Ennui, Entertainment, Or Encounter?
Cultivating the Climate for a Transformational Approach to Leadership

Keren A. Toms
Chaplain for Outreach
Andrews University

Abstract
After studying the various qualities that have made for effective leaders, both in Bible times and in more recent church history, it is apparent that some were empowered by a guardian/guide mentality, others an entertainer/enabler mindset, and others possessed a difficult to define but easily recognizable cluster of virtues that enabled them, through their passion for mission and love for people, to be creative and observable role models for what recent leadership experts have termed transformational leaders. Creating a climate for the selection and the empowerment of transformational leaders is key for a successful youth ministry in the new millennium.

We Are Facing a Crisis

There is no argument. It is probable that by the time Seventh-day Adventist teenagers in North America reach their middle 20s, somewhere between 40 percent and 50 percent will have left the church (Dudley, 2000, p. 35). However, if youth are leaving our church, it is safe to conclude that there is either a crisis of followership, or a crisis of leadership, or both. Kenda Creasy Dean (2004) states that, "Eventually, adolescents select those external standards to which they wish to conform, but first the external standards choose them" (p. 12). When we allow for the idea that adult influences are predominate in the shaping of attitudes and behaviors in the succeeding generation as Dean suggests, then it becomes apparent that the primary issue lies with leadership. "If youth invest their passions elsewhere (and statistics overwhelmingly suggest that they do), then the church must receive this news as a judgment not on adolescents, but on us" (p. 25).

What has emerged in recent studies, such as Value-genesis I and II, is that during the period of adolescence there is a heightened sensitivity to the apparent ability to empathize with the every day experiences to which young people of that generation are called to make an ethical response. In short, young people prefer leaders or teachers who seem closer connected by age (Gillespie, Donahue, Gane, & Boyatt, 2004, p. 215). Perhaps this is not so much prejudicial as it is a consequence of the predictable falloff in effective communication due to what the Boomer generation coined "the Generation Gap."

The purpose of this article is to explore the factors in leadership recruitment, empowerment, and leaders' behavioral decisions that result in three divergent experiences on the part of the youth. Leaders can take the approach of, "give them what *we* want," "give them what *they* want," or a more powerful, yet relatively more difficult to achieve alternative: "give them what they need." The first approach will inevitably lead to boredom, disenchantment, or ennui. Following the second mantra merely provides entertainment as though it were an end in itself. But the third alternative is not satisfied until a life-changing encounter occurs.

Why New Destinations Require New Modalities

Tradition has the force of aphoristic value. Those who adhere to traditional approaches in leadership can be heard expressing their preference for the "tried and true." What many traditionalists fail to understand is that just as our modern culture has accelerated the change due to technological progress, it has also replaced old modalities of attitude formation and behavioral modification. This

has reached into the domain of conversation, word choice, and communication. The listener is in need of hearing something newly personal, yet what many communicators can offer are only the collective, stale thoughts of a system embraced by the church's hierarchy. In spite of the fact that this may seem to be a modern problem, Scriptural precedents inform us of the truth and consequences of this unfortunate situation. It often took supernatural effects before leaders such as Moses or Elijah were able to reach their audience and obtain a significant attitudinal shift.

While the average youth leader today no longer possesses access to that kind of support system, there are those who still adopt a similar prophetic model as they seek to give leadership within the church. It is one thing to speak, believing it is what God wants you to say simply because it serves the interest of the church. It is quite another to find the reception of any such truth in the listener. As Steve Daily (1993) confessed, "I was force-fed from the tree of knowledge to such a degree that I lost my appetite for the tree of life" (p. 67). Perhaps this gives an understanding why he concludes that, "doctrine serves healthy religion only as it serves humanity" (p. 49). It is apparent that traditional Christianity, zealous though it may be, if tainted by misinformed or misguided teachers, will instead of creating loving, merciful, tolerant, affirming, and emotionally healthy human beings will instead increase tendencies to bigotry, sexism, intolerance, rigidity, racism, and a deficit of healthy self-acceptance (p. 45).

Having stated the perils of strict religious orthodoxy without a leavening spirit of understanding love for humanity, it is important that the transmission of the laws undergirding spiritual vitality be done so by a mentor or guardian/guide. Paul makes reference of this need in Ephesians when he says, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:11-12, New International Version).

In Exodus, the narrative repeatedly documents how Moses would meet with the Lord and listen carefully to His instructions, at times actually transcribing significant material in detail, to share with the congregation. This is particularly visible in the detailed list of the tabernacle blueprints contained in chapters 25 through 30 and the documentation of the careful adherence to these plans in chapters 36 through 40. Now while he carefully followed the instructions of the Lord, in relaying these messages to the Israelites, he often found a spirit of discontentment with the message. He was often accused of taking too much upon himself over diet as seen in Numbers chapter 11 (vv. 1-15, 31-35), his selection of wife, chapter 12 (vv.

