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Contemporary Approaches to Leadership

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Background

I am the youth director for Valley Christian Center Foursquare Church in Albany, Oregon, and have been for the past two years. Previous to this, I was the volunteer middle school leader for six years, with a hiatus of two years in the middle. During this time my family worked with a church plant in another city. I am a full-time student and am compensated for eight hours of work through the church per week. My wife works full-time as a labor and delivery nurse, working graveyard three times a week in 12 hour shifts. We have two girls: Zoe age nine and Madelyn age six.

I have a volunteer staff of five adults; four of them are parents of students in the group. They are all great at building relationships with students and three of them meet with students in a small group or discipleship setting.

Two of the leaders are married to each other. I have one recent high school graduate who leads our worship team that is composed mostly of students. He plans to continue in ministry with us next year.

Our youth group consists of 50-60 regular middle school and high school students. Many of those students have not grown up in the church and their parents do not attend VCC or have started recently coming because of their child. Approximately half of them live in a blended family or with just their mother or father.

We currently have one meeting a week on Wednesday nights as a combined middle school and high school youth group. Youth group consists of dinner, game, worship, and a message. We are currently contemplating adding a youth service or Sunday school class to our
Sunday service. VCC currently has an average attendance of approximately 300 people between two (9:00 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.) services.

One need that has been identified in our group is the need for an official youth leadership program. We have had students want to help with youth group, but have been unsure on how to incorporate them. We’ve also had trouble identifying who is eligible to be a student leader as well as what to do if we feel a student is unable to continue in ministry. This confusion has led to inconsistencies in how we build new leaders and how we disciple students as well.

This paper will briefly cover how youth leadership development is often handled in churches as well as leadership development in the secular marketplace. I will also cover some assumptions to be made before working with students in a leadership developmental model. Last, I will cover our plan and model to be implemented this fall.

Assumptions

Assumption #1 - Leaders are both born and made

Though everyone has a certain genetic predisposition and makeup, leadership is mostly a learned trait.

“For some people, it is simply less effort both intellectually and emotionally to accept leadership is born into some people, but not others, including themselves. They learned at some point in their life stream, that leadership is inborn and it became a truth for them and part of their mental image or model about leadership” (Avolio 2).
Avolio goes on to propose that great leaders often speak of how they learned to lead (often via their parents) and not an innate sense of what to do in a situation. However,

“Thinking in terms of becoming, is an essential part of the mental model that provides each of us with a greater readiness to assume new roles and responsibilities en route to defining our relationships with others. I therefore suggest that leadership is by no means irrevocably fixed by genetics” (Avolio 3)

We must assume that all students have at least some capacity to lead, just as we as leaders must assume that we can become better leaders.

Assumption #2 - Leadership is best displayed in the form of the humble servant

“Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt 20.26-28 NKJV)

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men” (PHIL 2.5-7 NKJV).

Jesus is the ultimate leader for all ages. He set the bar for all who claim to be Christ-like to follow. His leadership was that of the humble servant. Jesus did not come to be a dictator; he came to serve us. That is the ultimate model of leadership and what any student leadership
program should strive for – leaders who lead like Jesus – regardless of their personality, gifting, or aptitude.

However, none of us are Jesus. Leaders need to take what they have been given and offer those gifts to God to use as he sees fit. Howell states:

“God does not depend upon heroes, he uses smudged and unattractive ‘jars of clay’ (2 COR 4:7) – a betrayed brother, a reluctant desert herdsman, a fearful wheat thresher, an overlooked shepherd boy, a burdened cup bearer, and an ethnocentric Galilean fisherman…Who the leader is and is becoming is one’s essential being (character), why the leader undertakes a course of action (motive), and what the leader pursues as the defined mission (agenda) are, we believe, the core constituents and interrelated foci of the kind of leadership enjoined in Holy Scripture.” (Howell 296)

Student leaders need to be molded after the humble servant and a student leadership program should have this goal at its core.

