

Journal of Applied Christian Leadership

Volume 5 | Number 1

Article 1

2011

Creativity and Leadership

JACL Editors

Andrews University, jacl@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl>



Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editors, JACL (2011) "Creativity and Leadership," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 5: No. 1, 4-10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol5/iss1/1>

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

EDITORIAL

CREATIVITY AND LEADERSHIP

Creativity, Design, and Purpose

If you ever lived with chronic pain and looked for help, you may have come across a little book by Pete Egoscue (1998) with the bold title *Pain Free: A Revolutionary Method for Stopping Chronic Pain*. During a chance encounter at a New Year's gathering of friends, I overheard one of my friends describing how he had been "cured" from a chronic pain issue. Since I had a hurting knee, I decided to give the book a try. On the day the Amazon package arrived I immediately read the chapter on "Knees: Good News About Bad Knee Pain." I soon found out that my problem was related to "external knee rotation," and a few anatomical explanations later I was given four exercises that took all of 25 minutes. When I got up from the floor the pain was gone. I felt lucky. Now I know that not all issues are curable with a few simple exercises, but at the time the immediate result took me by surprise. So I began reading the first chapters, which explained Egoscue's philosophy of treating pain as the body's warning system that something is not working. From a musculoskeletal standpoint, Egoscue explains the following:

We are here in order to move! The body is a motion machine. The bone-levers and the muscle-pulleys make that perfectly clear. We may have a high purpose, but physical movement, hand over hand, one foot in front of the other, is how we accomplish it. (Egoscue & Gittines, 1998, p. 4)

As limited as this musculoskeletal perspective of the body may be, recognizing that the body is designed for movement helped me get out of physical pain. The daily back pain I experience as a sedentary knowledge worker has become a strong reminder that I need to exercise to counteract the forces of gravity and entropy.

What if we were to apply a neurophysiological viewpoint to the human body? In other words, does the human brain tell us something about the purpose of humans? Given its ability to make decisions, perform mundane as well as complex tasks any given day, compose a worship song, express the speed of light in an elegant mathematical formula, retain memories and store experiences, and maintain an active sense of self, all I can say is that the human capacity for life seems incredibly rich. Paul adds another dimension to this thought by reminding us that the ultimate fulfillment of the destiny of the body is found in its capacity to serve as “a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Cor. 6:19, New International Version).

Risk and Surprise in Creativity

What does all this have to do with leadership? While leaders deal with human life in all its complexity, leaders are necessary to mobilize this richness of human capacity and then aggregate human effort to create something humans could not create by themselves (Hamel, 2007, pp. 250-251). The focus of this issue is this connection between leadership and that great gift of creativity all human beings have been endowed with. Creativity is no longer a peripheral issue for Christian organizations. As the world is becoming more complex and its problems seemingly more confounding, Christian leaders are called to become part of the quest for solutions, not only to be critics of what is wrong with the world.

The question this: Do Christian leaders have the courage to go beyond the margins of their own imagination? As the Western world is leaving the church—only 3% of the Lutheran Swedish population attend church while in the United States it is still closer to 20% (Strommen, 1997, p. 13)—its leaders are challenged to look for new ways to minister in a fast changing world. Creativity by definition means trying something new, going beyond the boundaries of established practice, experimenting with the promise of better solutions—and that often invites a clash with the guardians of tradition. Even the Son of God was rejected by the very ones He came to save (John 1:10-11). Jesus warned his disciples that “new wine” would burst “old wine-skins” (Luke 5:37-38) and that His new kingdom would test their resolve to go forward (Matt 10:37-39). Yet He knew that once the gospel of God’s transforming love had found a nesting place in the human heart it was virtually unstoppable, because love is one of the most cre-

ative forces in the world.

