



# CULTURE CRAFT

Leadership for Organizational Health

Rick Sessoms  
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### **Addendum**

Rick Sessom's email address is now [rick@freedomtolead.net](mailto:rick@freedomtolead.net)

# P<sub>reface</sub>

A leader of an evangelical agency in the U.S. asked, “How can I lead like Jesus and meet my organization’s demands at the same time?”

An HR officer from India who serves in a global Christian organization asked, “Why are none of our real spiritual leaders in positions of senior leadership?”

A Christian worker in Europe said, “A popular speaker in our ministry has been accused by several women of immoral sexual conduct. Why have our senior leaders denied these women’s allegations without due process?”

A youth worker in Brazil asked, “How can our pastor preach about honesty on Sunday morning and be dishonest about the benevolent fund at the board meeting on Tuesday?”

A young leader from the Middle East expressed it this way: “I work with a small Christian mission in my country. We face security risks every day. The leader of our mission recently read a book written by a well-known Christian leader that teaches principles for success. Our leader is trying to practice the lessons from the book, but the lessons are creating much confusion in our mission. What does ‘success’ mean for Christian ministries in our nation?”

This book is a response to these kinds of questions from leaders in many nations. They are often frustrated with the leadership approach in their own organizations. These leaders are committed to the leadership approach of Jesus, but they encounter conflict in their organizations when they attempt to live out these biblical principles. Their organizations’ stated values appear to support Jesus’ way of leadership, but the senior leaders are not actually functioning according to their stated values.

**The purpose of this book is to provide tools for leaders to assess their organization’s real values and to develop their organizational culture toward better health.** We believe that organizations are *healthy* when the values that they actually demonstrate are consistent with the values and example of Jesus Christ. We have written for existing and emerging leaders who want to apply Jesus’ way of leadership in their organizations. We want to

equip them with some proven assessment tools for evaluating their organization's culture. These leaders can also use these assessment tools to craft their organizations toward better health.

In Section 1, we describe the culture-related conflict that leaders encounter, and summarize our proposed solution.

In Section 2, we discuss perspectives on evangelical organizations from the recent past, from research, and from the present.

In Section 3, we explain the essential components of organizational culture.

In Section 4, we present our views on Jesus' way of leadership.

In Sections 5-9, we describe the "handles" that leaders can use to assess and develop their organizational cultures toward better effectiveness. We offer insights into how Jesus used these tools in His leadership to shape the culture of the early church.

In September 2004, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization hosted a forum in Pattaya, Thailand. Attending participants from around the world expressed a common, urgent need for Christ-centered leaders in their churches, missions, and organizations. This book is one contribution among several initiatives to address this need.

This book is also the result of our own experiences with Christian organizations. We are impressed with the impact many of these churches, missions, and organizations have made over the past half-century. But we have also seen our share of tragedies. We have observed a few excellent Christian leaders, but we are mostly disappointed with the organizational cultures that evangelical leaders have fostered in their organizations. Masses of committed, capable leaders are leaving these organizations because they cannot reconcile the evident chasm between Jesus' way of leadership and their organizations' dysfunctional cultures. We hope that this book provides some relevant answers in this impending crisis.

We have used a dialogue format to present much of the book's content. This style reflects our relationship and the way we typically facilitate seminars and conferences together. Although we believe that the subject of this book is extremely important, you will also notice that we often do not take ourselves very seriously. We hope that you will find our approach refreshing.

We also want to confess at the outset our cultural limitations. We have travelled and consulted with organizations in many cultural contexts, but we are still most familiar with organizations in North America and Western Europe. We were born and raised in the West, and many of the illustrations in this book are from these contexts that we know best.

Moreover, we have written this book with the deep conviction that many leadership models have been imposed by our respective countries on the rest of the world with damaging effect. We do not believe that western leaders have the answers for everyone. In fact, our experiences in other cultures convince us that **many Christian organizations will have to shed western leadership models and return to universal, timeless, biblical principles in order to pursue their Kingdom priorities with faithfulness.** Therefore, we invite our readers to determine how the concepts and tools we offer herein apply to their distinct cultural settings.

This book is the abridged version of a more complete treatment that we are currently writing. The expanded version will be available in the near future. Therefore, we welcome constructive feedback to enhance the quality of this forthcoming resource for leaders. We can be contacted at the following email addresses:

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We pray that Jesus' way of leadership will once again become prominent among Christian leaders and will lead to revitalized cultures in the organizations they lead.

# 1

## *The man with no thumbs in a world of round handles...*

Peter was depressed! He wasn't like other people in his village. At least he didn't feel like other people, because he didn't have any thumbs. On each hand were four well-formed, perfectly capable fingers, but no thumbs. In many ways, this wouldn't have been much of a problem if it were not for the fact that his village was created for people with thumbs. For example, all of the handles in his village were round. With no thumbs, Peter couldn't grip the round handles. Tasks that seemed easy for others were impossible for Peter. He felt out of place, abnormal. He constantly had to ask for a helping hand just to get through the day.

Peter got used to his problem, but he was never quite as efficient as other people. Every day was a difficult struggle....

Rick: Colin, what is this all about?

Colin: It's my creative introduction to our book.

Rick: But we are writing a book on leadership in organizations. More specifically, we want to apply leadership lessons that were modeled by Jesus Christ to develop more effective organizations. Although there was a character named Peter in the Bible, he was a fisherman who probably had two thumbs that worked well. I can't see the relevance of your intro.

Colin: I understand your question, Rick, but let me explain. This is what we call in the trade a "hook" – an introduction that grabs attention and causes the reader to want to read the book. With so many available books on leadership, I thought we could begin with a little story about the thumbless man so that people would read what we have to say.

Rick: Okay, I can see why we might want some kind of "hook" to encourage people to read our book. But what does having no thumbs to do with leadership?



Colin: I'll answer your question later, but for now let me continue my story. For as long as he could remember, Thumbless Peter - as he is now known - had assumed that he was deformed. All the door handles in his village were round, so nothing would turn for him. Nothing would open for him. Most normal activities - like drinking water from a glass - required both hands. Most people with thumbs treated Peter with pity.

Until one day Peter took a long bike ride – riding his bike was one thing Peter could do well. He rode many kilometers, and came to a village he had never visited. He was hot and thirsty, so he stopped at a cafe for a cold drink. When he approached the door to the cafe, he noticed that there was a pull handle rather than a round knob. He had never seen a pull handle in his village. When he ordered his drink, the waiter served it in a mug with a handle. The mug was easy for him to pick up.

Then he noticed that the waiter had no thumbs! He looked around, and saw other people with no thumbs enjoying their drinks. He walked out onto the street, and saw men, women, and children – with no thumbs. Peter was in a village where thumblessness was normal. And suddenly his whole life looked different.

Rick: OK, it's a cute story – and very touching I might add. But do you want to explain the meaning?

Colin: It's about being in the world that has fixed views of how things should be that don't work. Many of the models of leadership that are out there – even the ones that are popular and well-known - have some fairly serious flaws. Many leaders - and particularly Christian leaders - are finding it difficult to know how to lead their organizations. They read about the leadership of Jesus, and are confused by what model to use. They feel as clumsy as a thumbless man!

But the good news is that many of these leaders are waking up to the fact that they are not alone. They are beginning to realize that their feelings of confusion and clumsiness are also being felt by a lot of other leaders. And they're looking for solutions.

Rick: I'm still not convinced that thumblessness helps us out here. But I also know lots of the confused leaders you're describing. So let's press on with the book and see how it goes.

This is a short book designed to clear the confusion. It is a practical view about proven tools to build a healthy organization.

What do we mean when we describe an organization as “healthy?” A *healthy* organization is one whose members demonstrate their real values through their behavior that is consistent with the teachings and example of Jesus.

This is the forerunner of a larger book, but both are designed to equip leaders who need clarity and help to apply Jesus’ leadership principles in developing their organizations toward better health. We have found these tools extremely useful, and we hope you do too.

## *Preamble*

‘Leadership’ that was modeled by Jesus is an essential dynamic in Christian organizations. But Jesus’ way of leadership – frequently sought-after, often romanticized, and rarely understood - is constantly corrupted by our insecurities and egos. As a result, our leaders are often recognizable more for their status and rank than for their character. This kind of unhealthy leadership divides us. It creates the separation between first class and economy, and attracts the trappings of success. These leaders frequently prioritize their own image over the community’s benefit. They choose personal gain over collective growth. It is no wonder that we struggle to find excellent leaders that enable people to be truly free and to engage everyone’s potential.

To borrow a phrase, **we need a “reformation” in our understanding and practice of leadership. Like the Christians of centuries past, returning to the wisdom of God is our wellspring for a hopeful future.**

Colin: Even as we write this, we confess that there have been times when we have been intoxicated by a faulty view of leadership. To be honored above others can be sweet to us. It does nothing for our souls, but sometimes it makes life easier.

Rick: I certainly agree. This has happened to me many times through the years as a pastor and educator. And do you remember just a few months ago when you and I ran headlong into our own tendencies? During our visit to Asia to conduct a leadership seminar, we were the honored guests, the public speakers, the “experts.” We were given the best rooms with

personal service. We were separated from the other seminar participants. From a philosophical perspective, we felt this was wrong. And we made all the appropriate comments about how unsettled we felt to be put in such a privileged position. But honestly..... there was a part of us that enjoyed it! Somehow it fed in us that longing to stand out from the crowd. There is a desire within each of us to be seen and appreciated. When all is said and done, we actually want to be loved. But in a distorted world where people are in constant competition with one another, the quest to outdo the next person is firmly entrenched in each human heart.

Colin: Well, if that doesn't depress our readers, I don't know what will! Now that you've described what is true of us all, I must ask the questions:

"Is this how it has to be"?

"Do we have to settle with these symptoms of our fallen human nature?"

"Can we change?"

Rick: Absolutely. We can change! And because organizations are made of people, organizations can change too. **Through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we not only experience salvation, but we now have the real potential to foretaste heaven through our transformed lives and relationships.**

## *Problem*

**M**any leaders are encountering Jesus' way of leadership. They may go to a conference or read a book that reflects on the way Jesus led during His life and ministry. His leadership approach looked something like this:

- He chose not to dominate people, but to serve them.
- He led primarily through relationships with His followers.
- He sacrificed Himself for others so that they could reach their highest Kingdom potential.

Colin: Can you imagine if our leaders actually led organizations like this? What a reformation we would have!

Rick: It's exciting that some leaders are beginning to believe leading Jesus' way is truly attainable. But here's the typical scenario. The leader reads a book or attends a conference and is convinced to lead Jesus' way. So he or she tries to lead this way in the work setting, but encounters strong resistance.

Colin: Why are these leaders encountering resistance?

Rick: Because **in Christian organizations today, our stated values – biblical though they may be – are oftentimes not our practiced values.**

The dominant leaders in our organizations are usually profiled as the “spiritual leaders,” and their vision is publicly declared as from God. So they dictate the direction of the organization with little if any input from those who are responsible to carry out the vision. They often use the organization's political system to manipulate people into maintaining the status quo. They don't develop relationships with colleagues beyond their own organizational level. They resort to power in order to make things happen. They prioritize the success of the organization at the expense of people – while stating that people are the organization's most valuable resource.

Colin: This is a strong indictment on today's Christian leaders. But I have to agree. There are exceptions, but this description is more common than we like to admit.

Rick: M. and P. are leaders who faced conflict when they tried to lead Jesus' way. P. grew up in Latin America as a missionary kid; M. was from a Christian home in the mid-western United States. They met during their college years and were married. Early on M. was noticed for his leadership ability; his career path accelerated when he was moved into a junior executive position with his company.

But they grew restless with their comfortable executive lifestyle. So they signed up with a Christian mission and moved to the Caribbean into a middle management role. Within three years, they were transferred to become the mission's Director of Operations.

But P. and M. became troubled. They had joined the mission with the assumption that practicing Jesus' way of leadership would be celebrated. But in reality they were in constant conflict with "big boss" senior leaders. Disillusioned, they eventually resigned their ministry position.

Colin: Unfortunately, I've heard stories like this many times. It seems that good Christian leaders – though they exist - are hard to find. And when we do find them, we don't necessarily recognize them because they don't look or sound like leaders to us. The views of leadership in our minds are shaped over many years.

Rick: And **we have frequently highlighted unhealthy leaders only because they are successful.** These leaders are celebrated as icons to be admired and copied. Books have often come from these leaders and are offered as how-to books to those who want to be leaders.

When well-intentioned people like M. and P. try to challenge these prominent leaders based on their understanding of a more Jesus-centered approach, the resistance in their organizations is often overwhelming. They become disoriented because the stated values of the organization are not the values that the organization actually practices. And people like M. and P. don't know how to survive in this dysfunctional environment. He or she may feel awkward to speak out since Jesus' way of leadership seems to be out of step with everyone else. Therefore, one of three possible scenarios usually occurs:

1. The Jesus-centered leader challenges the dominant leadership model until he or she is marginalized by the power structure in the organization. In worst cases, the individual is accused of insubordination and terminated. In many cases, he or she is isolated and never has the opportunity to have influence. In many cases, the dominant leaders respond with sincerity because they are unable to acknowledge that their leadership motif is in any way flawed. As a result, organizations often abuse some of their most talented people, and stand in the way of their own future through ignorance of the process.
2. The leader senses the inconsistency between the stated and actual values within the organization, but does not completely understand the problem, or feels powerless to bring about needed change.

Therefore, he or she conforms to the dominant leadership approach and becomes another player that supports the dysfunctional culture. The leader has tasted the possibilities of Jesus' way of leadership, but sacrifices this dream on the altar of organizational acceptance and personal advancement.