1-15), the report of the spies in chapter 13 (vv. 1-33) and 14 (vv. 1-38), and prerogative of leadership in chapter 16 (vv. 1-50). It was precisely because he had an inside connection with the Source of power that his peers, including his own sister, exhibited signs of envy and mistrust. God supernaturally rescued Moses from this dilemma because it was imperative that the people have guidance. Revelation does not always carry with it the persuasive element of logic or rational proof. There are times when faith must move ahead of the acquisition of evidence. During this period, such faith is called blind because it walks, not on what it sees, but on what it hopes to see or expects to see. In spite of the many evidences of the validity of this style of leadership, the people repeatedly murmured, complained, and even rebelled.

Like Moses before him, Elijah also found his life in jeopardy when others in power failed to receive his revelation from God in faith. Ahab pursued him, and he was forced to find refuge, first in the wilderness (I Kings 17:3), and then at God's direction, in the household of a woman considered "among the heathen," the widow of Zarephath (v. 9).

Ennui Anyone?

The rejection of the traditional guardian/guide by many youth is not met with the violence of Biblical proportions. Today, it suffices to simply "check-out" due to boredom. As one popular music group describes in a song, "In my head there's a greyhound station / Where I send my thoughts to far off destinations / So they may have a chance of finding a place / Where they're far more suited than here" (Gibbard, 2005, 2). Or perhaps it results by playing games during an instructional class, whispering and carrying on competitive communication among one's peers, or by simply stopping attending altogether. The youth leader as guardian/guide may be faithful but ultimately becomes a one-trick pony.

Anciently, this difficulty was resolved by God through pairing the guardian/guide with another individual of different temperament and talent. To Moses, God gave Aaron; to Elijah, Elisha. These pairings reveal the need for complementary resources in leadership. However, many leaders find themselves alone, and so they choose between the guardian/guide persona and its compliment: the enabler/entertainer. Often, its modern interpretation is to simply be an entertainer.

Enabled and Entertained

We might accord Aaron a similar timeless reference as we have for Moses, except for the debacle surrounding the golden calf (Exodus 32). Here the fundamental weakness of the enabler/entertainer is revealed in all of its potential baleful consequence. As a management style, it provides

short term cooperation, even enthusiasm. Such leaders are popular; they serve the church by filling its congregation at every appointment or scheduled event. They are often charismatic and personable, which enables them to easily connect with youth. Ultimately, though it is not always as clearly visible as in the narrative of the golden calf, it is the followers, not the leader, that determine the agenda.

Elisha, having a double portion of Elijah's Spirit from God, appears to avoid many of the weaknesses of an enabler/ entertainer. He never allows the congregation, or the beneficiaries of his ministry, to set the agenda; rather he spends his years in ministry building up the faith through establishing systematic centers for inculcating true faith among the youth called the Schools of the Prophets. One story will suffice to illustrate this close connection with the young. In the accidental separation of the ax head from its handle and its plummet into the muddy currents of the Jordan River, we see Elisha right there, capable of rendering immediate assistance (II Kings 6:1-7). But he was there because he said, "Yes," when he was asked to go with the youth. An enabler at its finest is good, but Elisha was more than an enabler; he built transformational relationships with young people as well. Elisha was not merely working for an organization; he was working for both individual and corporate renewal of faith.

Most leaders who see themselves as guardian/guides, and most leaders who would say they are enablers/ entertainers, often approach their relationship with their followers with an eye for exchanging one thing for another (Lee, 2003, p. 35). A guardian/guide may say, "If you want to get to a certain place, follow me." Thus, obedience is the price to achieve one's goal. Similarly, the enabler/entertainer may say, "If you attend this meeting, I promise you will enjoy it!"

Transforming leadership is far more potent, yet is more complex. James MacGregor Burns is quoted by Lee saying:

> The transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need of demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents. (pp. 35, 36)

> "The transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need of demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower."

Lee goes on to quote Robert Greenleaf with the following idea. In the context of transformational youth leadership, one major task would be to heal from alienation and cynicism to where the young person is freed to exhibit loving and faith behaviors (Lee, p. 37). In fact, the number one reason people have left the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been due to relational conflicts (Haffner, 2002, p. 38).

Another transformational task is to build followers into leaders and to enable potentially good leaders to become, instead, great leaders. Certainly Moses, Aaron, Elijah, and Elisha discovered ways to change their followers in dimensions of spiritual significance. The annals of the reign of kings David and Solomon even more dramatically spotlight what can happen when transformational leadership matches the challenge of a generation's spiritual needs.