In this issue, Shirley Freed reflects on the connection between creativity and forgiveness. Not even Jesus himself was able to avoid criticism as He tried to open His contemporaries' minds to the new thing God was doing among them. Criticized by the established powers, He turned to those who had been declared beyond hope by the leaders of Israel and started ministering in ways that brought them near to the heart of God. To those who had nothing more to lose because often they had no more hope left, He brought the Good News that God's mercy included them too. By healing their sick, confronting the powers of evil that oppressed them, and teaching them the truth about God, He opened up new pathways of faith. Linking the familiar with the unfamiliar, He energized their lives in ways they had never experienced before.

In the last few years it has become clearer that creativity is not only limited to those who have chosen traditionally "creative" careers (e.g., writers, artists, musicians, and designers). Rather, creativity is also necessary in any job, be it science, management, or engineering, that requires you to solve problems (Florida, 2004; Henry, 2011). The ability to function in a creative mode has almost become a hot job requirement. This is also true in Christian institutions and churches. When Debbie Potter was hired as the Pastor for Children's Ministry at Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, it was partly for her reputation as a creative teacher. Little did she know that her own quest to develop a creative environment for children coming to church would lead to a most unique partnership with Shawn Bridges, a nationally known artist in her church. The unforeseen result was one of the most intriguing artworks in any church nationwide: a mural depicting the stories of the Bible, covering some 10,000 square feet of wall space. In "God's Paintbrush," Debbie tells this unique story. While her story may be unique, the problem she is describing is not.

Can Creative Leaders Be Developed?

If today's leaders are constantly challenged to find creative solutions in an ever changing environment, the question is: Can creative leaders be trained? Most formal academic leadership programs follow traditional patterns of coursework, even if some of them have adopted the Internet as a mode of teaching and learning. But in the last few years, quite a few institutes aiming at teaching creativity to leaders have begun to spring up. Three of the oldest academic programs, the International Centre for Studies in Creative Leadership in Buffalo, New York, the

Banff Centre in Banff, Alberta, Canada, and the Leadership Development Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida, have been around for a long time and are the focus of the research article of Karen Tilstra, Shirley Freed, and Erich Baumgartner. What are these creative leadership programs doing to develop creative leaders and what can Christian organizations learn from them? One of the most interesting findings of this research study is that the starting point for developing creative leaders is the search for authenticity and the overcoming of a leader's blind spots.

Don't try to find these kinds of leadership programs in the traditional research literature on leadership. When you read some of the books published on leadership over the years, you get the impression that anyone can be a leader if they just put their mind to it and follow a few good recipes to success. And while leadership can be learned in almost any setting, most experienced leaders recognize that describing good leadership is not a simple thing and is often full of ambiguity. What seems to be an obvious solution in one situation does not work at all in another (just ask the many pastors who have split their churches after coming home with the latest new leadership idea from an energizing "Leadership Summit").

Here at Andrews University, I teach a course on leadership theory. As we survey some of the most popular theories, certain types of leaders are identified in rather distinct ways: leaders are either people-oriented or task-oriented (Fiedler, 1995), transformational or transactional (Bass, 1985), or level 1 through 5 leaders (Collins, 2001). While most one-style theories no longer have the popular following they once enjoyed, even more complex situational theories seem to prescribe a rather predictable matrix of styles to match the needs of followers (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969, 2008). When I ask participants to reflect on how they actually experience their leadership roles, they often describe their leading as a dynamic mix of activities using multiple leadership behaviors as they cope with ever-changing and often unpredictable organizational realities. In the world of Christian organizations, an additional element is the fact that leaders often work with volunteers. In other words, leadership is much more ambiguous and complex than many leadership researchers would have us believe. And many leaders, even when taught some of these venerable theories of leadership, admit that they are unsure what kind of leaders they are. Daniel Goleman (1995, cf. Goleman & Boyatzis, 2002) reminds us that it takes emotional intelligence to be able to live in that tension. (Note: Daniel Goleman

will be the speaker of the Second Annual Leadership Conference at Andrews University.)