3. The leader becomes aware that he or she cannot change his or her current organizational environment, but does not want to compromise. In this case, the leader leaves the organization in search of another. He or she may move to another organization, or start something new; however, he or she does not typically have the tools either to discern the new organization's actual culture or to start a new organization with the strategic building blocks needed to develop a healthy organization.

Colin: This sounds melodramatic, Rick. It might be hard for some of our readers to believe, but it is happening all around us. These dynamics are common, particularly where leaders are attempting to live out Jesus-centered leadership dynamics in a traditional organizational environment.

A young leader who came to me for advice was having a good ministry to the youth of a prominent church in London. But he was frequently criticized publicly for offering points of view that differed from those of the senior pastor. He assumed that he would be embraced as a colleague, as someone with experience and something to say. He wasn't overly demonstrative with his ideas; nevertheless, the views he expressed were interpreted by the church's senior leaders as a failure to accept authority. Since this was a prominent church, he assumed it would be future-oriented and a place for new ideas to flourish. Instead, the senior pastor proceeded to ridicule the young leader. Instead of encouraging him to see things differently, the senior pastor constantly chastised him. The situation went from bad to worse. The young leader was increasingly micromanaged; one of the elders of the church was appointed to watch his every move. He was denied his adulthood and stripped of self-respect. Eventually, the young leader left the church.

Rick: This example accurately describes the problem. But how did our organizations become so unhealthy? How did we get into this predicament? That's the subject of the next section.

**Reflection:** *Reflect on leaders in your past and present experience. Make some notes as you think about their leadership behavior that you have observed.*

# 2

## *Perspectives from the Recent Past*

Christian organizations that dominated the landscape during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century possessed a winning spirit. Most of these church and para-church ministries were birthed in North America or Western Europe within a few years after the Second World War. For example, Billy Graham began rallies called “crusades” in which many thousands heard the gospel. Similarly, Bill Bright founded Campus Crusade for Christ, a college ministry that has spanned far beyond the campus. Both these organizations emphasized mass evangelism and prioritized winning the world to Christ. In these cases, the concept of “crusade” implied that followers of Christ are called to rise up and be victorious in the spiritual battle with evil and worldly forces. This mindset was broadly embraced and spawned initiatives such as the Church Growth Movement, A.D. 2000, World by Radio, and Saturation Church Planting, to name just a few. As a result, the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be noted in history as a time of great advance for Christian faith around the world. We owe a great debt of gratitude to these movements and their outstanding leaders.

This crusading spirit also ushered in a priority for success in Christian organizations. Logic expressed it this way: “If we’re going to win the world for Christ, then we must have big, successful organizations.” Bigger churches, bigger missions, and bigger organizations became the focus of attention. Books and tapes and seminars abounded that taught the secrets to becoming big and successful. These resources were consumed in the West, and were exported as the model for organizations on every continent, regardless of the cultural context.

Rick: Colin, it sounds like we're saying that to want a large church or a successful organization is somehow wrong.

Colin: A large church or a successful organization is not necessarily wrong. But let me come at the issue from a different angle. From my European view, the concept of “crusade” picks up the notion of the Knights of Saint John warring against the masses of unbelievers and underlines a sense of warfare. It is not difficult to imagine organizations that were started within a few years of the Second World War having in their



minds an image of battle and warfare. There is nothing inherently wrong with the notion of spiritual battle with the attendant thought, “If we’re going to win the world for Christ, then we must be big and strong as an organization.” But **the overemphasis on success measured by numbers becomes a dilemma in organizations that miss dynamics like effectiveness or faithfulness through persecution as marks of success.** When bigger is better, we will most likely run into these problems.

Rick: I’m relieved to hear you say that **bigger is not better.** A few years ago, I met an elderly man in China whose life demonstrates this important principle. Many years earlier, he had been a pastor of a large church in China, but he gave up his influential leadership role when he would not submit to the Mao regime. He could have compromised and retained his influential position. But he would not. As a result, he was imprisoned for twenty-seven years. He sacrificed everything. As this faithful man told me his story, I thought, “The ‘bigger is better’ motif just doesn’t work very well in places where political forces are hostile to the Gospel.”

Colin: You’re right. But even in political contexts that are more sympathetic, bigger is not necessarily better. In the late 1980’s, my wife and I were requested by a church in the United States to visit a pastor and bring some counsel to his situation. When we arrived to meet this pastor, we found a man in emotional turmoil. It didn’t take long to discover that the source of his inner turmoil had to do with his image of success. He was the founding pastor of a church that belonged to a group of churches that were visionary and had set high goals for growth. The senior leaders of this group of churches had promoted the thought that success equates to growing a church to 500 people in five years. Within eighteen months, this pastor now had a congregation of 100 people. But he felt like a failure because – according to his superiors - the number needed to be 150 to be on target. It sounds strange, but this pastor doubted his calling and saw himself as inadequate. During my time with him, I was able to tell him that in the United Kingdom he would be teaching church growth if he had managed to grow a church to 100 in just eighteen months! It took quite some time for him to recover from his depression. This pastor’s experience demonstrates the price that is often paid when we embrace a flawed success model.

I have worked with thousands of pastors over the past 25 years. And the story above - with different twists and turns - is all too common. Many pastors admit to counting the number of people in the congregation on Sunday. If the numbers are up, then they are encouraged. If the numbers are down, they are discouraged. The need to be successful is paramount. Many church leaders have actually admitted to me that hearing the story of another struggling local pastor gives them secret feelings of joy and satisfaction. They are shamed by their admission and recognition. But it is understandable when the idea of success by numbers has been drilled into our psyches. **When success is only about numbers or size, we can expect a destructive, competitive spirit among Christian leaders.**

When I was a young pastor (a long time ago), I was leading a church of fifty people in the inner city of London. It was hard work. To make any headway in the local community with all its attendant inner-city problems was very challenging. I found myself with mixed emotions. On the one hand, I was happy to engage in front-line mission in one of the largest cities in the world. But at the same time, I struggled with my ego as pastor of a small and fragile church. One Sunday I found myself counting the congregation yet again when I had one of those "God-moments." Do you know what I mean? I've never heard God speak to me with an audible voice, but somewhere in my mind and heart I sensed God ask me, "Do you believe I will grow this church?" I was quick to respond that I did believe that God would grow the church. But then He said to me, "Well, then, stop counting, because it won't make any difference!" From that point on, I determined never to count the numbers, but to trust that whether the church was small or big - God would be faithful.

Rick: Your stories are encouraging because so many Christian leaders have been judged in recent years by the amount of money in their organization's bank account or the number of people in their church. They compare their organizations with the larger, more successful ones and the strong personalities that lead them. They have read the bestsellers – often written by the same successful leaders – that emphasize vision must come from the anointed leader (rather than from the community). These writers have often mistaken positional authority for spiritual authority when they assume that the senior leader should always be the source of organizational vision. Over time, the concept of

spiritual leader has been overshadowed by the preference for a Chief Executive Officer to hold the senior leader's role. Thus imperial leadership has become the order of the day. In short, success is the predominant measurement for leadership; therefore, ambitious leaders in Christian organizations have functioned – often subconsciously - on the premise that the goal (a strong, successful organization so that the ends of the earth will be reached with the gospel) justifies the means (valuing people, leading above reproach, and respect for the process).

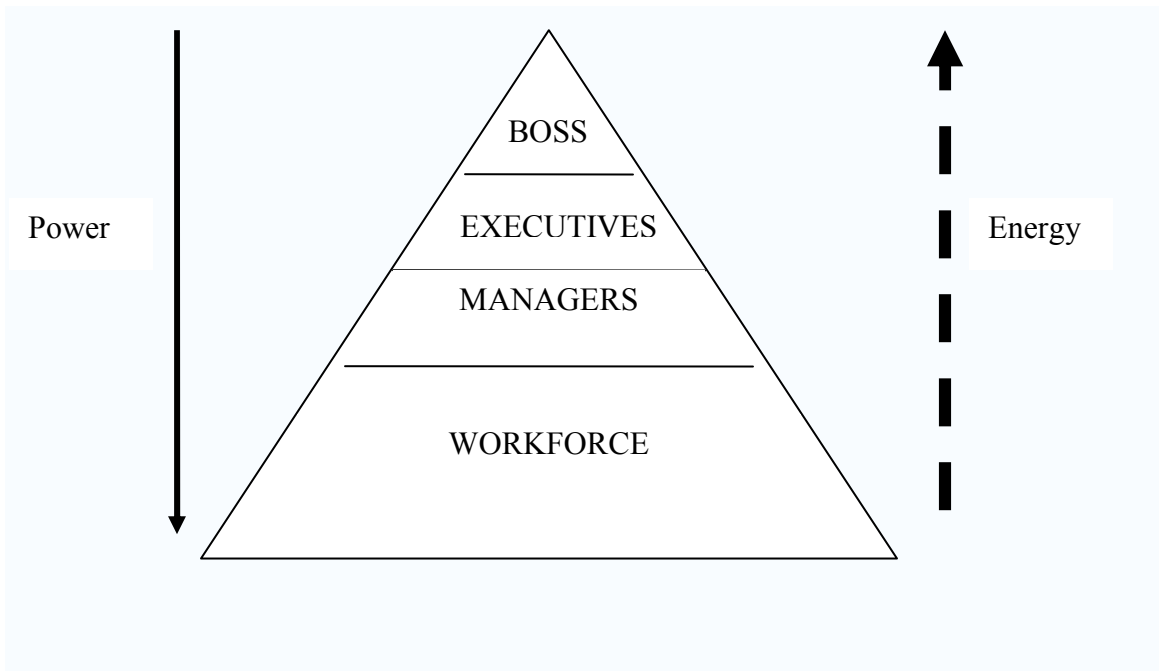
Colin: I don't think, however, that Christian leaders meant for it to turn out this way. The leaders I know began in their vocations with strong Christian principles and honorable intentions. However, as they had opportunity to advance, they began to make subtle but important compromises because they assumed that the goal above all others is to reach as many people as possible. However, over time they became abusive in their leadership. They used bully tactics and positional authority to keep the common people in their place.

To make matters even worse, these leaders frequently used spiritual language to avoid healthy conflict. They forbade all challenges to their authority with a simple "The Lord has told me . . ." or "The Lord's will is . . ." Most people in Christian organizations have been conditioned to perceive that the senior leaders are the spiritual leaders in the organization; they are the anointed ones to receive wisdom from God. Therefore, loyalty to the senior leader is equated with loyalty to God and His work. And anyone who contests the leader is ostracized or penalized.

Rick: These are uncomfortable things to express; nevertheless, none of us is above these temptations. It's like criticizing people with large vehicles for polluting the earth by driving their "gas guzzlers." Perhaps my arguments against large vehicles are ecologically - even ethically – sound . . . until I get a chance to own such a vehicle myself. The temptation is to give all kinds of reasons why my circumstances are unique, but these examples demonstrate that **power and status are intoxicating and behave like a magnet by pulling well-intentioned leaders away from their original values.**

### *Perspectives from Research*

According to the dictionary, the word “tradition” comes from the Latin word *traditio* which means "to hand down" or "to hand over." It is used in a number of ways in the English language, but it generally refers to a custom or set of customs taught by one generation to another. A tradition establishes the norm over time; in other words, a tradition determines how something should be done. If we accept the statements above, we can see that Christian organizations that were begun after the Second World War determined leadership norms that eventually resulted in leaders that were more focused on having power and being successful than on releasing people. Therefore, **the traditional form of Christian leadership today is characterized by status, power and control.**



The traditional leadership motif is a "top-down" model. The graphic above shows a traditional hierarchical structure within organizations. At the top of the triangle is the senior leader (boss). Below the boss are several levels of leadership. Different organizations have varying levels, but the bottom level is populated by the workforce. The broken arrow on the right running from bottom to top demonstrates the direction of energy. The energy of the workforce and the energy of the other sub layers of leadership are ultimately used to serve the desires and goals of the senior leader. The solid arrow on the left running from top to bottom shows the downward flow of power. The higher up on the pyramid one moves, the greater his or her level of authority and power in the organization.

This model is deeply ingrained in western Christian organizations and has frequently been a major export from the West to other parts of the world. It is so well-known that only recently have people begun to question its validity. But here are some of the weaknesses of the top-down model:

1. This model implies that wisdom is the exclusive domain of the senior leaders. It is generally perceived that those who populate the upper tiers of an organization have reached their position on the basis of their greater wisdom and spirituality. These leaders probably don't sit down one day and think, "I am wiser and more spiritual; therefore, I should climb higher." Perhaps some do, but most do not. Rather, this thinking often generates at a subconscious level. Then these leaders face the pressure of needing to sound and appear wiser than they truly feel themselves to be, simply because they've received a promotion.
2. The model underlines the dynamic of rank or status. It works with the perceptions of 'more than' and 'less than' -- usually embedded by the reward system that provides tokens that underline status within an organization. In the hierarchical structure, it is not difficult to know your place. One is aware of the difficulty of moving to a higher level on the pyramid since status is fiercely guarded by those who possess it. This is particularly relevant in those parts of the world where the mindset, "you are what you do," is deeply entrenched in the culture.
3. This model underlines the importance of power and authority, the key elements of a status mentality. In this view, the more power a person has the more important and successful he or she feels. This is intoxicating, so regardless of one's actual ability to lead, power is held tightly. In many instances, this results in the blocking of wisdom and skill from others in the organization that do not have sufficient status to warrant a hearing from those with power and authority. This often means that organizations fail to reap the benefits of all their people. It would be like having a brain surgeon in a hospital and using her only to fix bandages for people with minor injuries.

