

# FINDING YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

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# FINDING YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

A guide for ministers

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I want to thank all my colleagues from Oxford and Sarum College, as well as all those people who invite me to sit with them while they puzzle out something of importance as they lead in their own place. I also want to thank Ruth McCurry, whose confidence in me enabled me to believe I could do this. Without the regular Christmas letters from Robert Gallagher and his willing co-operation in Chapter 8 I do not believe I would have found the inspiration for the idea of the prophet leader.

Without them there would be very little of value here at all. Where this book reveals my mistakes and losses of memory and failures to understand or explain clearly enough there will be no one to blame except me.

## An introduction

The world is full of textbooks on leadership and manuals to help you gather a new skill, or to slot yourself into a new way of thinking or working. This book is not another one. This is more of a reflective journey through some of the landscape of leadership and from a distinctly Christian perspective. If there is such a thing as a 'landscape' of leadership then there will be places where the view is good, and I hope that if you are a leader of any kind in a church or congregation you will find it helpful to sit a while with the ideas here and explore the views that they offer you. I hope also that this will help you to understand more easily some of the strains that come your way, and how you might manage yourself when you feel under pressure. I hope too that if you are a Christian working in a range of other 'secular' settings you will find the ideas here helpful in understanding the fashions that hold sway in the world at the moment, and how you as a disciple of Christ might shape your own leading.

From my earliest days I have been interested in how things work, and many of my toys were taken to pieces before trying to put them together again, often without success. As I grew up this passion expanded to take in history, so that I could understand why things are as they are, and psychology, to understand why I was the kind of person I found myself becoming. This soon developed into wondering and exploring how things get done and decisions made. Quite when this became a fascination with leadership I am not sure, but after some years as a Baptist minister in a church I found myself in a training role listening to both individuals and teams and offering them feedback and ideas, which they found useful.

For many years the Church of England Board of Education was a key national player in developing the use of experiential

methods of adult education, running workshops of group work, education design and consultancy. This approach was influenced by the foundational theories of John Adair<sup>1</sup> who taught that every group and every leader needs to attend to task, individual needs and the maintenance of the group. It was also shaped by the approach of the American Bethel group work programme, which was adopted and developed by the Grubb Institute<sup>2</sup> and the Tavistock Institute and the Chelmsford Cathedral Centre for Research and Training, which has now closed. The 1970s were a time of a heady mix of experimentation and one of my predecessors here at Salisbury, Harold Wilson, was developing experiential educational methods for ordination training years before it became more generally accepted.

This ragbag of experiences and theories that had come my way was focused when ten years ago I was commissioned by the Bishop of Oxford to gather some colleagues together and develop a leadership training programme for the clergy of the diocese. The course we designed was known as Developing Servant Leaders (DSL) and was adopted by several other Anglican dioceses and a United Reformed Church province. We all learned a great deal about teaching and training leaders. Since coming to Sarum College I have been leading one of our programme areas, which we are calling leadership development, and now teach on our MA in Christian Approaches to Leadership.

While I was still in Oxford, Mike Hill, the Bishop of Buckingham, persuaded me to go to Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago for their annual Leadership Summit, and at that first visit I heard Bill Hybels say some very sensible things. I have gone most years since to this annual event at Willow, even though I do not share much of its theology or its easy and seemingly uncritical baptism of American business methods.<sup>3</sup> However, it is one of the few Christian centres which has given sustained attention to leadership and has sought to embody its thinking in practice. As a living example it is special, and gathers some of the best contemporary thinking about leadership at

its annual summit. That first year Bill Hybels had some tips for leaders that have stood me in good stead and I think they inspire the way in which I have approached this small book.

He said:

- Always have a book on leadership on the go.
- Learn from whoever you can, and do not restrict your attention to those who you think you will agree with, or whose theology you approve of.
- Get close to a leader who is ahead of you in the game and learn from him or her without getting in the way.
- Do some leading, if at all possible with colleagues from other disciplines.
- Set yourself some leadership learning goals each year as part of an annual review.

From quite a different world, I remember welcoming a priest from Lesotho who was coming to shadow me in Oxford for several days. I was keen that we should make the most use of the time and asked him what he was most interested in learning and watching. He was very polite but clearly did not understand my language of learning outcomes, intentional learning and success measures. After a while he shook his head and told me about the tradition of medicine men in his part of Africa. He told me that they go out into the wilderness not knowing what they will find, or even if they will find anything. When they do find something and put it in their bag they have no idea when or how they will use it when they get back, or even if it will be useful at all. Some years later I had the privilege of visiting a native African healer in his house and being amazed when he opened his bag for me and spread its contents on his rug.

