

Growing Leaders course reflections April 2010

We are currently looking at how to stay the course as a Christian leader. Many leaders "burn out" with over work or feel over burdened. In session 8 we explored some of the costs of leadership. The participants on the course were invited in groups to write a letter of advice to someone new in leadership, to encourage them to keep going. As Paul points out in 1&2 Timothy, leadership is more about a marathon than a sprint. I think the letters they have written, to fictional people, offer much wisdom and support for anyone engaged in leadership. The final session of the year long "Growing Leaders" course will be a service at St John's on Wednesday 30th June at 7.30pm.

Dear John,

Our advice to you, from our experience:

Criticism is a fact of life but REMEMBER, Christ himself was criticised. Hold it lightly, talk it over with someone you trust, weigh it up and if there's anything useful from it, use it as an opportunity to improve your leadership skills.

Remember grace, when you yourself give feedback to others – do it gently and be aware of that person's personality.

Learn to say no and delegation is good. Try to build in time to pray and relax. Spend time with people to get to know them better – this will help you to delegate and empathise more effectively. Remember to take a break and have a Kit-Kat!

You will get disappointed when people 'fall off their pedestal' and don't live up to your expectations. Make sure whoever you ask to do a task is able to do it. If not sure, show and help them.

Dear David,

Protect the vulnerable from harm by others. Keep healthy boundaries and seek wise counsel. Avoid causing hurt or bad feeling – think and pray before you act.

Be aware of the motives of others – who's agenda are you following?

Never be afraid to ask for advice – you are never alone! Be realistic about what you can do and be realistic about the abilities of others.

Work hard – recognise the tasks involved and the expectations of yourself and others. Identify how the work will be carried out and agree a reasonable timescale.

Dear Gordon,

Expect criticism at some point in time. Sometimes it may be justified and sometimes it is not. Think it through carefully and discuss with other wise people. Respond accordingly – sometimes you need to just let it ride.

Be honest with yourself.

In public be a good example to others. Sacrifice your privacy for the benefit of others when appropriate; but take opportunities to stay fresh. Be careful of those who will use others to attack you.

Criticism: see it as a positive. Someone has taken the opportunity to comment or feedback on something you have said or done. Sometimes they're right in what they say but don't react immediately – it's amazing how a good night sleep can change your perspective!

Sacrifice: This seems to be expected as a 'Christian' thing – be prepared to make some sacrifices but it must be balanced against the potential costs in terms of your family life or other areas of your life. Not everyone is able or willing to sacrifice the same amount.

Hard Work: Prioritise – discerning God's priorities – sometimes these are not the easy options. Build in periods of rest and reflection to sustain your physical and spiritual energy to avoid burn-out. Try to enjoy what you're doing as part of God's plan. You're doing God's work so try to 'relish' it!

Loneliness: Have someone you can talk to – a spiritual guide or soul friend, someone to help you put things in perspective.

Try to work as a team and share each others burdens.

Don't isolate yourself – have some social time as a team to enjoy each others company. You'll be amazed at how much you'll find out about each other when you're not so task focussed.

Share your successes and failures with others.

Disappointment: allows for greater joy when success comes. Expect it so you're not surprised when it comes. How you deal with disappointment is important.

Expectations: Be careful of the expectations you put on yourself and others – they need to be fluid – don't get into fixed positions.

Expectations are necessary in order to see where you're achieving or need improving.