In his book entitled *The Human Side of Enterprise*, Douglas McGregor examined theories on the behavior of individuals at work. From his research, McGregor formulated two models which he called Theory “X” and Theory “Y” (we shall deal only with Theory “X” for our purposes here). The Theory “X” model captures the assumptions that form the philosophical foundation of the traditional, top-down leadership approach. These assumptions are:

- The average person dislikes work and will avoid it if possible.
- People lack motivation and are not goal-oriented; therefore, control and threats must be used to coerce people to action.
- The average person prefers to be directed and dislikes taking responsibility.
- Tough management is required if an organization wants to reach its goals; therefore, firmness and micromanagement are frequently necessary.
- The average person needs direction more than development.
- People depend on the intelligence of their leaders.
- The average person lacks innovation.

Predictably, the “Theory X” model easily translates into an “us and them” mentality in the organization – the bosses and the workers.

Not all of the assumptions above are held by everyone subscribing to a traditional model of leadership; however, these assumptions are prevalent. It might require some soul-searching for a leader to recognize that some of these elements exist in his or her attitudes toward people.

### *Perspectives from the Present*

Today’s Christian organizations certainly have some bright spots, but as a whole the scene is not very encouraging. Although some Christian organizations are claiming to reach millions, their statistics are not credible. While mega-churches are more numerous than ever before, their

actual impact upon secular culture in many contexts is in question. Younger people are observing the misalignment of word and deed and are wondering whether they want to participate in these organizations. And if they do decide to participate, they often insist on contributing toward a revitalized future. Describing these younger evangelicals, George Barna recently stated, “. . . the means now justify the end,” (*Revolution*, 2005) implying that **the dysfunctional approaches of the past must yield to a deep desire for authenticity, integrity, and a prioritization not just on what we do, but how we do what we do**. And this message must be more than a mantra; it must be seen and felt to be real. If this does not happen, the unquenched thirst for authenticity becomes just one more dynamic in the hemorrhaging of younger people from the church.

Colin: Rick, I've noticed this trend in the attitudes of younger people. In the local church, for example, I've seen Christian leaders endeavor to encourage their church members with promises that future growth and blessing are just around the next corner. The message from the pulpit is, “Keep going; we have nearly arrived.” And that message works for a while, but eventually the congregation begins to doubt the leader. They question whether they will ever experience the blessings promised, and their levels of commitment often begin to wane. When such promises go unfulfilled, people grow discouraged. When the church fails to deliver on its own beliefs and values, people feel let down and become skeptical that the church will ever become what they have been told the church can be.

Rick; As I get older - although I'm younger than you, Colin - I also find empty promises unattractive. When my heart is led to embrace a promise, it is very difficult when that promise fails to deliver. I believe in the church and I know you do too, but we are facing times when the actual values and actions that we practice often seem to betray our stated beliefs.

Colin: Unfortunately, you're right. I'm tempted to lighten the mood at this point because I am concerned that our discussion is too depressing. Thankfully, there are a number of inspiring Christian leaders and their organizations that are gaining health and growing - not simply in numbers, but in Christian maturity and deep spirituality.

Nevertheless, our quest in this little book is to deal with the truth and we cannot fail to tell it like it is. I don't think I would ever be a good car salesman, because I would always be pointing out what's wrong with the

car. Of course, there are also good things to say about the car – and Christian organizations.

Rick: God didn't call you to sell cars, but He did call you to a significant counseling ministry with many Christian leaders. From your counseling experience, why are many leaders deserting their original values in lieu of power and control when the issues seem to be so clear?

Colin: Simply put, **control is almost always a mask for fear for leaders: fear of being perceived as weak, fear of being taken advantage of, fear of failure.** The symptoms of this control include:

- withholding information unnecessarily
- making decisions without input from those affected by the decisions
- micromanagement
- using organizational hierarchy to avoid dealing with people

As we've said, the traditional model of leadership prioritizes personal achievement and success. If a person needs to silence an inner voice that speaks the constant message of inadequacy, then status, power, and control become enormously important and can become the primary focus of a leader's life.

### *Proposed Solutions*

**S**o how do organizations and their leaders change? How do they become healthy again?

First, we recognize that God alone can turn our hearts from fear to confidence in His sufficiency to lead.

Second, we acknowledge that God has called leaders to faithfulness. He alone is responsible for the increase; we are responsible to plant and nurture the seed.

Third, we recognize that we can change. We don't have to settle with our current state. **Despite the fact that fallen human nature has affected all leaders, God can transform us and our organizations. That's the message of the Gospel.**



With these realities in hand, we can begin to assess the current culture of our organizations using researched tools that contain a set of vital questions. The assessment tools are in the form of five questions. They are:

1. **What do the leaders of your organization consistently pay attention to and measure?**
2. **How do the leaders of your organization respond to critical incidents and organizational crisis?**
3. **How do the leaders of your organization allocate resources?**
4. **What do the leaders of your organization deliberately model and teach?**
5. **How do the leaders of your organization allocate rewards and status?**

We'll discuss these questions and their implications in the remainder of the book. With these questions, the leader will be able to assess the real culture of the organization, and how this real culture differs from the stated culture. The answer to these questions will also provide leaders the ability to determine their realistic potential of effectively rebooting his/her organization toward better health. In other words, if the answers to these questions reveal an organizational culture with real values that are relatively similar to its stated values, then the leader will have a better chance of bringing about positive change. On the other hand, if the answers reveal real values that are vastly different from the stated values, then the change will be more costly and will take much longer.

To evaluate and reboot your organization, it is important first to understand the components of organizational culture. We'll explain these components in the next section.

**Reflection:** *Spend some time reflecting on what you have read so far. Consider your experiences (look at any notes you made earlier) and identify what you may be feeling.*

# 3

## What is organizational culture?

Rick: When we conduct seminars, we often ask participants to define organizational culture. Their answers differ, but the most common response is, “It’s the way we do things around here.” That’s a common understanding of culture, and a pretty good answer.

In a broad sense, **organizational culture is a collective way of perceiving reality**. It is a set of assumptions – or a worldview – that is shared by a group of people. The people adopt these assumptions as their own over a period of time. These assumptions take on increasing importance as the group adapts to the outside environment to address challenges and to solve problems. Based on these assumptions, the group develops a “way of doing things” that works well enough so that these patterns become the values of the group. These values are reinforced by the leaders of the group as the correct and acceptable way to think, feel, and behave.

Colin: So, here’s a question to stump you: Are organizational cultures good or bad?

Rick: Yes.

Colin: Good answer. I interpret your answer to mean that there are both good and bad characteristics of any culture. And this would be true of organizational cultures as well?

Rick: Yes. On the one hand, an organizational culture is good because it provides group identity for the people who are part of it. Organizational culture also gives its members a set of standards by which to relate and function in relative harmony. Organizational culture provides a way for group members to predict actions and reactions of other members

toward certain behavior. And organizational culture also provides a level of stability so that people can reasonably plan for the future.

But an organizational culture can be bad when it perpetuates questionable practices. For example, even in Christian organizations, political manipulation can take priority over character and the truth. In unhealthy organizational cultures, who we know can become more important than who we are. Moreover, when money is seen as the commodity that secures the organization's future, a bad organizational culture overlooks unethical behavior from those with financial capacity.

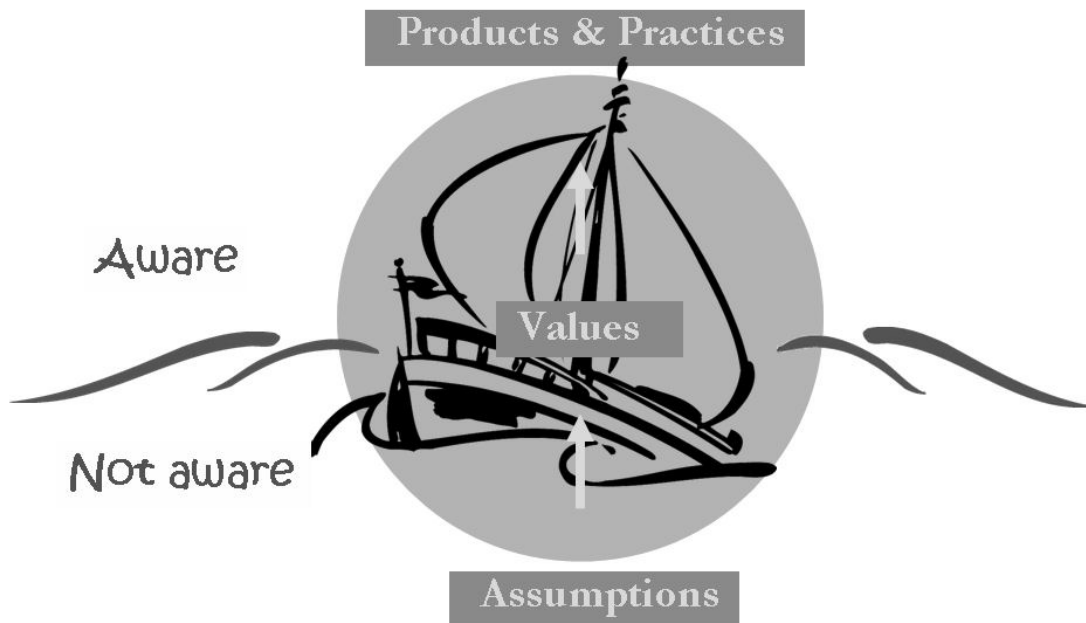
**Reflection:** *It is helpful to evaluate both the good and bad characteristics of any organization's culture. So what are the good aspects of your organization's culture? What are the not-so-good aspects of your organization's culture?*

### *Cultural Components*

**E**very organization possesses a distinctive culture. That culture is developed over time. More mature organizations have more defined cultures. As a result, **older organizations – healthy or unhealthy - have cultures that are more entrenched and difficult to change.**

The following graphic helps to explain the basic concepts of culture.

# Organizational Culture



Organizational culture contains three basic components: (1) assumptions, (2) values, and (3) products and practices.

## *Component #1: Assumptions*

An organization's assumptions are the foundation of its culture. These assumptions affect almost everything that its members think and do. Here are some important principles about assumptions to remember:

*Assumptions exist as images in the minds of the cultural members.*

**Assumptions usually exist in the minds of the cultural members as mental images. These mental images are powerful and instructive.** For example, when one organization speaks about teamwork, most of their members function with mental images of a team. Some members may function with the mental image of a soccer team, a team of players whose goal is to defeat the opposing team by scoring more points. On this team, the coach's (leader) role is to give commands from the sideline, but is not a player on the field. In this mental image, fans are cheering a select group of talented athletes. Competition with the opposing team is the primary focus. Although defeating the other team

is a major goal, competition among players on the same team can also be intense. Members of an organization who function with the mental image of a soccer team have certain assumptions about how members and leaders of an organization should act and react.

Another group of people may have the mental image of an orchestra when they think of teamwork. In this mental image, the leader is the conductor with responsibility to keep the members executing the master score. Members are not allowed to improvise, and each member is required to play a specific note on a specific instrument at a specific time. There may be competition among the members, but usually an orchestra's overall goal – unlike a soccer team - is to make excellent music rather than to compete.

Still another group of people may have a jazz band as their mental image of a team. For those familiar with the jazz band, you can use your imagination to see the differences between a team that perceives itself as a jazz band and one that is functions with the mental image of an orchestra.

*Assumptions develop and deepen over time.*

These mental images are developed over time as the leaders of the organization act, react, and reinforce certain behavior. **Assumptions become fixed in the minds of members as leaders overcome challenges and problems with consistent patterns of behavior.** To illustrate, a director of a Christian ministry in Brazil was appointed and trained by his U.S. predecessor that financial solvency is a non-negotiable leadership priority in their organization. Shortly after assuming his leadership role, the Brazilian director faced some major financial challenges that seemed to justify in his mind a string of unscrupulous financial arrangements with the public. His financial dishonesty was commonly known among his employees; however, the dishonest director was able to garner sufficient finances to provide generous staff salaries. Therefore, the director's behavior was viewed by members as "a necessary reality in our world." Over the course of two decades, the director's behavior created and perpetuated deeply-held assumptions within that organization's culture. If leaders behave consistently in terms of certain basic assumptions, the cultural members eventually come to behave according to those assumptions to make their world stable and predictable. Consistent reinforcement of assumptions

results in more powerful – and more deeply held - assumptions within a culture.

*Assumptions become reality for the cultural members.*

Assumptions can be either true or false; they can represent the truth about reality, or they can be the fanciful creation of the leader and group members. For example, David Koresh taught and practiced a decadent, deranged lifestyle, but his Davidian cult members followed him to kill and die in Waco, Texas in 1999. Koresh consistently acted, reacted, and reinforced among the cult members a set of assumptions that became their reality. It is important to remember that whatever behavior the leaders consistently reinforce – through action and language – generally becomes the organization’s frame of reality whether or not this frame is related to objective reality.

*Assumptions function mostly “below the water line.”*

Cultural assumptions affect organizational behavior even though the members are usually not consciously aware of these assumptions. In other words, assumptions function below the water line (see graphic above). These assumptions influence the actions and reactions of cultural members every day even though they are not aware of the assumptions.

*Assumptions are difficult to change.*

Once embedded over time in an organization, cultural assumptions are very difficult to change. It is risky even to challenge them. But **acknowledgement and examination of working assumptions is a non-negotiable requirement for developing an organization toward better health.**

Rick: I am sobered to think that I have embedded certain assumptions in the ministries I have led – without realizing it - by the behavior I consistently practiced. I guess this suggests that leaders need to look beyond what they say – and write – to examine frequently how their actions are shaping the assumptions of the organization. Looking back, it would have been good practice to invite an evaluation of my behavior – with the help of others – that gave rise to our organizational culture.