This rather open-ended approach to learning stood me in good stead for my first visit to South Africa in 1995, when a link was formed between the dioceses of Oxford and Kimberley and Kuruman. There was no way I could predict what I would

learn, or which experience would pass me by or influence me for ever. The key was to go and be as open as possible to experience whatever came my way. This was so like much of the early counselling and group work training designed under the mantra of Fritz Perls, who was famous for saying: 'Lose your mind and come to your senses.'

Too much of our educational world at every level is dominated by learning outcomes and measurable results, valuable as they undoubtedly are sometimes. Most of what I have learned has been by experience and chance, integrated by reflective practice. I have also read whatever I can lay my hands on and made my annual visit to Willow to the Leadership Summit.

Inevitably this book is more like a medicine man's bag than anything else and I hope you will use it in any way that works for you. I once heard a speaker on leadership say that there is nothing new to be discovered, only new ways of putting the ideas together. I know that some of the ways I have woven ideas together in this book you will not find anywhere else, and I hope that the way in which I have put ideas together will be useful. Where I have been able to reference something, I have done so, and where I am sure someone else has put it better than I can I have quoted. There have been countless conversations which friends and colleagues will recognize and which I have long forgotten except for the nugget of wisdom that has stayed with me.

There is a structure and purpose to these thoughts that has taken shape over so many years. In Chapters 1 and 2 I take an overview of the ways in which leadership has become an all-encompassing idea, not only in the world but also in the Church, offering my tentative conclusions that leadership is a human characteristic that belongs to all of us and is about seeing what is wrong, and how it could be better, and trying to do something about it.

In the next six chapters I explore different paradigms that I have found operating in church life and examine their content

and dynamics. They are monarch, warrior, servant, elder, contemplative and prophet. It is my view that by far the most popular paradigms operating in church today are those of monarch and warrior. They both deliver some real benefits but, I believe, carry within them the seeds and dynamics of dysfunction. The final four are minority paradigms, which I think carry more hope for the Church and for those disciples seeking to offer leadership in the world, beyond the walls of the church building.

In the final chapter I offer some advice for those people who find themselves in leadership positions in the Church where operating out of a monarch paradigm is inevitable and not up for negotiation. My interest here is in providing some ideas about how it is possible to operate and at the same time be aware of the inherent dangers and pitfalls.

If leadership is about influence and change then it is also about power, its use and abuse. Throughout this book I think of power in a number of ways. There is the power you have as a person, with your own body and its strength, and with your own personal history and sense of esteem, which is often thought of as your charisma. I think Jesus will have had a great deal of this kind of power. As you acquire it, this will, over the years, include the power you gain because of your knowledge and skill. There is the power that comes with being appointed to a position. This will include your ability to deploy resources (money and people), to hire and to fire, and to set strategy. Jesus had none of this power at all. There is the power that is called 'projected power', which is given to you by other people, either consciously or unconsciously, and which can be taken away as quickly as it is given. When the crowds followed Jesus he had this, but on the cross, when all his disciples deserted him, he had none of it. Each of these sources of power can be creative and wholesome and each can be malign and unhealthy. Together, to misquote Lord Acton, they have the potential for corruption or for great good.



# 1

## Mapping the territory

I heard recently of a train journey where there was a very extensive delay caused by some mechanical failure. The train was stationary for a long time in the middle of nowhere. Passengers were restless and wanted to know what was wrong. Some of them were missing their connections for the last boat to an island that day, and the temperature of frustration was clearly rising. It was a mechanical fault to some part of the train and engineers were working on it. The tea trolley made frequent journeys up and down the train and the two women staffing it brought solace to everybody.

‘Don’t worry. I have no idea what is wrong, but we are all in this together and a cup of tea will help.’ As the trolley made its journey, the gentle spirit of the trolley staff comforted people and, as they stopped and talked, brought to each part of the carriage a new sense of community and an easing of frustration.

‘This was real leadership,’ I was told. ‘It did not come from those in charge but from these lowly paid trolley assistants.’ So what was this leadership? It was not the kind that motivated people to get up out of their chairs and go to the front in an evangelistic rally or ‘step up to the plate’, as Americans say. Nor was it the kind that painted a future vision that people were prepared to die for. It was something different from those more familiar teachings about leadership, vision and motivation. These trolley assistants read the emotional climate of the passengers on the train and knew that they needed to stay calm and learn how to wait for others to deal with the problem. The two women identified with them, and as well as providing

what was to hand – refreshments – in a much deeper sense refreshed them.

