they were asking for volunteers to help lead and teach young people's groups. The one requirement seemed to be a willingness for a DBS check.

In an effort to do rather better than this, here are a number of New Testament passages which bear study for the kind of people you should be seeking to hold office or lead groups in your church.

1 Acts 6:1-7

This is an example of early church life rather than a teaching passage, but the outcomes seem to show that the methodology was wise and the passage is deemed good practice. In the selection of seven people for a particular work of service, but one which demanded sensitivity because of political issues, the requirements are for these people to be:

- full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom;
- full of faith.

But it is also worth noting that they were chosen so that the apostles could maintain *their* leadership priorities which were to be:

- people of prayer;
- people who focused on the ministry of the word.

2 1 Timothy 3:1-13

This is the most detailed person profile for church office-holders in the New Testament. What is so interesting is that the requirements for deacons (those it seems who carried out the more practical tasks) are almost identical to those for the leaders. Some of these points need to be applied carefully to a culture today rather different from when this was written, but the overall aim is to be **'above reproach'**. Here is an overview of both lists:

- faithful in marriage *(not ruling out single people given the writer of the letter)*;
- free of harmful addictions and showing self-control;
- worthy of respect in a well-ordered life;
- hospitable, generous to others;
- with the ability to teach *(for an elder)*;
- not given to too much alcohol;
- gentle and patient;
- not picking arguments;
- not a lover of money or being dishonest in financial affairs;
- a faithful Christian;
- managing their family well with a healthy lifestyle;
- not a new, and therefore untested, believer;
- having a good reputation with those outside the church.

It is worth noting in this passage that deacons are to be tested, presumably on these points. What testing does your church carry out?

3 Titus 1:5-9

There is a similar list for elders in Titus. Additional points to note:

- children behaving as members of a Christian household;
- not over-bearing or quick tempered;
- an upright, holy and disciplined Christian;
- understanding sound doctrine to refute error.

4 1 Peter 5:1-4

This passage looks at the motives which should be apparent in those who offer themselves for leadership roles or accept such a role. A person:

- not offering because they must but because they are willing;
- eager to serve;
- not lording it over others but being an example of servant leadership.

Other passages to check out include: Matthew 20:25-27; Acts 20:28-31; 2 Timothy 2:1,2; Hebrews 13:7,17; James 3:1.

The question is, would you have the courage to include these points in a person profile for leadership roles in your church?

Additional checklists

When it comes to person profiles for Christian leaders, it seems churches alliterate on C. The obvious points are Character (most of what is covered in the biblical passages above) and Competence but some add points such as Commitment, Calling, Conviction, Chemistry. These notes will resist the temptation to follow suit!

The following points serve as checklists for what you might include in addition to the scriptural bullet-points above, although some overlap with these. These lists are given for leadership posts in general, so you will need to select from them and adapt them for whatever staff member, office-holder or group leader you have in mind.

Essentials *(part of the Scriptural listings above)*

- Whatever level of spiritual maturity is deemed necessary for this role.
- Showing evidence of growth in their faith towards maturity.
- A person of disciplined prayer.
- A person who studies the Scriptures.
- A person of realism and humility.
- A person of integrity.
- Some sense of God's calling for this ministry.

Church membership

- Enthusiasm for the church's vision and values.
- Not a 'yes' person but in sympathy with the church's way of working.
- Prepared to be a role model of godly living.
- Prepared to be regular in attendance at the church's services.
- Giving priority to *(any specific meetings for prayer, etc. that are expected)*.
- Taking a full part in church membership responsibilities *(meetings, giving, etc.)*.

Gifting

This will depend on the role, but gifts of servant leadership, wisdom and discernment will no doubt feature somewhere in the list.

Competence

- Spiritually gifted in the area of service, as judged by others.
- With skills acquired through experience of life/work.
- Willing to learn and grow in this area, eg. through training.
- Willing to be accountable within a management structure as required.
- Willing to be mentored or guided and have their work reviewed.
- With good communication and/or planning skills *(when necessary)*.

Experience

- Any requirement for length of time as a member of this church.
- Roles already filled within this church and in previous churches *(if applicable)*.
- Enthusiasm for this particular area of ministry.
- Understanding of the culture being addressed.
- Character in those roles as seen by others including other leaders.

Teamwork *(vital for those serving on decision-making groups)*

- A team player, able to work well with a range of other personalities.
- Someone prepared to share their views honestly and openly.
- A good listener, willing to learn from other viewpoints.
- Open to change and able to handle conflict well.
- Able to keep confidences and handle sensitive information.
- Understanding the range of people in this congregation.
- A wide friendship base *(if appropriate)*.

Availability

- Time to give to the ministry in question.
- And to its preparation as necessary.
- Team and other meetings seen as a required part of this role.
- Ability to undertake any related responsibilities that go with this role.
- Occasional or seasonal special requirements where extra time will be required.
- Not overburdened with too many commitments in this church.
- Not seeking to escape from family or other responsibilities through this ministry.

Legal requirements

Any requirement for:

- DBS checking *(eg. if working with children or adults at risk of harm)*.
- Other training *(eg. in food hygiene or in driving competence for a minibus)*.
- Minimum or maximum age *(eg. for membership of a decision-making body)*.
- Special qualifications or exclusions from your denomination for this role.

Is this setting the bar too high?

The answer has to be that Scripture sets it high because church leadership in any form is seen as serious business. The problem is that many churches have in the past welcomed almost anyone to almost any role in their church and so there is a culture that demands too little for those who serve as leaders.

But that does not mean that all this has to be seen in a particularly pressured way. Here is an example from one church encouraging people to join a decision-making group.

> "We work hard together, pray hard together and have fun together too. It's an exciting time to be serving the church in this way. What we need is not saints or superheroes but ordinary folk of all ages, committed to serving God and others in the name of Jesus and the power of the Spirit, who are willing to work hard and get involved in the life of the church."

And, finally, some words from St Paul who set the standard cited above in the Pastoral Epistles and elsewhere:

> "Who is equal to such a task? … Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant…" NIV 2 Corinthians 2:16; 3:5,6.

These notes are available at https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index then TN87. See also Article A15, *Christian administration?,* A17, *Staff selection step-by-step,* and A49, *The patronage process as drama,* plus Training Notes TN78, *The role of a church leader*, (which applies to Ministers), TN91, *An MOT for disciples of Jesus,* and TN120, *Lessons for leaders..*

They are based on an idea first produced by John's colleagues in Administry some years ago in *Adminisheets 10* & *60*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN87 under Leadership.

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