## *Component #2: Values*

Values are the middle layer of culture; they are the core collective beliefs of an organization and its members. An organization's values are determined by its assumptions (see arrow in graphic above). In turn, the organization's values result in a set of products and practices. "We reap what we sow" is a modern idiom originally expressed by Jesus that captures the impact of values upon an organization's culture.

Rick: When we refer to a culture's values, we are talking about the real values, not necessarily the ones that are formally written and placed in a prominent location for all to read.

Colin: There are lots of seminars offered today that highlight the importance of values. However, in most of these seminars, the participants are trained to go home and meet with their leadership group, determine the values of the organization, then post the values on the wall or on their website. These written values are almost always positive – usually with appropriate biblical texts subscribed to them - that describe the ideal Christian organization.

Rick: I know what you mean. Nearly every ministry I've visited recently has their list of values posted in some public place for everyone to see. Although the ministries are different, it seems that they all have somewhat similar lists of values. Their lists consistently include values like integrity, excellence, and the importance of people.

Colin: I've noticed that too. But written lists of ideal values are not our focus here. **The values we want to highlight are not the ones an organization should have; they are the values an organization does have. And furthermore, although values are generally considered to be good, the truth is that all organizations have both good and bad values.**

Rick: Examples come to mind that illustrate your point. One Christian mission in Hong Kong states that they value the development of people, and they really do when they pay for each staff person to attend one continuing education event per year at the organization's expense. However, another organization in Western Europe disconnects their

written and real values when they talk about the importance of spiritual health for their staff members, but the first item to be cut under the pressure of financial constraint is the annual staff retreat. Similarly, one director in Africa declares that he values being available to staff, but staff members must get past two administrative assistants for an appointment with him. Thus, the typical organization has a set of written values and a set of real values. Some of the real values are synonymous with the written ones, but others are not.

Colin: I've consulted with several Christian ministries whose written values seem to be little more than a marketing device since the written values don't translate into reality within the organization. In fact, many people have taken jobs based upon these organizations' marketed values, but quickly became disenchanted by their actual experience within the organization.

Rick: Ideal values look good on paper, don't they? And they may comfort the organizational members, but often the truth about real values lies elsewhere.

Here are some observations about values to keep in mind:

*The leaders who prevail during organizational conflict determine values.*

The term "dominant narrative" helps to clarify this principle. This term simply means that the winners write the history books. Those leaders who win the organizational battle (conflict) are also the leaders who articulate – and archive – the organization's history. The version of the conflict that is communicated by the prevailing leaders is repeated and tends to shape the cultural values into the future.

Colin: So the loudest voices determine the historical understanding of organizational events?

Rick: Exactly. This is particularly true of leaders, and is a dynamic of human nature.

*The organizational founder's values are powerful and perpetual.*

As stated above, **leaders determine the real values of the organization by endorsing certain behavior.** Moreover, some studies



have been conducted recently that trace the important relationship between a founder's original values and the continuing values of the organization, even after the founder is gone. Therefore, to understand the current values of an organization, it is important to observe the values – both good and bad values - of the founder. This is especially true when the current leaders or members are under pressure or experience crisis.

Rick: We're saying that a founder's values are like a genetic strand that gets passed on to future generations?

Colin: Yes, we're saying that **the primary values of the founder usually impact the organization's values long after the founder and his or her direct relationships have been replaced.**

Rick: This sounds like the "presence" of the founder lives on!

Colin: Yes it does. I've worked with Christian ministries in which the founder's influence remains in the organization through the founder's values even many years after he or she has died. This benefits the organization insofar as the founder's healthy values are perpetuated. But since we all are human, founders have both healthy and unhealthy values. Organizations do not tend to talk openly about the founder's unhealthy values, so these unhealthy values become entrenched in the culture along with the healthy ones.

*Cultural members are aware of some values, but not aware of others.*

As depicted in the graphic above, members are aware of some cultural values, but other values - particularly bad values - are less obvious and are not discussed publicly among the members of the culture. And often the less obvious values can be the more powerful ones.

Rick: Let me give an example from my own personal life that hopefully illustrates this principle in organizations. I am aware of my value to develop younger leaders. I am aware that this healthy value influences many of my vocational and personal decisions. But on the other hand, I am usually unaware of my value for orderliness – until I am faced with disorder!

Colin: I've seen that value for orderliness in you. For example, you like an empty inbox in your email host. In fact, you often delete my emails, then ask me to resend them! That's a little more insight for you.

Rick: Well thank you for volunteering that insight, Colin. I can always depend on you for helpful assistance. But seriously, I use this illustration to point out that my value for orderliness isn't always good. And I'm often not aware that it is affecting my judgments and behavior.

Colin: OK, I think we've made the point. Some values are conscious; others are subconscious. But all values affect behavior. And what is true of individuals is also true in organizations.

*Validation of organizational behavior leads to shared values.*

**People within any particular organization are accepted socially when they behave in ways that are consistent with the real values of the organization. This is particularly important when the written values and the real values are different.**

Colin: For example, there is no written policy in one Christian organization that staff members must contribute to a certain charity, but failure to do so can bring subtle – and not so subtle - ostracism by the person who violates the real value.

Rick: Another organization has a written policy that states the work day begins at 0800 hrs. However, those who arrive at the publicized start time are often criticized during annual reviews for lacking motivation, and those who arrive thirty minutes earlier are praised publicly.

Colin: My youngest daughter took a job that was offered and described as secretarial in nature. There was no mention in the job description that she would be involved in sales. She is good with people, but has no interest in selling. Within a few days, she ran into problems with the organization's real – but unwritten - values and expectations. She was told by other members of the staff that she must sell since everyone was expected to do so. She objected, but this unwritten rule was underlined by her line manager. Eventually, she left the job after the sad experience.

Rick: Your daughter's experience illustrates the solidarity that can exist within an organization's members around an unwritten – but very real - status quo.

*Values are difficult to change*

Most values are difficult to change. Nevertheless, change can take place over time as leaders catalyze the process by consistently demonstrating and teaching different values than the ones that are embedded within the organization's culture.

### **Reflection:**

*Before change can occur, it is important to understand the similarities and differences between your organization's written and real values. Therefore, consider the following questions:*

*What are your organization's written values?*

*What are your organization's real values?*

*How are the written and real values the same?*

*How are the written and real values different?*

### ***Component #3: Products and Practices***

Every organization has products that distinguish it from other organizations. McDonald's produces Big Mac hamburgers. World Vision produces global compassion and relief services. These products are easily identifiable.

But more important to the discussion of organizational culture is the matter of practices. Every organization also adheres to a pattern of accepted practices that reflect and influence the culture. These practices are largely determined by the organization's assumptions and values. **The behavior of leaders is usually the most important catalyst for acceptable practices in an organization.**

Important practices in organizations include:

- use of language (every organization has a distinctive vocabulary)
- ways of social interaction
- acceptable dress
- use of formal titles
- ways of handling conflict
- accountability of leaders
- policies and procedures

- symbols
- organizational structure

A couple of principles about products and practices to remember are:

*Products and Practices are easy to observe, especially to outsiders.*

The products and practices of an organization are above the water line (see graphic above). In other words, these components of culture are visible for observation. Products and practices are especially obvious to outsiders - people who are not members of the culture. Conversely, the longer a member has been inside the organization, the “blinder” he or she can become to the products and practices of the organization.

Rick: To illustrate, I think about Trans World Radio, the organization where I work. Like many organizations, we have a corporate logo. If your organization – like mine – has a logo, it is probably displayed somewhere in your office reception area, on your letterhead, or on your business cards. The logo is usually one of the first things visitors see when they visit your organization’s offices or website. But if you closely observe long-term staff members in your organization, you will probably discover that most of them probably don’t even notice the logo any longer. In our case, the Trans World Radio logo is displayed with huge letters in our reception area, but most of our staff members state that they no longer notice the logo when they enter the building. They don’t see it because it has become so familiar. The same could be said about the office furnishings, ways of greeting people, and even the acceptable time for coffee break. Organizational members have practices that are second nature to them, and are clearly distinguishable to outsiders.

Colin: Or think about the practice of organizations using coded language. I was recently consulting with a Christian ministry whose people used so many abbreviations, it sounded like they were speaking a foreign language. When I began to question what the abbreviations mean, they confessed that they didn’t even realize they were using abbreviations. They had become “blind” to their own cultural use of language.

*Products and practices are the easiest components of culture to change.*

Compared to assumptions and values, products and practices are easier to change. However, changes in products and practices alone are mostly surface changes. **If an organizational change initiative does not also occur at the values and assumptions level, the organization will tend to revert to old practices during times of crisis.** For example, many organizations attempt to change their culture by changing the organizational chart. But change in organizational structure without an accompanying change in values is usually disappointing. In almost all cases, unchanged values results in a new structure supporting the same old practices.

Colin: One senior pastor with whom I worked returned from his annual vacation with new inspiration. During a quiet nap by a swimming pool, he had a moment of inspiration. He finally realized what needed to be done to take the congregation forward. He returned to the church and readied himself for this major change to take place. The church was energized by his inspiration for a month or two, but ultimately the change didn't last. The process of change was incomplete because they neglected to attend to the deeper values and assumptions of their church culture.

Typically, close communities like churches can only go through this a few times before they no longer believe in the leader. It might be that the leader has good ideas and planning skills; nevertheless, without a change at the assumption and values level, the community's hopes and dreams are not fulfilled.

For deep and lasting cultural transformation, an organization must change its assumptions, values, and products and practices. Anything short of this comprehensive reformation will not last.

# 4

## What is Jesus' way of leadership?

Colin: Rick, we've been talking about organizational culture. But before we go further, we should include a biblical perspective. Specifically, I think readers will want to know about the relevance of all this with biblical teaching on the life and leadership of Jesus.

Rick: OK. Since Jesus' leadership deeply impacted the culture of the early church, let's consider His way of leading that can radically transform today's organizations as well.

This brief book cannot begin to do justice to the many amazing leadership principles we can learn from Jesus Christ. We'll take up this discussion in more depth in the forthcoming book. For our purposes here, we'll introduce a few key points.

Colin: Before we get too far, isn't it important to point out that Jesus never led an organization?

Rick: You're absolutely right. Although Jesus did not emphasize positions and organizational charts, **Jesus' leadership focused on the development of a vital culture upon which one of the most enduring organizations in history – the church - was founded and expanded worldwide for over two millennia.** Therefore, the lessons we can learn from Jesus' leadership are timeless and universal

Colin: I'm also fascinated that Jesus never used the word "leader" to describe his disciples. Although he spent the majority of his ministry years investing in these future leaders, it seems that the conventional leadership values in His time were not those He wanted to transfer to

His disciples. The image of leaders in that day – not very different from our present day – was that they were oppressive, arrogant, and in charge. Jesus confronted the religious leaders, using terms like “hypocrite,” “white-washed sepulchers”, and “snakes” to describe them.

Therefore, we propose that Jesus preferred different mental images such as “servant”, “steward”, “shepherd”, and “disciple” to form the base of assumptions for leadership as the early church was established.

### *The King who led with a towel*

John 13:3-14 is a classic biblical account that demonstrates Jesus’ leadership perspectives and practice:

*“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’*

*Jesus replied, ‘You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’*

*‘No,’ said Peter, ‘you shall never wash my feet.’*

*Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.’*

*‘Then, Lord,’ Simon Peter replied, ‘not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!’*

*Jesus answered, ‘A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.’ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.*

*When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them. ‘You call me*

*Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you and example that you should do as I have done for you."*

The time was Passover, the most sacred of Jewish feasts. Three million people would have been in Jerusalem for this Celebration Week. Word had spread like wildfire through the city that Jesus of Nazareth was on his way to the feast. Thousands lined the road as Jesus made his way into Jerusalem. "Hosanna!" they chanted. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the kingdom of our father David!"

**But Jesus wasn't what the crowd expected. They expected a conquering King. He disappointed the Passover pilgrims that week. But in so doing, he fulfilled their most profound need.** This is made graphically clear a few days later when Jesus and his friends had gathered for a meal. Since the streets and roads of Palestine were plain dirt - in dry weather they were deep in dust, and in wet weather they could become liquid mud - the shoes people wore in that day were simple: a flat sole, held onto the feet by a few straps. So every walk in the street soiled the feet. That's why just inside the doorway of homes sat a basin of water with a towel. The custom was for a servant to greet visitors and wash their feet.

But on this night when Jesus gathered his disciples for a meal, the wash basin sat unused. Of course, the disciples had their minds riveted on more noble thoughts. The talk of the week had ignited their imaginations of the Kingdom of God – dreams of thrones and power and glory. In fact, they were conflicted about which of them would be the greatest in this Kingdom - while everybody in the house had dirty feet.

So Jesus got up from the table, prepared himself, and started to wash the feet of his followers. Here is the King of Kings, washing filthy feet, and drying them with a towel. Here is a King whose symbol of authority is a towel. Jesus demonstrated and taught three lessons about leadership in his use of the towel that night.

***Lesson #1: Jesus' use of the "towel" represented His whole life and leadership.***

The first lesson is that the towel dramatizes not only Jesus' leadership, but also his whole life. Washing his disciples' feet was no isolated event. On the



contrary, **what Jesus did that night in the upper room vividly portrays the whole journey He made from the Father into the world and back to the Father.** Jesus laid aside His garments that night just as He had laid aside His glory in heaven and His privileges as the Son of God. He washed men's feet – a menial act of service – just as He died the degrading death of a common criminal. And when Jesus had finished washing their feet, He took up His garments and returned to His place of honor, just as He was taken up from the grave and was seated again with God the Father. In this upper room, the Son of Man stripped off His garments, got down on his knees, and washed dirt from the feet of those whom He had called to follow Him as a fitting symbol of His whole life and leadership.