In fact, I often worry about those participants who seem married to fixed notions of what a good leader is. Some of these notions are predictably cultural. In the West, participative leadership is often peddled as the most effective leadership, even in the face of mounting evidence that this just may not hold true in all situations (Yukl, 2006, pp. 86-89). Meanwhile, non-Western leaders admit that leading effectively requires them to leverage higher power distance practices (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Thus the realization that different cultural contexts seem to promote different notions of what it means to lead effectively adds to the complexity of leadership understanding (Hofstede, 2001).

Ambiguity, Metaphor, and the Meaning of Leadership

One important way to talk about this complexity is through the use of metaphors. Metaphors have long been used to describe leadership. In our program we talk about leaders as catalysts for change. What do we mean when we say that? Webster's dictionary tells us that a catalyst is "a substance that enables a chemical reaction to proceed at a usually faster rate or under different conditions (as at a lower temperature) than otherwise possible." When speaking of leaders as catalysts for change, we apply the literal meaning from the domain of chemistry metaphorically to the domain of organizations. Thus we seem to say that leaders are people who provoke change and cause action. In actuality, change sometimes seems the last thing leaders, Christian leaders included, like to deal with. Gary Hamel (2007) once remarked that deep organizational change is "nearly always crisis-led, episodic, and programmatic" change (p. 43) forced on an organization by leaders desperate to turn the Titanic around before the iceberg hits. Change often comes only after a tsunami-like crisis threatens the existence of an organization. We all have visited churches that to an outsider have the feel of a near-dead body out of touch with the community surrounding it. Strangely, even in such desperate situations churches manage to—well—do nothing. Instead of being heroic catalysts for change, church leaders seem more like hospice directors. The harshness of the metaphor reminds us that leadership is indeed complex and difficult.

Metaphors allow us to explore the meaning of leadership in the midst of the complexities that seem to characterize organizational life.

Janine Lim's short piece "Rebuilding the Plane While Flying It" is a good example of this kind of use of metaphor. Bradley Sheppard describes his own academic journey in a doctoral leadership program as a pilgrimage based on the famous El Camino de Santiago de Compostela in Spain, popularized recently by the movie "The Way." And Liv Fønnebø draws our attention to Jesus' unparalleled use of parables and metaphors, which are one of the hallmarks of Jesus' leadership.

A unique piece in this issue is the poem "God's Cowboy Pastor" which we publish here in Portuguese and English. The author is Adean da Costa, a Brazilian pastor and administrator who recently graduated from Andrews University's Leadership Program in Brazil. Constructed in the poetic form of a *trova*, Adean takes us on a journey from great tragedy to confidence in God's provision and peace. Translated by Dr. José Alaby, editor of the *Brazilian Bible in Poetry*, it reminds us that Christian leadership character is often forged on the anvil of heartbreak and hardship (Gonzalez, 2010).

If you are a member of an academic community, you will appreciate that we have added in this issue a short abstract to each of the dissertation notices. The development of this issue of the journal has been greatly helped by our new editorial assistant, Matthew Shallenberger, who joined the team recently and has already brought a new degree of efficiency and rigor to the production process.

References

- Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap and others don't*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Egoscue, P., & Gittines, R. (1998). *Pain free: A revolutionary method for stopping chronic pain*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Fiedler, F. E. (1995). Reflections by an accidental theorist. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 6(4), 453-461.
- Florida, R. L. (2004). *The rise of the creative class: And how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2002). *Primal leadership: Learning to lead with emotional intelligence*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Gonzalez, S. (2010). Hardship and leadership: Is there a connection? *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, 4(2), 52-62.
- Hamel, G. (2007). *The future of management*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Henry, T. (2011). *The accidental creative: How to be brilliant at a moment's notice*. New York, NY: Portfolio/Penguin.

- Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. H. (1969, 2008). *Management of organizational behavior: Utilizing human resources*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Hofstede, G. H. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (2004). *Culture, leadership, and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strommen, M. P. (1997). *The innovative church: Seven steps to positive change in your congregation*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.
- Yukl, G. A. (2006). *Leadership in organizations* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall.