# Character development within the ambit of leadership development

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Character is often described as the distinctive qualities of an individual which makes him or her unique to the next person. These would include personality traits, habits, and talents.

The Oxford dictionary described it as: “*all the qualities and features that make a person different from others*.”

The relationship between character and leadership has long been a subject of much discussion. This speaks to both Christianity and our political environment and social context.

There are individuals that naturally have the necessary personality traits or abilities; let’s call them, for the sake of our illustration, natural born leaders. They are often followed and naturally resume leadership roles when leadership is required. In many cases no further development takes place, or no energy is spent to develop them further. This could result in burnout, frustrations or even abuse of leadership. It is often when this point is reached that their character is tested. The process of developing leadership skills or further developing leaders need to incorporate developing character, so the natural leader expands his capacity and becomes a better leader.

We, however, also have a second group of individuals that may not necessarily have the leadership character spoken of in the previous paragraph but may be required to step into a leadership role. Speaking from the context of Christianity, servant leadership, as part of the character of God, is what we as godly leaders have been called to.

Taking the above and considering the development of these qualities, within leadership, it has become more important and prevalent to consider the importance of developing character within the ambit of leadership development. We currently are experiencing a crisis in leadership were the examples provided lack the necessary character which in return sets the wrong role models.

Mules Munroe in his book: “The Power of Character in Leadership: How values, Morals, Ethics and Principles Affect: “makes the following statement: *“Remember that no matter how great leader you become, you could lose everything that you’ve gained due to a lack of character”*

Mark 10:43-44

*“You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.****43****Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.*

Jesus’s response came after the people around them became perturbed by James and John arrogance as they desired to be seated on the left and right of Jesus in His Kingdom. They wanted to step into leadership without proving their capacity.

Jesus explained that leadership in His Kingdom would be defined by servanthood, sacrifice, and suffering. These all relate to character. This is in stark contrast to what we see around us today under the banner of leadership. Leadership within social context focusses on developing personality traits, habits, and talents while servant leadership focusses on dying to oneself.

John Maxwell, who wrote many books on leadership and who is regarded as the front-runner in leadership development once wrote that his shift to servant leadership came when he changed his focus to the empowering of others to do what he was doing.

It would be advantageous to look at the character of Jesus, especially as it relates to His leadership and how He influenced and developed His own disciples.

**Strong decision-making skills**

In Mathew 26 we read of the account of Jesus praying to His father about the “cup that He had to drink” (His suffering and eventually His crucifixion). He had the option of not going through with it but decided:

“*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”*

A few verses later we read that servants of the high priest came to arrest Jesus. This caused Peter to react and cut off the ear of one of the servants. We read in the narrative, Jesus rebuked Peter and healed the servant’s ear.

Jesus made a decision earlier that evening which He followed through. He was prepared to complete His mission. Many years later Peter would also be required to give his life as a sacrifice on a Roman Cross. A Servant leader will always consider others even to the detriment of his/her own life.

In the social context this is unheard of as the leader is considered the most important part of a structure. A leader would regard him/herself as the main role players. Servant leaders work within teams. Within these teams there will still require direction and decision-making skills.

**Emotional Intelligence –**

In social context of leadership we often find that leaders are not always in touch with what is happening in lives of people they lead. It may be a deliberate choice or just them being oblivious to the needs of others. Servant leadership requires that a leader acquaints him/herself with the need and be willing to listen and serve…

When Jesus knew it was almost time to be crucified and fulfil his assignment on earth we read He rose from the table they were seated at and proceeded to wash the feed of all His disciples. Peter did not want Jesus to wash his feet as he felt it was not appropriate for his leader to do such.

Jesus concluded with these words:

“***15****For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.****16****Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.” (John 13:15,16)*

Because character encroaches on our ethical or moral conduct it should be considered when we refer to character and the influence it has on our leadership roles and how it manifests itself.

Ethics is defined as moral principals which govern a person’s behaviour or the conducting of an activity … as Christians our ethics are formed by the Word of God.

The reason we, as Christians, are required to live according to an ethical code is found in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians

“……..” 2 Cor 6:3-4 (NKJV)

Paul writes that as workers with Christ we need to adhere to certain qualities, call it an ethical code. Representing God, even in our leadership roles should always be guided by it

The following 4 principals are important building blocks when developing character even more so when it falls within the ambit of developing your leadership:

* Integrity
* Servant -leadership
* Accountability
* Trustworthiness

**Integrity** is the firm adherence to a set of ethical principles and the consistency in one's actions, regardless of the circumstances. It is the unwavering commitment to honesty, transparency, and moral righteousness. Being a person of integrity means conducting oneself with integrity in all aspects of life - personal, professional, and social. It involves staying true to one's values and principles, even when faced with difficult choices or temptations. Integrity is not just about how we behave when others are watching, but it is also about the choices we make when nobody is watching. It is the foundation upon which trust, respect and credibility are built, and it serves as a guiding compass for living a purposeful and honourable life.

**Servant-leadership and the role of humility**

Following the example of Jesus, Christian leaders are called to serve others selflessly, considering the well-being of their followers and empowering them to reach their potential. Christian leaders are encouraged to practice humility, recognizing that their authority and abilities come from God, and not to use their position for personal gain or selfish motives.

**Accountability** is a crucial aspect of personal and professional growth. It refers to taking responsibility for one's actions, decisions, and their consequences. By being accountable, individuals demonstrate integrity and reliability, as they acknowledge and own up to their mistakes and shortcomings. It involves being proactive in fulfilling commitments, meeting deadlines, and delivering quality work. Accountability fosters trust and collaboration within teams and organizations, as it creates a transparent and supportive environment. It also enables personal development, as individuals learn from their experiences, make necessary changes and strive for continuous improvement. Embracing accountability empowers individuals to take control of their destiny, prioritize their goals and cultivate a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

**Trustworthiness** is a fundamental trait that plays a vital role in both personal and professional relationships. It pertains to the reliability, honesty and integrity individuals possess in their actions and words. Being trustworthy means fulfilling promises, keeping confidential information secure and being consistent in behaviour and character. Trust is the foundation on which relationships are built and trustworthiness is the cornerstone that ensures its stability. When people know they can rely on someone, it creates an atmosphere of comfort and security, enabling effective communication, collaboration, and cooperation. Trustworthiness instils confidence in others, encourages open and transparent interactions, and fosters a sense of loyalty and mutual respect. By embodying trustworthiness, individuals establish a positive reputation and gain the trust of others, which is essential for personal and professional growth even as it relates to being faithful to Christian values. As leaders, we are expected to uphold and promote Christian values, which may include love, forgiveness, truth, integrity, and principles outlined in the Bible.

These principles are not exhaustive, but they provide a general framework that Christians often consider when contemplating ethical behaviour in leadership. It's also important to remember that application of these principles may vary depending on different contexts and individual interpretations.

Whether you are a natural born leader or a leader in training character is crucial especially as it relates to leadership. Leadership character determines the trustworthiness, influence, resilience, and ethical decision-making of a leader. Building and nurturing a strong character is essential for leaders to effectively guide and inspire their teams towards achieving shared goals.