On other occasions I have been party to many conversations about the importance of the head teacher to the success of a school, a clergyperson to the well-being of a church, or a bishop to the development of a diocese. There can be no doubt that the person in charge does have a very significant role in any organization.

For example, consider a head teacher appointed to a small rural school. The school had been in the doldrums for some years and parents who had the choice were no longer so keen to send their children there. The loyal and excellent teachers were demoralized and standards were not as high as they should have been. Then some years later the school was performing well, numbers of children attending the school were up and the results were very good. The head quietly went about holding her colleagues to account and raised the demands made upon them, as they had lowered their expectations over the years when they had not been led well. She challenged the children to achieve more, and expected the governors to take responsibility seriously. This was leadership of the kind we are more used to reading about in leadership manuals.

Many years ago I was part of a survey of Anglican clergy in the diocese of Oxford who were leading churches which seemed to be growing numerically at quite a significant rate. There were liberals, evangelicals and Catholics in the mix. The fascinating results were that the only common feature was that each of these clergy followed on from a clergyperson who had not been popular! At the same time it was significant that each of them brought to their particular theological persuasion the same basic skills of relating well, being reliable and trustworthy and leading worship with a sense of presence.

If leadership can encompass these stories, and many more, it is a wide subject and I want now to use a longer example to set out some of the core principles that lie at the heart of any

thinking about leadership. More than ten years ago the diocese of Oxford developed and launched a programme of leadership training for its clergy. I want to explain how I think such a programme came about.

Richard Harries had been bishop for a good many years and seemed to have an inner assurance that God would look after the Church whatever was happening in the world. On a number of occasions I heard him talk very positively about the Church. For instance, he stressed that giving had been better than ever; numbers attending church were in decline but not nearly as much as with other national institutions such as trade unions and political parties. Although there was a decline in the number of stipendiary clergy the number of licensed ministers, clergy – stipendiary and non-stipendiary – and readers was as great as at the beginning of the 1900s. This was no time to sound the alarm but to steady the ship.

However, there were others among his senior colleagues who thought that some kind of drastic wake-up call was needed to avoid the looming disappearance of the Anglican Church in England. To use modern churchspeak, they thought that the Church was dominated by a pastoral metaphor and needed to adopt a missional one. They found that the majority of their clergy ministered within that pastoral metaphor, referring to themselves as pastors and teachers rather than as evangelists. Such clergy often see their key role as being leaders of stability and pastoral care, with congregations that need to be cared for rather than challenged. Among these other senior colleagues there was talk about most of the Church being in terminal decline and needing either hospice care or a radical injection of leadership to bring about substantial and lasting change. They wanted a new initiative of teaching and training in leadership.

Bishop Richard was not easily persuaded but I think some statistics about how few people in the country knew anything about Easter changed his mind, and he became increasingly aware of the chasm that was opening up between the Church

and most of the people who lived in Britain. He was influenced by the rather vibrant anti-church messages in the media and the more radical atheism that was being propounded. In the end he agreed that something needed to be done.

He called for a major consultation, which started with an invitation to 60 key lay and clergy leaders in the diocese to write a side of paper in response to the question: 'What would the diocese of Oxford look like in ten years' time if it adopted a wholly mission perspective rather than a maintenance one?' These produced a fascinating collection of thoughts which were gathered together and used as a focus for a day's discernment conference. This day and discussions that followed drew out a commitment that the diocese should be:

- centred on God
- orientated towards the world and its needs
- connecting to people, both their communities and their cultures, in new ways
- serious about Christian discipleship.

These were later amplified with some strategic directions, one of which, under the fourth heading, was the priority of training in leadership. It was further established that no 'off the peg' training would do. It had to be focused on the values and practices of change, collaboration and leaders who were first and foremost servants. Each of these values needs a brief explanation.

Change has become a fundamental issue for leadership in both secular and religious texts. I attended a day conference organized on the theme of leadership by the Franklin Covey organization. It started with a video clip of a canoeist in a turbulent river. 'Change is the new constant,' Stephen Covey said.<sup>1</sup> So leaders have to be excellent at handling change, reading it, feeling its energy, discerning where it is taking you, and steering the raft in what Stephen Covey calls our 'white water society'. Bringing about change is much easier to talk about

than to do, and there are many books about how to and how not to do it. There is much discussion about the difference between changing the structure of an organization and changing its values or culture. As a planning and training team we used the idea that some people tackle change like engineers who think that something can be taken to pieces, repaired and put back together again. Others behave more like diplomats or politicians who build alliances behind the scenes and push change through when they know they have enough support to win the day. Others prefer to think of themselves as gardeners who are aware of the times and seasons and say they are willing to wait for change to grow naturally; they talk about working organically. Others have adopted the idea of chaos, wave theory and things like social networking and think of themselves as surfers waiting for and catching the waves of change as they sweep in from the deep. Change is not something that can be planned and delivered, they say, but waited for and ridden, or missed.

On the course we taught the theories of Kotter,<sup>2</sup> who identifies eight essential characteristics for any change programme to be successful, and we used the idea of William Bridges<sup>3</sup> that change has to be understood from the psychological perspective of those people faced with the prospect of change. Later on I have found the ideas of Senge, in his book *Presence*,<sup>4</sup> evocative of some of the teaching of the mystics. It may seem obvious that for Christians the religious language of conversion is useful in helping clergy to think about changes they are trying to bring about in their churches.

‘Collaboration’ is another buzz word that permeates the churches these days. It resonates with the renewed interest in the Trinity as a key doctrine for understanding community and church, and echoes much emphasis in secular leadership texts on the importance of teamwork. This has proved to be very difficult in church contexts. Many clergy, and indeed bishops, have modelled themselves on their vicars or bishops from the

past who operated more like a sole trader running a corner shop than a committed member of an organization called a church, diocese, association or province. For them these ideas of collaboration and teamwork have been extremely hard to learn. At the same time the nature of an unhealthy dependency<sup>5</sup> is so prevalent in the churches that the dynamics of desire and hope are projected into church leaders. I deal with the topic of projection and collusion in other parts of the book, and how they make collaboration very difficult as they build distance and separation rather than team and mutuality. I will explore how the ideas of collaboration and teamwork fit with different paradigms of leadership.

We found two writers of great help. Katzenbach<sup>6</sup> identifies the difference between a team and a group, showing that in a real team members actually do depend on each other for both success and failure. They sink or swim together. This helps many Anglican clergy in team ministries to realize that they are not in teams at all but in loose associations of co-workers. We also found helpful the work of Patrick Lencioni, whose *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*<sup>7</sup> is a masterpiece in its clarity and simplicity. If teams cannot focus on results they become embroiled in status and ego. But they cannot achieve this focus until they have found the capacity to hold one another accountable for their behaviour. And they cannot do that until they have committed to the chosen course of action, and they cannot commit until they have argued and tested their differences, and they cannot do that until they have built trust. Very often in church and diocesan teams it is the absence of trust that is reported to me as the key feature that undermines all efforts to build successful teams.

Servanthood is another theme written about by both religious and secular authors. It may seem to stand in opposition to the rather easy quip that you know you are a leader when people follow you, but I shall devote a chapter to this subject and I will argue that a mature understanding of servant leadership

should lie at the heart of every person who seeks to be a disciple of Jesus and a leader in the assembly of the faithful, or a Christian leader in other spheres of public life.

Our team shaped a programme around these values hoping that clergy who attended the programme would be more willing to function as leaders of mission rather than maintenance. As we read more and checked with other colleagues developing different programmes, some core principles became clear to me, and I will turn to these in the next chapter. I shall argue in more detail that leaders are very aware of both the best and worst of the organization they belong to and of the world or context in which the organization works, and they know that all is not right. I call this **discontent**, and it is discontent in the heart of anybody that stirs the desire to lead. Knowing that something is not right often brings with it an idea about how it could be better. This is normally known by the word **vision**. The third essential ingredient is the **courage** and resilience to put both discontent and vision into the public arena. These three things, then, call a person into leadership – discontent, vision and courage.

I shall say more about these three things in the next chapter, and for the chapters that follow I have chosen six paradigms that I have noticed leaders in the churches seem to take as their way of explaining and justifying what they do and how they do it. These same paradigms shape the way in which organizations and churches think of themselves and the kind of leader they want. I want to explore their Hebrew and Christian roots. The paradigms are monarch, warrior, prophet, servant, contemplative and elder. I realize that in choosing these titles I have not wanted to use the framework developed by Dulles<sup>8</sup> which has been such a benchmark set of theories about leadership and management in church organization. Nor have I used the metaphors developed by Morgan,<sup>9</sup> which also in their own way have been so important. I have been tempted to go with Simon Western,<sup>10</sup> who suggests that a study of the literature

learn, or which experience would pass me by or influence me for ever. The key was to go and be as open as possible to experience whatever came my way. This was so like much of the early counselling and group work training designed under the mantra of Fritz Perls, who was famous for saying: 'Lose your mind and come to your senses.'

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