**Assumption #3 – Leaders have vision**

“Vision is at the core of leadership. Vision is the fuel that leaders run on. It’s the energy that creates action. It’s the fire that ignites the passion of followers” “Vision is a picture of the future that produces passion” (Hybels 31 & 32)

A leader must to some degree have vision for the program and people that he or she is a part of. Any student leadership program must encourage students to develop and share the vision for the program. If this opportunity does not exist it is simply a management training program. The pieces that students are allowed to work in must be part of their vision.
Assumption #4 - The process of creating leaders is complex

“I believe that leadership development is by far one of the most complex human processes in that it involves leaders, followers, dynamic contexts, timing, resources, technology, history, luck and a few things we have not thought of yet” (Avolio 4). One basic model will not cover every situation. Student leadership development is also more than just giving information to a child and letting them apply it correctly. It is also not just creating opportunities for a leader to develop.

The best model of leadership I have discovered is the one proposed by Sashkin and Sashkin. In their book they take a look at the history of leadership development and study and introduce their concept as a comprehensive synthesis of leadership models that include behavior and skills, personal characteristics, and the organizational context of leadership. “All three are, however, necessary components of any meaningful approach to understanding leadership” (Sashkin and Sashkin 3).

The Goal

The elements listed below are mostly derived from Sashkin and Sashkin’s elements of leadership (a synthesis of ideas with creating transformational leaders in mind) with the idea of the humble servant model added.

A student leadership program should produce the following:

Leaders who exhibit the following behaviors

1) Good communication
2) Maintaining credibility among adults, peers and family

3) Caring for others

4) Creating opportunities for themselves and others

Leaders who exhibit the following characteristics

1) Self-Confidence

2) Vision

3) Humility

They should also feel empowered by the program and organization to lead.

Current Methods of Student Leadership Development

For this research paper I contacted 50 youth pastors that I have a personal acquaintance with and asked them how they handle student leadership. The responses I received were all across the board. One, Ryan Brown of Canby Foursquare, has an official program consisting of discipleship, classroom time, and practical ministry time called I.D. or Immersive Discipleship. Many of the youth pastors said they wanted to implement a program and were reading or researching the subject. Most did not have an official program. Many of the youth pastors were reading one of three books published by Youth Specialties via Zondervan: Help! I’m a student leader!: Practical ideas and guidance on leadership by Doug Fields, The Student Leadership Training Manual for Youth Workers by Dennis “Tiger” McLuen and Chuck Wysong, and/or Leadership 101: An Interactive Leadership Development Guide for Students by Denise VanEck.
Denise VanEck’s definition of leadership is based on the verse: “So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands” (NKJ, Psalm 78:72) and claims that characteristics and skills of leadership aren’t as important. Paradoxically VanEck writes two paragraphs on integrity and spends the rest of her book on the skills and characteristics of leaders. Most of the content is based on discovering your spiritual gift. After a quiz and definition of spiritual gifts (serving, teaching, encouragement, giving, leadership, mercy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, discernment, tongues, interpretation, administration and prophecy) Eck defines multiple leadership styles (Praying leader, Serving Leader, Listening leader, Communicating leader, Conflict Management leader, and Mentoring leader). The vast majority of the book is given to defining these styles and how to obtain the skills necessary for those styles. Very little of the book is given to building leaders as a person.

McLuen and Wysong indicate that there are many definitions of student leadership and offer five different models: peer ministry, peer evangelism, ministry leadership teams, servant or work teams, and program planning leadership teams. Discipleship is listed as a foundation for the program:

“No matter what you do or what skills you teach, it’s crucial to remember that your primary task is to help ground your student leaders in their personal relationship with Christ.” “The strength of leadership development is to stay anchored in the core issues of helping students mature in their faith. Let the leadership flow out of the focus, and your student leadership program is on its way” (McLuen & Wysong 18).
The rest of the book is sessions designed to lead students through discovering their personality, spiritual gifts, and their own defined leadership styles.

Doug Field’s audience is to students who already find themselves in student ministry. Fields begins his book by defining student leadership as serving like Jesus (correct according to our assumptions!):

“Leadership is not about popularity; it’s about…guess what? Serving. If you don’t serve others you’re not a Christian leader. I don’t care how popular, charismatic, and wonderful you are…it you want to be a leader, you must be a servant. Get it?” (Fields 18)

After this introduction, Fields concentrates on the traits of successful student leaders including: faithfulness to leadership; commitment to spiritual growth; supporting others; conflict management; and serving their families, schools and other student leaders.

It appears that the three biggest sources of leadership development that a youth pastor has to draw on are all based on developing traits, gifts, and the tasks of leaders. However, research (as conducted by Ralph Stogdill) has discovered that traits and tasks are only one part of leadership development. (Sashkin & Sashkin 18-19) If this research is true, a student leadership development program must focus on more than spiritual gifts and where in the church they serve!

Leadership Development Using Psychodynamics

The psychodynamic approach to leadership development emphasizes “the importance of the leader becoming aware of his or her own personality type and the personalities of the
follows” (Northouse 272). There is an emphasis on examining the person’s background (family upbringing) and matching that to personality type. “Instead of beginning with a study of leaders or people in positions of authority, the psychodynamic approach starts with the analysis of the human personality and then relates the personality types to leadership levels and types” (Northouse 272).

Kets de Vries introduces the following philosophies to the psychodynamic approach (Kets de Vries 9-11):

1) There is a rationale behind every human act—even those that are apparently irrational.

2) A great deal of mental life—thoughts, feelings, and motives—lies outside of conscious awareness.

3) Nothing is more central to whom a person is than the way he or she expresses and regulates emotions.

4) Human development is an inter- and intrapersonal process.

Though Northouse only touches on the personality types and having student’s realize their own selves, Kets de Vries indicates that changing who we are and growing lies at the core of the psychoanalysis process. “We all benefit from stopping occasionally to reflect and to change direction. Life goes on no matter what we do, but personal growth and development happen if we choose wisely.”

For change to happen, Kets de Vries outlines the following challenges (220-250):

1) Preparing for the Journey
2) Identifying the Problem

3) Unhooking “False Connections”

4) Creating a Holding Environment

5) Actively working on the problem

6) Consolidating the Change

In short: Creating leaders is a change management process. Some of the ways we think have to be changed. For students (especially those who have grown up in broken households) this is often a radical change into seeing themselves the way Jesus sees them; a student who has grown up without a father has an especially difficult time relating to Father God. Placing students in leadership positions will cause ‘trigger’ or ‘focal’ events to happen:

“Accepting the need for change is a necessary first step – I can’t stress that enough – but on its own it’s no guarantee of action. People need a push, in the form of something that can later be described as a “focal event” – a crisis, if you will. Although we typically think of a crisis as something so acute that it’s obvious, the focal event that triggers change is sometimes only retrospectively interpreted as a milestone” (Kets de Vries 22).

Valley Christian Center Student Leadership Program

To accomplish the goals of our program we will use a combination of tools:
Student Application

Students must apply to the program. This application process will set out the expectations of the student, and outline what the student can expect from the leader. Some students will be rejected if they cannot comply with the requirements. As stated before, building leaders is a change management process, not just dissemination of facts and opportunities. Students must recognize that change is difficult.

Classroom meetings

Either weekly or monthly student leaders are required to meet together to learn about leadership. These meetings will encompass some psychodynamic processes such as the Miggs-Bryer test, elements of leadership, gift inventory tests, discussion on leadership, and take home tests. The classroom meetings will emphasize communication, credibility (faithfulness), and the care of others and themselves.

Mentorship

A key portion of the leadership program will be a mentorship basis approach, learning from church members in key leadership positions. This is a formal relationship between the student, mentor, and program administrator. The mentor(s) are leaders who have already been approached before the program began and know what the student is asking. Mentors will give feedback to the student on both his or her successes and “focal events.” The use of the STAARR report will also provide feedback and learning opportunities. The mentor will also outline expectations he or she has for the student to operate successfully in that ministry.
If the student chooses a mentor in the youth department, the student will be allowed to share in some of the vision and hopefully influence the direction of the program he or she is a part of.

Summary and Conclusion

The process of creating leaders, as already said, is difficult. A survey of materials at hand for youth pastors indicates a lack of adequate sources describing the process. Most seem stuck in the 1960s, yet these are youth pastors who have successfully ran youth leadership programs. As we turn to the secular world of psychodynamics, we see some information that perhaps is taken for granted by these authors, but needs to be understood before a program is implemented.

The goal of this program is to produce Humble Leaders that are transformational in their approach. To do so a synthesis of leadership programs has been described based on the works of Youth Pastors VanEck, Mcluen and Wysong, and Fields as well as the works of Sashkin & Sashkin, Avolio, and Kets De Vries.
Appendix

Requirements for leaders who mentor students

1) All requirements for leadership as outlined in the Bible, VCC, and youth leadership

2) Read and be familiar with at least the following (other books are in work cited):
   1) Leadership that Matters (Sashkin & Sashkin)
   2) The Leader on the Couch (Kets de Vries)
      i. Emphasis on chapters 8-11

Requirements for students

1) Comply with Student Leadership Expectations (McLuen & Wysong 218)

2) Find a mentor in the church

3) Attend monthly student leadership meetings

Requirements for mentors

1) Meet with student on a regular basis

2) Complete STAARR once a quarter (at least)
Student Leader Expectations

“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity.” (1 Tim 4.12)

Spiritual expectations

- I acknowledge that I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- I desire to serve God with my whole life.
- I am committed to spiritual growth through individual and group study.
- I am willing to be involved actively in my church through attendance and attitude.

Behavioral expectations

- I am serious about my lifestyle because I know it tells other people about my commitment to Christ.
- I am committed to a lifestyle made up of choices that honor God.
- I am willing to remain teachable and willing to grow in my faith.

Leadership expectations

- I am committing to a particular student leadership ministry area and will be faithful in that area.
- I am willing to attend youth ministry events and greet visitors at those events.
- I will attend all required student leadership training events and retreats.
- I am willing to meet with an adult mentor on a regular basis.
- I understand and am willing to work within the youth ministry vision statement.
- I am committing to a positive role in our youth ministry in my behavior and attitudes.
STAARR Report

Situation: Examine how the student has had an influence on the evolving leader-follower relationship or task outcome. Briefly tell when, how, why, and other relevant aspects of the situation.

Task: State the task of the named student; include the larger goal or mission if relevant.

Action: What did the student do that was positive (negative)? Describe each student behavior response in a single sentence.

Analysis: Why did you consider the behavior or incident (positive or negative)? Was it in terms of the impact on the follower, the situation, the task, or some other facet in the situation?

Relationships: How did the positive (negative) relationship affect the relationship between the student and others in both short-term and long-term?

Results: What happened as a consequence of the leader’s positive or negative behavior?
Possible Mentorship Opportunities

Youth Ministry (with youth staff)

- Teaching (Jeremy Carlton)
- Hospitality
- Program and games
- Worship
- Technology – Sound, lights, video, etc. (Jeremy Carlton)
- Event planning and participation (Jeremy Carlton)

Church Ministry

- Sunday School (Nicole Cade)
- Worship team (Kerry Shaha, Brian Coons)
- Sound & Light technician (Jeremy Carlton)
- Overhead projection technician (Scott Eberhart)
- Hospitality (Maria Ruddiman, Karen Caswell)
- Ushers (Scott Eberhart)
- Greeters (Scott Eberhart)
- Welcome booth (Lauri Williams)
- Prayer team (Roger Peterson)
- Small Group or Home Group (Jeff Walpole, Roger Peterson, Ed Sweet, Brian Coons)
- Facility Maintenance (Nicole Cade or Scott Eberhart)
Works Cited