A new modality is shown in the post-literate generation of today. The current western generation tends to learn through different media. Television, radio, telephone, and computer usage open the doorway for drama, news, music, interactive graphics, discussion, and internet use, which do not rely on literacy, but rather use it as a stepping stone for the manipulation of transmission of information (Jenkins, para. 5). It is because of this presence that youth leaders are faced with a new challenge.

Traditionally, a team united in thought and action can tackle a controversial challenge, a motivated team can take on an unpleasant challenge, and an experienced team is able to tackle the Everest-sized challenges. But to take on a new challenge, a forward-thinking and creative team is needed (Maxwell, 2001, p. 49).

Encounter

Once again, God's word offers a typological template for precisely this type of leadership in the inter-generational team of King David and his son, King Solomon. David's creative vision, passed on to Solomon, transformed the richness of the scope of the worship of God. The temple was enlarged, becoming a global wonder. Through this vision, the profession of the priest became elevated society. By separating the various families within the Levites, each priest served two weeks in Jerusalem and then was allowed to return home. A similar organization was setup for Levites not of Aaron's lineage to care for the structure of the temple and its warehouse of sacred utensils (I Chronicles 24:5,18-24). A third class of professionals, the family of

Asaph, was selected to lead in both the singing of psalms and in the orchestration, or musical accompaniment of such. This musical ensemble was originally composed of 288 individuals (25:1-7); all of them of the temperament of artisans and creative people. Their new psalms and new music were welcomed and celebrated. At times, tradition bound individuals, such as David's own wife, perhaps experienced offense at these new songs (II Samuel 6:16, 21), but through the leadership of David there was a national renewal and expansion of the influence of worship in daily community life (I Chronicles 26:26).

David had envisioned this throughout his life, but the security of the nation absorbed his energies, and as a man of war God did not allow these plans to come to fruition (I Chronicles 28:3). Instead, he turned over the plans to his son Solomon who, like his father, retained the creativity of thought and action (28:6). Though he often repeats that there is nothing new under the sun, the shape of innovation would appear to be a fusion and adaptation of some of the best of themes within traditional worship modalities with a contemporary interpretation. This should not be seen as blasphemous, compromising, or at worst apostatizing; it is simply allowing the freedom of creativity.

The church, in wanting to feel safe, has typically put into positions of leadership the "guardian" of faith, one who keeps standards and does little to upset the status quo. However, to get to "encounter" will require a leader who will retain the need to guard while bypassing the desire to merely pander and entertain, and instead encompass both, seeking to constrain young people to the practice of their faith. This leader is willing to risk the introduction of adaptive forms, new forms, and processes in worship in order for youth to gain a current experience in matters of faith, instead of a canned, or solely emotional experience. The paradigm shift is in choosing the artistic-guardian as a leader instead of the guardian alone. Even a guardian who really loves youth will only be moderately successful.

There has never been an argument that the church needs leaders who are faithful; but perhaps it is a more courageous statement to say that they church is in more need now than ever of leaders who are willing to assume the risk of creative endeavor to more successfully meet the needs of the current generation to whom the gospel must be communicated in a way it can be received. Perhaps there is no better way to summarize the sense of urgency then to share this challenge observed by Kenda Creasy Dean:

The theological challenge youth pose to the church is blunt: Are we who we say we are? Do we practice passion, transformed by a Love who never disappoints, and live by faith so convincing that we stake our lives on it?

Or are we just another sagging social convention, like Dracula, that needs young blood to survive? (p. 25).

References

Daily, Steven G. (1993). *Adventism for a New Generation.* Portland/Clackamas, OR: Better Living Publishers.

Dean, Kenda C. (2004). *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church.* Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Dudley, Roger L. (2000). *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church: Personal Stories From a 10-year Study.* Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Gibbard, Ben. (2005). Soul Meets Body. On Plans [CD]. New York: Atlantic.

Gillespie, V. Bailey, Michael J. Donahue, Ed Boyatt, and Barry Gane. (2004) *Valuegenesis Ten Years Later: A Study of Two Generations.* Riverside, CA: Hancock Center for Publication.

Haffner, Karl. (2002). *Out of the Hot Tub, Into the World: The Cure for Comfort-Zone Christianity.* Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

Jenkins, Orville B. (n.d.). Orality and the Post-literate West. Retrieved October 18, 2008, from http://www.orvillejenkins.com/orality/postliterate.html Lee, Harris W. (2003). *Effective Church Leadership: A Practical Sourcebook.* Pacific Press Publishing Association.

Maxwell, John C. (2001). *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: Embrace Them and Empower Your Team.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.