***Lesson #2: Jesus' use of the "towel" revealed His perspective on positional power.***

The second lesson is that the towel revealed Jesus' own concept of positional power. From a human perspective, washing feet is beneath the dignity of a King. In fact, Peter reflected his shock at Jesus' actions when he responded, "*You shall never wash my feet.*" Peter wanted Jesus to fit into human ideas of royalty and privilege. In this foot-washing, Jesus dismantled our concept of position and pecking order. We live with the notion that to be leader is to be exalted. But **in His use of the towel, Jesus revealed that being God means coming down from His throne and giving Himself to serve.**

Peter would have been perfectly comfortable washing Jesus' feet. That would be normal according to human ideas. But to see Jesus – the great I AM – stoop before Peter and begin to reach for his dirty feet is not normal.

Just before coming into Jerusalem that week, Jesus told His disciples, "*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.*" In that one line He turned everything upside down.

Colin: I have to admit that these words of Jesus stir in me a mixed reaction. On the one hand, I'm touched by such a King. But on the other hand, like Peter, I'm disturbed. For at first glance, if I hold to a view of God as the One who serves me, will it not create in me an inappropriate pride?

Rick: I see what you mean. Will it not cause a person to be self-centered?

Colin: But as I take a second look, the opposite is actually true. **A God on His knees humbles me.** For if my only view of God is that of a supreme King at the top rung of the ladder, then I'm always wondering how I will get to Him and worrying how I am doing. Am I making progress toward Him? What can I do to make my way up to Him? In the name of religion, I become preoccupied with myself . . . compared to where everybody else is on the ladder. But this kind of love knocks me off the ladder and out of the center. Jesus was revealing the King's own idea about what it means to be King.

***Lesson #3: Jesus' use of the "towel" teaches us to serve God by serving others.***

After washing their feet, Jesus said to His disciples, *"Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should wash one another's feet."*

What a profound statement. If Jesus had said *"Now that I've washed your feet, you wash my feet"*, we would be standing in line for the privilege of being first with the towel and the basin to wash God's feet. But Jesus said, *"Now that I have washed your feet, you wash one another's feet."* I am a debtor to Jesus the King for what He has paid for me.

Rick: I once heard a preacher interpret Jesus' words here to imply that **my neighbor is now the appointed agent authorized to receive what I owe the Master.**

Colin: You know, if this is true, it means that my wife is the appointed agent authorized to receive my gratitude to Jesus Christ the King. I wash my Lord's feet as I wash her feet. My children are the appointed agents authorized to receive my gratitude to the King. I wash Jesus' feet as I wash their feet. My work colleagues are the appointed agents authorized to receive my gratitude to the King. I wash Jesus' feet as I wash their feet.

Rick: Leading with the "towel" means believing in people enough to empower them with the authority and the resources and the information as well the accountability they need to be the best they can be. It means creating an environment safe enough for them to risk giving all . . . and

sometimes fail in their giving . . . and encouraging them to risk again. Leading with the “towel” implies that I don’t have to be the source of every good idea, but we discover the vision together. It is all about creating an atmosphere where everyone is free to tell me the truth, especially to the leaders. Leading with the “towel” means allowing people to express their passion and defending those privately and publicly who don’t compromise principle for profit. It also means treating each person with the sacred understanding that they are uniquely crafted in the image of their Creator - not in mine. Leading with the “towel” is enabling people to make decisions and to pursue their God-given dreams, and celebrating their accomplishments. **Leading with the “towel” means serving those I lead not so that they will serve me, but so that they will serve others.**

But I have to admit, there is a tension in me as I write these things. As a leader, this way of relating to people isn’t normal. It’s often not the way I have related to people in the past. This way of relating to people reverses the order. It is subversive. It destabilizes.

Colin: But isn’t that precisely what Jesus intends? I think we’re beginning to grasp the Gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus changes our whole concept of power, of authority, of status. When the disciples were arguing about who would be greatest, He said to them, *“You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them . . . . But it is not so among you. Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be number one shall be slave to all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve”* (Matthew 20:25-28).

The King who led with a towel inaugurated a kingdom of foot washers. He deleted the icon of leaders clamoring for power, people climbing over each other to get to the top. Jesus’ example even puts to rest the notion that I wash your feet so that you wash mine. Rather, I wash your feet so that you can in turn wash another’s feet.

That which distinguishes Jesus’ way of leadership is brought into being by the self-emptying love of Jesus Himself. When leaders belong to King Jesus, we can no longer write on our resume, “I don’t wash feet.” That’s precisely what leaders do, because that’s what Jesus does.

Rick: As liberating as it is, this way of leadership doesn’t just happen. As much as I may want to be this kind of leader, I find myself expressing with the

Apostle Paul, “*Lord, what I do is not the good I want to do, and the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. . . who will rescue me?*” (Romans 7:19-24). I’m unable to lead this way – at least with any consistency. In those times, when I’m unable - or unwilling - to take up the “towel,” **when I find myself in that place where Jesus’ way of leadership just doesn’t make sense, it usually means that it’s time to let Him wash my feet again.** It’s time to let the King wash me again. It’s time to let this King who knew where he had come from and where he was going, this King who knew that He was in the absolute center of His Father’s will, this King whose heart is overflowing with love, to wash my feet again. For to the degree that I allow him to love me and serve me, to that degree I can wash the feet of those I lead into the liberty of the Kingdom of God.

### *Jesus’ leadership values*

**T**here is so much more biblical insight into Jesus’ life and leadership that will have to wait for a more complete treatment. But for now, let’s look at the practical implications. What does it mean to lead with these principles of Jesus to craft a healthier organization?

We don’t want to imply that there is a simple answer, but we can begin by looking at three cardinal values that shaped Jesus’ leadership.

#### ***Value #1: Jesus; leadership was established upon a relationship with his followers.***

Genesis to Revelation describes a God who desires relationship with the people He created. Restored relationship with God is central to the Gospel message. In the same theme, **leadership for Jesus existed in the context of relationship with His followers.**

Colin: Regarding the importance of relationship in leadership, I think of the account in Luke when Jesus inspired Simon Peter to leave his nets and fish for men. In order to lead Simon, Jesus entered Simon’s world (the fishing boat), met his need (catching fish), and spoke to him with dignity

(invited him to a higher calling). In these practical ways, Jesus summoned Simon to follow Him through relationship. In other Gospel accounts, we read that Jesus invested time eating, socializing and traveling with his disciples and others.

I also think of other examples from Jesus' leadership that demonstrated his commitment to relationships with followers:

- His vulnerability in the Garden to His three friends when He was facing Gethsemane.
- His patient explanation of parables to the disciples.
- His statement to his disciples: “You are my friends.”
- His encounter with the Samaritan woman when He engaged her in conversation and communicated His concern and care for her as a person.
- His healing of Jairus' daughter.

From these biblical examples and many others, we can conclude that many people chose to follow Jesus because of His relationship with them.

Through the Bible, God led people through a relationship with those who chose to follow Him.

***Value #2: Jesus' leadership was activated by influence, not coercive power.***

Jesus demonstrated that leadership is activated by influence, not coercive force. Jesus held no positional power over those he was leading. They had a choice to follow Him or to turn away and reject His invitation.

Therefore, God's creation of human will – our freedom to choose – was one of God's most profound acts of authentic leadership. **The fact that Jesus came as a baby – of low socioeconomic status– implies a God who leads not based on power, but through influencing His willing followers.**

Rick : The Gospels are filled with examples of Jesus' incredible personal and spiritual influence with his disciples and many others, including those who disagreed with Him and those who ultimately crucified Him.

Some examples include:

- Multitudes came to hear him speak on many occasions.
- Simon dropped everything and followed Him.
- Large crowds followed him.
- Jesus' encounter with His accusers on the morning of the Crucifixion.
- Jesus' conversation with the thief on the cross.

People who had the free choice followed Jesus because of His massive personal and spiritual influence.

Colin: So what are implications of this principle?

Rick: The capacity to influence others is the characteristic that primarily distinguishes leaders from followers. The true leaders in an organization are not necessarily those people who are appointed by the board.  
**Authentic leadership by influence is not subject to organizational charts; the real leaders in any organization influence both those “above” and “below” them on the organizational chart.** One way to determine whether one is a leader is to evaluate whether others are following because they want to – free will – or because they have to.

In my own personal experience, I have followed some people no longer than I absolutely had to, and others I have followed regardless of their title or position.

Colin: Unfortunately, many Christian organizations make the mistake of appointing people as the spiritual leaders rather than affirming those who are already recognized as the spiritual leaders. This is often a tragic misstep for the welfare of the organization since these appointed individuals establish the spiritual climate into the organization's future.

***Value #3: Jesus' prioritized His followers' potential over His own benefit.***

The value that really set apart Jesus' way of leadership from all other leadership approaches was His priority on the followers' potential. Jesus' leadership was focused on His followers' Kingdom potential, not on His well-being or the benefit of any religious organization that He was building.

Colin: I think I understand what you're saying, but this principle seems to be very controversial since leaders are usually appointed to build a successful organization.

Rick: You're right. All leaders desire to be successful, or at least "fruitful". And after all, how will the organization be successful unless the leader is successful? But this third value is radical. **Jesus did not invest His life in others to build a successful organization. Jesus invested His life in others so that they could grow to their maximum Kingdom potential.**

This type of leadership is risky, but it stands at the heart of Jesus' way of leadership. The religious establishment in Jesus' day was building a system that seemed infinitely stronger and more permanent than what Jesus was doing. But He was building people to be their very best. In reality, the church was a byproduct of Jesus' primary focus during His three years of ministry. He developed eleven followers who were transformed to reach their highest potential.

Colin: If the weight of the Gospel writings is any indication of where Jesus spent his time and energy, Jesus evidently spent almost no time investing in a religious system. In fact, He consistently challenged the religious system and its leaders. Rather, the majority of Jesus' time was spent teaching and preaching with the goal of transforming lives and reproducing His heart for the world into those who would carry the torch after His departure. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit who would lead them to do even greater things than they had heretofore experienced. Also, in His appearance to them just before His ascension, Jesus exhorted His disciples to be empowered by the Spirit and be witnesses. These priorities demonstrate a deep commitment for His disciples to reach

their highest Kingdom potential. The church's early momentum and sustained perpetuity for twenty-one centuries was birthed through Jesus' sacrificial resolve to lead by focusing on His followers' highest potential.

Rick: If this is true, it distinguishes Jesus' leadership from so many utilitarian leadership models that are discarded if they aren't successful. Those who lead Jesus' way do so not because it is the most successful way to lead, but because it is right way to lead.

Colin: If Jesus' followers had failed to reach their potential, He did not have another plan. Jesus had one focus: the potential of those He called disciples . . . and friends. Perhaps there is no more profound-- and life-changing message than this one.

Rick: Now I'm beginning to see why your story of Thumbless Peter - remember him - makes sense.

Colin: Why do you mention him again?

Rick : Because Thumbless Peter represents all those leaders who have begun to understand the radical, transforming potential of leading like Jesus, but feel out of place in their current organizational context. These leaders see Jesus' leadership that was founded upon a relationship with his followers rather than position, was activated by influence rather than coercive power, and was focused on their potential rather than his own personal success. But they don't know how to function in an organizational environment that champions leaders who thrive on status, power, and success. Like Thumbless Peter, how can they survive in a world of round handles?

The man with no thumbs represents many of us. Therefore, in the next chapter we'll begin to introduce a set of "handles" that will help these leaders open doors to better organizational health. These proven "handles" are presented in the form of five questions that will equip leaders both to assess and to develop a healthier organizational culture. These "handles" combined with lessons from Jesus' leadership provide hope for a deep, lasting reformation.

*Reflection: As you ponder Jesus' way of leadership (based on a relationship with followers, activated by personal and spiritual influence, and seeks the highest potential of followers),*



*write down 4-5 practical steps that you can take as a leader to emulate more faithfully Jesus' way of leadership.*

# 5

*Handle 1* → **W** *hat do the leaders measure?*

Rick: Before we launch into a discussion about the handles for opening doors to organizational health, let's review a little. Many leaders are currently struggling to work out Jesus' leadership values in their current organizational context. This is due in part because Christian organizations today often have dysfunctional cultures because they are operating with a set of real values that are not the same as their written or stated values. Jesus' leadership that was founded upon a relationship with His followers, was activated by spiritual and personal influence rather than coercive power, and focused on His followers' potential stands in stark contrast to many Christian leaders of organizations today who are recognized for their status, power, and personal success.

Colin: Now let's provide some practical handles. We should mention here that the handles are not original with us, but are based on research by Edgar Schein, one of the most respected experts on the subject of organizational culture. **Schein referred to these handles as “primary embedding mechanisms” of organizational culture. He was saying that these mechanisms are the major tools that leaders have available to them to teach organizational members how to behave, think, and feel.** As a result, these handles are primary means by which leaders “embed” culture within the organization. We want to consider these handles in light of Jesus' leadership approach to developing a healthy culture in the early church.

The first handle for evaluating your organization's culture and developing a healthier one is to observe what the leaders consistently pay attention to and measure. What the leaders consistently pay attention to becomes very important in any organization. What they measure becomes priority in the minds of the organizational members. **If leaders want something to become important – or remain important – they must figure out a way to measure**

– and thereby control – that aspect of the organization. On the other hand, if the leaders do not highlight a particular value or provide any means to measure or control it, that stated value will not likely become a real value in the organization.

Leaders who are not aware of the importance of this principle or are inconsistent in what they pay attention to and measure will cause organizational members to spend undue energy and time trying to interpret what the leaders really value. Members will even project motives onto the leader where none may actually exist. **If leaders are inconsistent in what they measure and pay attention to, they will eventually cause organizational members to decide for themselves what is really important**, and will lead to a more diverse set of assumptions and more subcultures within the organization.

For example, good stewardship of finances are – and should be – an important value in most Christian organizations. This value is more easily measurable and often is a top agenda item in leadership discussions. For these reasons, finance maintains a priority value in most organizations, even if it is not a stated value. Conversely, a Christian organization can state that integrity is one of their primary values, but if the leaders do not provide a specific, practical way to highlight and measure with consistency the presence (or absence) of integrity, it will probably not become a real value in the organization, especially under times of pressure.

Colin: When I think about the importance of this process, I'm reminded of the Chief Executive Officer of an organization who wanted to get across to employees the importance of safety. To do so, she insisted that the first item on *every* meeting agenda was to be a discussion of safety issues.

Rick: This is an excellent illustration of a leader who brings consistent attention to a value he or she considers important.

Colin: It's also interesting to think about what Jesus the leader paid attention to – and measured.

Rick: Yes it is. But let's state again that Jesus wasn't an organizational leader, so we don't want to impose an interpretation on Jesus' leadership that isn't legitimate.

Colin: I agree, but I think of several instances in Jesus' leadership in which he emphasized certain behavior and downplayed other behavior. Here is a short list:

- Luke 10:17-20 – Jesus commissioned the seventy-two. They returned full of excitement about the results of ministry as they exercised authority over evil and spiritual power. But Jesus responded, *“Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”* In this statement, Jesus brought attention to their position in Christ rather than the ministry success.
- Matthew 13:3-23 – Jesus' “Parable of the Sower” emphasized that the response of the soil – not the effectiveness of the sower - determined the size of the crop. In this parable, He focused attention on the sower's consistent faithfulness (spreading the seed everywhere).

Luke 19 – Jesus “Parable of the Mina” drew attention to faithful servants, not to the minas given (all were given the same).

Rick: Sometimes Jesus emphasized numbers (such as the multiplied blessings available to the one who gives liberally), but He consistently paid more attention to His disciples' character rather than what they produced. And this emphasis impacted the culture of the early church.

Colin: This is a sobering concept, for I must say that I have never led or been involved with a church that knew how to measure character. For example, we have just tended to assume that integrity was a core value that was expected in Christian organizations.

Rick: Organizations that have integrity as a written value, but have no means of measuring integrity will have a value that is expected but not required. **A community of people cannot really know that they are practicing integrity unless they are able to check or measure its actual practice among them.** Unfortunately, many Christian organizations identify lapses of the members' spiritual life only when there is obvious failure due to sexual immorality or financial impropriety.

A case in point is my own experience several years ago as an administrator at a Christian college. I was hired by the college's president to initiate a focus on the spiritual development of students, faculty, and staff. The written values of the school stated that spiritual

formation is important. However, after many discussions during my first two years on campus, I observed that academics consistently took precedence over spiritual formation in budget and scheduling decisions. I could not understand this discrepancy between the college's stated priority for spiritual formation and their actual practices related to schedule and funding.

Then I began to notice that the academic division had many measurable features by which to evaluate their effectiveness; these measures included student-teacher ratio, the number of faculty members with doctorates, the number of books in the library, and number of computers per student. As I began to understand Schein's principle that organizations value what the leaders pay attention to and measure, I recommended that we begin to develop measurements in the area spiritual formation. These measures included benchmarks for quality of chapel services, number of students involved in volunteer local and overseas ministries, number of elective small group meeting on campus, and number of students taking elective spiritual formation courses. As a result, the emphasis on spiritual formation focus sharply increased on the campus.

My current employment is with Trans World Radio. When a visitor enters our U.S. offices, they soon observe postings on the wall that reveal what we have measured for many years: number of radio stations, number of listener letters received, and number of languages we use to broadcast the gospel. These factors are and should be core values of our organization. However, the senior leaders of TWR recently decided that a "servant attitude" should also become a more prominent value in our mission. Thus the leaders have been working diligently to create measures to evaluate the presence of this value among us and to bring added attention to its importance. As a result, our priority for demonstrating a servant attitude has begun to grow throughout the organization.

These experiences demonstrate the simple but profound power of measuring what we say we value.

Colin: Rick, this handle seems so obvious when discussed openly. But the decision of an organization like Trans World Radio to measure their written values takes courage to live and tell the truth because many organizational members fear the thought that they may not meet

expectations. And it takes commitment because measuring the deep and meaningful written values of the organization takes mental and spiritual stamina.

Rick: Are you saying that most organizations have a dark and hidden dynamic that they wish to conceal?

Colin: No, that's not necessarily what I mean. However, I do think that many organizations measure only the bottom line (profit, growth, numbers, and performance) rather than also measuring the human processes that are so critical to get them where they want to be.

It's important to note that **a measured value becomes a real value, whether or not the leaders intend it to be so.** For example, I don't know any leader of a Christian organization that sets out to place a low priority upon the staff's emotional and spiritual development. But it happens quite often because no measures are provided to observe whether these values are being lived. The problem lies in the act of omission. Perhaps this dilemma is further exacerbated by a Protestant work ethic that assumes people are called to serve at any sacrifice. This work ethic is reflected in the prayer by St. Ignatius of Loyola that reads:

Lord, teach me to be generous.  
Teach me to serve You as You deserve.  
Teach me to give and not to count the cost,  
To fight and not to heed the wounds,  
To toil and not to seek for rest,  
To labor and not to seek reward,  
save that of knowing that I do Your will.

This prayer expresses beautiful sentiment, but also supports a value system that has led to burnout for a host of Christian workers, ministers, and missionaries. These people have had little help in learning to be still or to experience Sabbath rest. This is due in part because most Christian organizations have no means of measuring these Christian virtues that we affirm.

**Reflection:**

*Pause for a while and think about what you measure as a leader. For example, if your organization employs annual performance reviews, what aspects of the employees' roles are measured? And what message does your approach to these reviews communicate?*

*Or, what is measured by your organization? What message is communicated by these measures?*

*What do you want your organization to value? How can you encourage your organization to pay attention to and measure these values?*

# 6

## *Handle 2 → How do the leaders respond to critical incidents?*

Someone wisely stated, “A leader’s actions are less important than her reactions.” Organizational members watch very carefully how leaders react under pressure. They are especially interested at these times because a leader’s reaction when he or she has little time to prepare reveals the leader’s true feelings, thinking, and perceptions. Therefore, the leader’s response to critical incidents – whether it is a financial crisis, a personnel crisis, or a public conflict – plants values deeply into the cultural soil. **Although a leader’s words and actions during normal periods are important, the leader’s reactions during crisis carry enormous weight and inform the members regarding the organization’s real values.** Cultures are shaped in lasting ways as leaders respond in these critical moments to solve problems and prevent threats; therefore, leaders need to be aware of and take advantage of these formational opportunities to develop vital organizations.

We plan to present a more thorough biblical study in our forthcoming book, but we mention three incidents that introduce the impact of Jesus’ responses to critical incidents on the culture of the early church.

- *The woman caught in adultery* (John 8:1-11). When Jesus was tested by the social and religious leaders, He did not underestimate the seriousness of the woman’s sin, but creatively demonstrated that the woman represented all people in our sinful, shame-filled state. He acknowledged her failure, called her to repentance (“go now and leave your life of sin”) and took a personal risk to extend grace to her.
- *Jesus pursued to become king* (John 6). Jesus’ feeding of the multitudes with limited resources was certainly a critical incident, but the important event that followed this miracle forged a value ever so deeply into the early church culture. In this moment, the crowds had experienced his power to provide free lunch, so they wanted to make him king. In response to



them, Jesus responded by launching into a teaching about the “food that endures.” This response ultimately alienated the crowds when He said, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. . . .” (v. 54). In these brief but critical moments, Jesus established the agenda for a church to address eternal issues (rather than popular ones) and to determine success not by numbers but by faithfulness to the truth. How would the early church be altered if Jesus’ response in this critical incident had been different?

- *Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane* (Matthew 26:36-46). Perhaps Jesus faced no more critical incident in his earthly life than the moments when He faced the suffering of the cross. All the forces of eternity were present in the Garden that night while His three friends slept. Jesus’ response to the “cup” had eternal consequences for all humankind. As He willingly chose God’s plan for Him – not once but three times – His response in this ultimate crisis set the stage for His arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Of course, no response made by today’s organizational leaders will have the impact of Jesus’ responses upon all history. But there will certainly be those key moments when the responses of leaders will define their respective organizational cultures indelibly into the future.

Rick: I believe this handle is huge for leaders. I’ve seen it played out many times. For example, L. was vice president in a thriving Christian mission. After functioning in this role for five years, he observed a series of decisions made by the president that would potentially have disastrous impact upon the mission. L. felt that he had an ethical obligation to express his concerns to the president regarding his decisions. His questioning was conducted according to the mission’s written policy for handling issues of this nature. As a result, several board members became aware of the problems, and the president was confronted by two of the board members. In response, the president prohibited all formal discussion on the matter at every level (including the board), dismissed L., and replaced the two board members within the next year. For various personal and political reasons, other board members did not challenge the president. Other staff members interpreted the leaders’ response to mean that “the president’s word is law.” Moreover, this crisis impressed upon organizational members that it is more appropriate to leave rather than to confront difficult problems related to the leaders. Therefore, after L’s departure, scores of people left the organization

quietly. For the next five years, the mission spiraled downward as a result of the president's decisions. Today the mission is struggling to survive.

Colin: I've seen the importance of this handle too. One Christian ministry I've consulted had a number of staff members who questioned the ethics of a supervisor in separate incidents. In every incident over a five-year period, senior leaders ignored the questions and protected the supervisor. Each staff member who had questioned the supervisor was either profiled as untrustworthy or released from the organization. Despite the fact that the senior leaders currently express that they desire to be accountable to organizational members, most of the staff express that the culture is acutely hierarchical, and the senior leaders protect their own at any cost.

Rick: Fortunately, there are also examples of leaders who have responded to crisis in ways that positively impact their organization's culture. Michael Schultz, founder of the Starbucks coffee chain, grew up in Brooklyn, New York in a working-class home. In 1999, I heard Schultz tell a story of an event from childhood that changed his life. As I recall Schultz' story, his father was once injured on his job and spent weeks at home recuperating with no income and no means to support the family. As a result, young Michael determined that he would treat his employees differently if he ever had the chance. Years later, in the late 1980s, Schultz was working tirelessly to expand the young and vulnerable Starbucks chain when his values were put to the test. One of his staff members died unexpectedly of a heart attack, leaving a wife and young children. According to the story, Schultz responded quickly. He attended the funeral and paid for all the family's funeral expenses, stayed for several days to ensure that the family was cared for, and continued to provide the family's medical benefits paid through the company. This response positively affected the culture of Starbucks for many years as a place that cares about its people.

Colin: What an incredible story! Incidentally, the fact that Starbucks spends more annually on staff development than marketing also speaks volumes about its priority on people.

I think this is a fairly simple concept and yet profound. Few things speak louder than actions.

A modern-day legend exists in IBM that expresses the importance of

critical events to shape a culture.. A young manager had made some bad decisions that cost the company several million dollars. The manager was summoned to the office of Thomas Watson, Jr., fully expecting to be released. As he entered the office, the young man said, “I suppose after that set of mistakes you will want to fire me.” Watson replied, “Not at all, young man; we have just spent a million dollars educating you.”

This story is an excellent example of a leader’s response in a critical moment that encouraged members of IBM not to fear failure in their quest for development and excellence. **Let’s face it: leaders live in glass houses whether they like it or not. They are always under observation. How they act and react in critical moments has a profound effect on others.** And these critical incidents are so important because at those times people’s senses are heightened.

Colin: During a funeral service, if a pastor uses the wrong name for the deceased, the mistake may be recovered quickly as the service continues, but this small slip will probably be remembered for a long time by the family members. The same could be said about weddings or any major event; small actions in critical moments take on grand importance. During these times, people feel insecure and fearful, so leaders of organizations need to judge carefully what they say, how they behave, and what decisions they make.

Rick: Let’s consider the following fictional case study. An executive is caught by the technology department using a company computer to access internet pornography. If the senior leaders had conducted a deeper probe into the executive’s life, they would have found that the failure was related to personal problems stemming from the executive’s childhood combined with stresses he was experiencing at work. If the senior leaders cover up the incident by closing ranks and “sweep it under the rug,” then the senior leaders will be perceived as lacking sufficient courage to deal with one of their own. On the other hand, if the senior leaders dismiss the executive without an attempt to provide counseling services, then a lower level of trust is generated toward the leaders’ ability to understand and care in future similar circumstances.

Colin, what would you advise the senior leaders of this organization to do in response to this crisis?

Colin: These are very difficult situations, and there is no easy answer. The leaders need to respond both with compassion toward the executive and with open honesty about his moral lapse. Failure to respond appropriately in such situations can result in large gaps between the workforce and the senior leaders that may take years to repair.

In addition, the leaders could ask themselves the following questions before making a decision:

1. How will this decision impact those immediately affected by the decision?
2. How will this decision impact other organizational members or stakeholders?
3. What immediate effect will this decision have upon the organization?
4. What long-range effect will this decision have upon the organizational ethos?

Rick: Let me mention one other principle before we conclude this section. During crisis, **leaders also communicate what they care about with a powerful signal: their emotional reaction.** This is especially true when the leaders' emotional response is related to an important value or assumption. Jesus, for example, expressed strong emotion when he entered the temple and overturned the lenders' tables because they had violated the place of worship.

Colin: We're not suggesting here that leaders should allow their emotions to become overly involved in their decision-making process. Moreover, the overt public expression of emotion in some cultures is inappropriate, especially for leaders. However, most organizational members generally know when their leaders are joyful. They also know when the leaders are disappointed or angry. And they will usually try to encourage positive emotions and avoid the negative emotions from their leaders, thus supporting the cultural values that leaders deposit through their emotional responses.

**Reflection:** *Leaders often fail even to notice when an incident is critical. At times, leaders are insulated from the real thoughts and feelings of organizational members, so they are unaware of the impact that their decisions or changes have upon others. What seems like an ordinary decision to a leader may be critical to others.*

*Think about a recent critical incident in your organization, and complete the following simple checklist of questions related to that incident:*

- 1. Did the leaders seem aware of the impact of their responses to this incident?*
- 2. How did this decision impact those immediately affected by the decision?*
- 3. How did this decision impact other organizational members or stakeholders?*
- 4. What immediate effect did this decision have upon the organization?*
- 5. What long-range effect did this decision have upon the organizational ethos?*

## 7

## Handle 3 → How do the leaders allocate resources?

A mega-church terminated three staff members so that they could use the money saved on salaries to replace their old audio and video system in the sanctuary with new, state-of-the-art equipment. Now several other staff members are wondering whether their ministries will also be discontinued this year in lieu of more technology upgrades. So they have updated their resumes and are quietly seeking other ministry positions.

How leaders allocate resources within an organization focuses the attention of the work force in such a way that reactions are strong and the results last for a long time. How leaders distribute scarce organizational resources – both financial resources and people – shapes the culture with enduring effect.

Rick: It seems that every Christian organization needs more resources to accomplish what they want to do?

Colin: Maybe not the Vatican.

Rick: OK, the Vatican may be an exception. But *nearly* every church, seminary, and Christian organization perceives that they need more money and more people to fulfill their mission. There never seems to be enough money or time to do all that is within their realm of possibility. As pastor of a local church, I constantly exhorted people to give more of their money and time in order to minister to more people. The pressure to speak about stewardship was relentless. Almost every year I tried to motivate more resources with a sermon series on giving or spiritual gifts.

Colin: But if your experience was like mine, the church still had to work with less than needed. I'm sure that you are a brilliant preacher, but despite your preaching, the leaders had to decide how to allocate the limited financial resources.

Rick: I don't know about the "brilliant preaching" part. But I do know we had to make some difficult staffing decisions. For example, we decided after much discussion to hire a mission pastor rather than a children's pastor since we didn't have enough money for both. We had to decide whether to invest in growing a mega-church or in planting daughter churches.

Colin: These are always difficult decisions. Other churches may choose to appoint a children's pastor rather than a missions pastor, and that is fine. What's important is for leaders to understand that their decisions related to distribution of the organization's limited resources either perpetuates a culture that supports the organization's stated values or detracts from those values. In fact, **the leaders' use of scarce resources often continues to impact the culture long after the resources are exhausted.**

Rick: Exactly! This discussion is really about the "scale of importance." When resources are scarce, leaders are faced with the need to make difficult choices. What they choose is perceived by the members as a reflection of the leaders' preferences and priorities. At these times, competition and jealousy can arise among members as they perceive that the leaders have their favorite people and projects. The need to be approved runs deep with human beings, so the leaders' decisions speak not only to the organization, but to the individual members' psyches.

Colin: Earlier this week, I was with a group of leaders who were remembering their school days together. Several of them recalled that they were often the last to be picked for a sports team. They laughed about it, but they also expressed underlying pain from these childhood experiences of being overlooked. The desire to be needed, to be significant, is a fundamental human desire. Many leaders send signals inadvertently through their allocation of resources that some goals – and some people – are more important than others. Thus these decisions can have lasting effect upon those who are prioritized, upon those who feel overlooked, and upon the perpetual values of the larger group.

Rick: Ouch! Before I understood this principle, I must have caused pain to a lot of people along the way without even realizing it. Although I didn't intend my choices to cause harm, some of my choices probably sent messages to people I never intended. Leaders need to think very carefully before allocating resources if they want to embed their desired

cultural values in their organizations.

Colin: No one ever said that leadership is easy. And leading Jesus' way is even harder, particularly since it requires a great deal more involvement of the mind and the heart before we make decisions with far-reaching consequences.

Rick: Speaking of Jesus' way of leadership, I have been thinking about how Jesus allocated resources. Of course, my thoughts go immediately to Gospel accounts like the Feeding of the Multitude where Jesus emphasized the need among his disciples for active faith to meet the massive need.

And I think of Luke's version of Jesus receiving the sinful woman's worship as she washed His feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and anointed His feet with her expensive perfume. As the religious leaders looked on, Jesus embedded the value of sacrificial giving and lavish worship as He allowed the woman to pour out her costly perfume – perhaps her most precious earthly resource – in response to His grace and favor.

But beyond these examples, Jesus' most limited resource was *Himself*. Jesus was completely divine, but He was also fully human. Being human, Jesus had limited time and energy like all leaders. So how did he invest Himself? He healed some people, but not everyone. He preached in some places, but not everywhere. He traveled to some regions, but not to the regions beyond.

Jesus had two priorities:

1. He prioritized time with His Father. He regularly reserved time – especially at critical junctures of his ministry – to spend time alone with God.
2. He prioritized time with His disciples. Although He could have invested all His time with the masses of people who clamored for His attention or in building an impressive organization, He focused most of His time with a few people, investing in them for the future. This aspect of His leadership punctuated His commitment to relationship and His focus on their potential for the Kingdom of God.



**Jesus prioritized the use of His most important resource – Himself.** The result was an early church culture with strong leaders who deeply valued their relationship with God and others.

Colin: Very helpful. You know, from a practical standpoint, all leaders need to make judgment calls from time to time about the allocation of resources that can be very difficult. But because leaders don't have the wisdom of Jesus when a difficult judgment call is before them, they often should access "collective wisdom" rather than make the decision on their own.

Rick: Collective wisdom. That sounds like a cliché. What does it mean?

Colin: The virtue of collective wisdom is based on research studies. These studies have consistently shown that **a group decision – when processed well - is usually better than the decision of any one individual.** With this in mind, good decisions emerge when leaders access the collective wisdom of others. This is especially true when important or difficult decisions are needed.

Rick: I like this idea, but aren't there practical problems with collective wisdom? For example, let's say that an urgent decision is needed. There is no time to get people together, sift through lots of data and points of view, and allow time for the collective process to run its due course.

Colin: Yes, there are circumstances in which collective wisdom is not practical. A leader of a military squadron cannot access collective wisdom during the heat of battle. Or when an organizational decision is urgently needed, leaders may not have time to access collective wisdom. But for most situations, collective wisdom is both superior and satisfying to more people than unilateral leadership decisions.

To illustrate, I recently read about a Chief Executive Officer who used what he called the "bottom-up system" for budgeting and resource allocation processes. To accomplish this system, he consistently directed senior leaders not to set targets, formulate strategies, and set goals themselves. Instead, he preferred to stimulate the various departments and divisions throughout the organization to come up with ministry plans and accompanying budgets that he and other senior leaders would review and approve if they made sense. He was convinced that people would give their best efforts and maximum commitment to projects and priorities that they themselves had invented and were accountable for.

This system became a strong, lasting value in the organization's culture, and allocation of limited resources became a process that the members shared and owned.

In our larger book, we'll get into some of the dynamics and processes that are necessary for collective wisdom to benefit the organization.

Rick: So then, damage can be limited even when resources are in short supply if people are engaged with the leaders in the decision-making process.

The allocation of limited resources is a reality for most leaders, but it is certainly possible for informed leaders to use limited resources to communicate strong messages toward the desired organizational culture.

**Reflection:** *As you think about your organization, jot down a response to the following questions:*

1. *What are your current leaders communicating to the members of your organization through the distribution of finances?*
2. *What are they communicating through the assignment of staff time and energy to specified projects or tasks?*
3. *What are they communicating through their own personal investment of time and energy?*
4. *Are the leaders making resource allocation decisions in isolation, or are they inviting others into a collective decision-making process?*

# 8

## Handle 4 → **W** *hat do the leaders model and teach?*

Leaders of organizations generally know that their verbal messages carry great importance. In one company, the president and several other senior executives made videotapes that outlined their philosophy. These tapes were shown to the members of the organization as part of their effort to emphasize assumptions and values.

However, there is often a difference between the leaders' messages that are delivered by video or in other staged settings and the messages they communicate informally each day through their behavior. To highlight this handle, Edgar Schein told the story of Ken Olsen, founder of Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC). Olsen wanted to downplay status and hierarchy in DEC because of his assumption that good ideas can come from anyone at any level. He communicated this assumption in many ways. For example, he kept a simple, unpretentious office, dressed informally, and spent many hours wandering around among the employees at all levels, getting to know them personally.

Leaders like Olsen know that their behavior is the key indicator for other members that either confirms or denies the leaders' spoken values. **These leaders develop healthier organizations by establishing principles through a consistency in their words and actions concerning the way people should be treated and the way goals should be pursued.** They create standards of excellence and then make themselves accountable to that standard. They break down political barriers that stand in the way of progress. These leaders provide an example to be followed when others are not sure where to go or how to get there. They create opportunities for others to follow their lead and do the right thing.

Rick: A few years ago, the award-winning film, *Forrest Gump*, depicted a mentally challenged man who said, "Stupid is as stupid does." Although his focus was not organizational leadership, he was citing a fundamental truth for organizations worldwide: what leaders say is validated by what they do. And when their words and actions communicate contrasting

messages to others, their actions communicate more powerfully than their words.

Colin: Does this ever happen? Do leaders' words and actions ever send contrasting messages?

Rick: I note a hint of cynicism in your question!

Colin: You're right. I've had countless encounters with leaders whose actions don't match their words. It started when I was a child. Adults in my life would say to me, "Don't do as I do; do as I say." Unfortunately, the loudest voice for me was always their behavior. And adult behavior – not adult words – is what I copied. Likewise, it is unreasonable for leaders to expect people to do what they say or believe the statements they make if their actions support another reality.

Rick: A large multi-national study was conducted in which people were asked about the characteristics they most desire in leaders. Although many responses were given, the number one response was "honesty." **People want honest, sincere leaders more than anything else.** And when asked how they determine whether a leader is honest, the typical response was, "I can discern whether a leader is honest by what he or she does, not what they say." In other words, people observe the leaders' actions to determine the credibility of his or her words.

Colin: This study underlines the old adage: "Actions speak louder than words." Authenticity, integrity, and congruence are the behaviors that count in leadership. And this principle certainly is common sense, but I've observed that it isn't common practice for many leaders of Christian organizations today.

Rick: In contrast to many of today's leaders, Jesus' spoken words and His leadership actions were always synchronous. There was never a time when Jesus communicated contrasting messages by actions that were inconsistent with His teaching. We referred in Section Four to the text in John's Gospel where Jesus washed the disciples' feet. There are two additional principles in this account we highlight here that demonstrate Jesus' seamless modelling and teaching:

First, as Jesus washed their feet, He demonstrated His earlier teaching when He said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over

them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 20:25-26). His actions and words were consistent.

Second, He explained His actions to them (John 13:12-17). A leader who washed feet was challenging the cultural norms of the day; therefore, Jesus not only modelled His teaching, but also taught what He was modelling to ensure that they understood His radical action.

Colin: This is a very important point. And this is why we have entitled the section, “What do the leaders model *and teach*.” Both modelling and teaching are crucial. I know a well-intentioned leader who is trying to change his organization’s assumptions and values by modelling behavior that is different than what is customarily expected from leaders in the organization. But progress is slow, partly because he isn’t talking about what he’s modelling. His leadership behavior radically differs from the leadership behavior that dominated the organization for many years. So the members frequently misinterpret this leader because his behavior is so different from the leadership approach they’re accustomed to and have grown to expect.

Rick: During my tenure as a pastor, I attempted to model new values, but did not teach these values as effectively as I modelled them. In this church, a cultural transformation was needed. When the church’s board appointed me as senior pastor, they expressed their desire to change from an ingrown congregation to become attractive to unchurched people. Therefore, soon after my arrival, I launched new ministries, hired several staff members with the specific goal of reaching out to unchurched people, and prioritized my time to focus on these issues. But I didn’t adequately communicate my actions to the entire congregation, so my actions sent confusing messages to them. They were accustomed to pastoral leadership whose time and energy supported the values of an ingrown church, and they didn’t understand their new, radical pastor. My behavior was very different, so they often misinterpreted my intentions. For a long time, I shifted the blame to the board and other church leaders. But eventually I learned that a leader who wants to transform his or her organization’s culture needs to teach in a way that is congruent with the leader’s actions.

Colin: Communication is a big topic, and we can’t get into it very much here.

But it sounds like you learned a lot from your experience about communication, so the practical elements of communication would be a good topic to discuss in our larger book.

Rick: Good idea. I guess what we are saying is that **leaders who embed the organizational culture with new assumptions and values both “practice what they preach” and “preach what they practice.”**

Colin: We also should add that even with effective modeling and teaching, leaders will need lots of patience. Although organizational members may initially affirm the new values, they often do not accept them wholeheartedly for a long time. Acceptance often requires the following:

- Training - a means of communicating the desired organizational outcomes.
- Feedback - an opportunity for dialogue and debate about the reasons for the new values.
- Inclusiveness – engaging the collective wisdom of the members when evaluating organizational values and creating new ones

Rick: And even with good training, feedback, and inclusiveness, it usually takes a long time to develop a healthy organizational culture. In fact, mature organizations often require many years for authentic transformation.

In the meantime, it's a good idea for leaders to position the organization strategically by beginning to use the real, shared values in promotional literature and advertising. It's also helpful to begin using a common language within the organization that reflects the new values so that both leaders and members will gravitate toward the key components of the new culture. These steps require courage and honesty, but will begin to shape the organizational mindset and to attract a new generation of people who crave this kind of work environment.

### **Reflection:**

*Jesus always lived what he proclaimed, and He proclaimed what He lived. How would your organization be changed if transparent leadership was the norm and leadership honesty was the currency of life.*

- *Do leaders in your organization behave consistently with their stated values?*

- *Do leaders in your organization teach deliberately what they are modeling?*
- *What steps would be necessary for leaders of your organization to align their actions with their spoken values?*

# 9

## Handle 5 → **H**ow do leaders allocate rewards and status?

Members of any organization learn what the leaders value through their own experience with promotions, salary reviews, performance appraisals, and from discussions with the leaders. We are talking about actual practices – what really happens – not what is expressed, or published, or preached. Both the nature of the behavior rewarded – or punished – and the nature of the rewards themselves carry the messages. **Leaders quickly and convincingly communicate their priorities and assumptions by consistently linking rewards and punishments to the members' behavior.**

These rewards and punishments come in various forms such as:

- salary increases
- appreciation plaques
- extra time off
- gift certificates
- assignment to challenging tasks
- public acknowledgement

Colin: A Christian businessman recently told me that the leaders of his global organization reduced the number of points in their company's values statement from thirteen clauses to four. The remaining clauses were entitled "enterprise," "collaboration," "application," and "initiative." Clauses like "integrity" were removed. The work force was bewildered since the leaders had no discussion about the changes with other organizational members.

Next, the leaders decided to embed their newly revised values in the organization by using a reward system. They publicized the new list of values, and announced that anyone who was found fulfilling these values could receive a handsome financial reward. Not long after the announcement was made, a staff member in one of senior leader's departments was singled out for completing a profitable project. He was presented with the cash award.



In fact, the leaders had initiated – whether intended or not - a new set of company expectations that rewarded making money above anything else. Not long after the staff member received the cash award for completing the profitable project, four of the employee's team members who had done most of the work on the project tried to explain that their colleague had merely put the final touches to the work that they had produced. They complained bitterly to the HR department that the reward was unfairly given to one, but the HR director ignored their plea and declared that the four colleagues were jealous and ungrateful.

Rick: In your illustration, the leaders championed individual achievement and profit above all else. This is not to say that rewarding individual achievement and productivity is necessarily wrong. Depending on the organization, some leaders will want to reward appropriate individual accomplishments; other organizations will prefer effective teamwork. What we're saying is simply this: whatever behavior the leaders feature through rewards will significantly influence how organizational members behave in the future. In the end, the reward system shapes the organization's culture.

Colin: This is another very important handle. Many years ago – it almost seems like a former lifetime - I was a police officer in the UK. In our police department, rewards such as time off, invitations to social activities, and opportunities to work overtime for increased pay were always given to the loud and self-centered people, those who were policing without the interests of the general public at heart. I became aware that advancement in that police department was gained in unsavoury ways.

Rick: Let me guess. You were never decorated as an outstanding police officer.

Colin: No, although I have superb character, a keen intellect, and a wonderful personality . . .

Rick: And humility.

Colin: . . . and humility, I could have been rewarded. But after five years I left because it was no life for me. I realized that they rewarded people in ways that embedded values other than the written ones.

Rick: Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" teaches that human beings are motivated in the workplace by a variety of factors including not only security (money), but also belonging and recognition. For these reasons, **organizational members watch carefully to determine what behaviors the leaders regard positively. Over time, this becomes the learned social behavior within the organization, regardless of the stated or written values.**

Colin: There is nothing inherently wrong with using rewards to motivate people. However, the rewards that leaders extend to organizational members should be in line with their intended organizational values. Because people will invariably operate based on the behavior that is actually rewarded.

### *Hiring, Firing, Promoting, and Retiring*

**I**n addition to the organizational reward system, leader assumptions get embedded and perpetuated in subtle yet potent ways through the leaders' real hiring, firing, promoting, and retiring practices.

Most organizations have written hiring policies. But in practice, hiring decisions – especially for higher level positions - are usually made by the senior leaders. One senior leader assumes that the best way to build a healthy organization is to hire articulate, emotionally intelligent, independent younger people and then give them lots of responsibility. Another senior leader elect to hire smart, well-educated people who fit into the more structured culture of the organization that has evolved over many years. In most cases, leaders tend to find attractive those candidates who most resemble themselves in style, assumptions, and values. Thus they bypass the formal hiring system and assign characteristics to these candidates that justify their being hired.

Cultural assumptions are further strengthened through the decisions leaders make regarding who does or does not get promoted, who is retired early, and who is fired or given a job that is clearly perceived to be less important.

Rick: A university provost directed the marketing department to devise a plan for recruiting new students. The veteran marketing director was promised a promotion if the plan was successful. The marketing plan was due in two months.

Since the results of the marketing plan to recruit new students could only be known twice per year (when new students arrived on campus), it was not possible to determine within two months whether the plan would be successful. In fact, what was really being considered for reward was the ability of the department to produce a marketing plan that appealed to the provost, not the ultimate effectiveness of the plan to recruit prospective students. The implicit message was that the senior leaders retained the authority to determine the viability of a department's plan. The marketing director presented a plan that appealed to the provost, and received a promotion.

What directors throughout the university learned from this episode was how to develop plans and programs that had the right characteristics and style from the senior leadership's point of view. If they developed the illusion that they really had independence in making program decisions based on effective outcomes, they had only to look at the actual reward system. In this organization's culture, to receive a promotion, get a better office, or to receive a salary raise requires one primary competency: learning to think like the senior leaders.

Colin: We should also note here that organizational members also observe the *consistent* behavior of leaders related to rewards and punishment.

**Inconsistent allocation of rewards and status will result in a highly conflicted organization without a clear culture or any culture at all.**

Rick: That is a very important point. One president of a Christian ministry is inconsistent in his approach to rewards, promotions, and hiring. Thus, several departments have created their own distinct cultures that compete against one another for control of the organization. These turf wars can become very destructive, especially when finances and promotions are being considered.

Colin: So true. I recently had a discussion with a senior HR executive of a global company. This executive described to me the way in which a staff member was terminated without clear guidelines while she was on vacation. The senior leaders did not want to get their hands dirty, so they waited until the employee had cleared his desk and was marched from the premises by a mid-level manager. The terminated individual had been a faithful, productive company employee for eleven years, but was terminated because of a personality clash with a more senior member of

the staff. As he left, he repeatedly asked, “What did I do. I haven’t done anything to deserve this treatment.” The staff members assigned to handle his departure had no information, so they treated him improperly. This HR executive came back from vacation to discover that the terminated employee was suing the company for the unsubstantiated termination.

Rick: Many of the reasons for hiring, firing, promoting, and retiring within Christian organizations are more related to politics than policies. Unfortunately, organizational members often invest great energy into developing equitable standards and writing formal policies, but these standards are often ignored by senior leaders. Whenever this happens, organizational members grow cynical, and motivation plummets to function based on principle and integrity.

Colin: Before we conclude this section, I must tell one more incident that happened during my time as a police officer. During the meeting for my annual review, my senior officer accused me of lacking focus because of my Christian commitments and church life. During the review, he attacked my personal life and convictions, and said that I would never be promoted because I was not a good police officer. He ordered me to sign the review as an indication that I agreed with his assessment. I did not agree with his assessment, so I refused to sign the review. As a result, I was sent to the superintendent who said, “Just turn a blind eye to this review. Your senior officer is prejudiced against Christians.” The superintendent recommended that I overlook my senior officer’s comment and avoid any further conflict with my senior officer. In effect, the superintendent directed me to ignore the senior officer’s illegal, unprofessional behavior that was against written organizational values.

Rick: Colin, yours is not an isolated story. Organizations pay a high price when their stated values are violated by leaders who allocate rewards and status on a different set of assumptions.

## **J**esus’ Way of Allocating Rewards and Status

Colin: Our readers have probably noticed that we haven’t yet mentioned how Jesus allocated rewards and status. Well, we’ve saved the best until last. We often discuss this “handle” of rewards and status with seminar

participants. During the discussion, we ask the participants to reflect on the way Jesus allocated rewards and status. Over the years, the responses have been impressive. Although Jesus was not an organizational leader who allocated salary increases and job promotions, he did select certain individuals as disciples (and not others). He also used the rewards of praise and privilege consistently to communicate his values and influence His followers. If we limited our observation just to Luke's Gospel, here is a sample of the responses our seminar participants have given:

- Jesus promoted Simon from fisherman to a "fisher of men" because of His willingness to obey.
- Jesus honoured the leprous man because of his faith.
- Jesus promoted Levi to the status of disciple because of his willingness to abandon all.
- Jesus pronounced blessing upon the poor, those who hunger now, those who weep, and those who are hated because of the Son of Man.
- Jesus pronounced "woes" to the rich, well fed, and popular.
- Jesus praised those who love their enemies.
- Jesus condemned those who judge others.
- Jesus celebrated those who practice what they know (wise and foolish builders).
- Jesus publicized the centurion's faith.
- Jesus championed the sacrifice of John the Baptist.
- Jesus defended the sinful woman as she worshipped him.
- Jesus healed the woman with the issue of blood for her courage.
- Jesus healed Jairus' daughter because of his believing pursuit of God.
- Jesus promoted Peter for His confession.
- Jesus scolded Peter for His resistance to the plan of God.
- Jesus set the servants in an exalted place.
- Jesus granted the Kingdom of God to those who follow Him.
- Jesus provided for the one who continually asks, seeks, and knocks.
- Jesus praised Mary for her desire just to be with Him.
- Jesus penalized "rich fools."
- Jesus publicly criticized the hypocritical religious leaders.
- Jesus complimented the watchful.
- Jesus rewarded those who can interpret the times.
- Jesus condoned shrewd managers.
- Jesus rewarded faith and duty.
- Jesus celebrated the leper who returned to give thanks.
- Jesus praised persistent widows and little children.

- Jesus condemned rich, oppressive rulers.
- Jesus rewarded faithful stewardship (Parable of the Minas)
- Jesus publicly honoured the widow's sacrifice.

There are many more examples from Jesus' leadership that could be added. But from these examples, we begin to see how Jesus' allocation of rewards and status deeply influenced the early church culture to become a healthy and powerful movement that impacted the world.

**Reflection:** *This section has explained that the leaders' practice of allocating rewards and status is a potent force for determining future behavior of organizational members. In the end, the reward and penalty system shapes the organization's culture.*

*Here, then, are some questions to consider:*

- *How and why are rewards given in your organization?*
- *How and why are penalties given in your organization?*
- *What behaviors do you think are consistently encouraged by the system of rewards in your organization?*
- *Do you think the actual rewarded behaviors support your organization's stated or written values?*
- *Consider the last two or three staff movements (up, down or out) and evaluate the leaders' decision in the light of the organization's stated policies and values.*
- *How similar are your leaders' allocations of rewards and status to Jesus' way of leadership?*

# *S*ummary

Colin: In this short book, we have attempted to provide our readers some tools to evaluate their organizations in light of Jesus' way of leadership.

Rick: Jesus' way of leadership was established upon a relationship with His followers, was activated by personal and spiritual influence upon them, and was focused on their highest Kingdom potential.

Colin: And the tools that enable these leaders to evaluate and develop their organizations toward better health are:

- What the leaders measure.
- How the leaders respond to critical incidents.
- How the leaders allocate resources.
- What the leaders consistently model and teach.
- How the leaders allocate rewards and status.

Rick: I imagine that our readers can have several types of responses as they consider their organizations with these five "handles:"

- Some leaders are encouraged that their organizations are relatively healthy, and a more consistent application of these handles will help to develop their organization's culture toward even better health.
- Some leaders have been enlightened and empowered to shape their organizational cultures toward health more intentionally.
- Some leaders have acknowledged that their organizations are acutely dysfunctional, and a cultural transformation is unlikely. As a result, they may decide to leave their organizations in search of a context that is more conducive to Jesus' way of leadership.

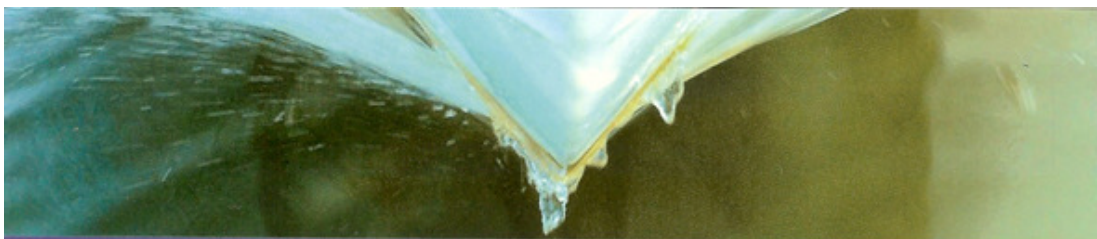
We want to conclude by expressing that organizational vitality is not our ultimate purpose for writing this book. Organizations come and go; they are merely intended as a means to an end, not the end itself. Rather, our greater

priority is the advance of God's Kingdom through the credibility of the Gospel message itself that is authenticated through credible followers of Christ.

We are alarmed by the many younger leaders who are saying, "If the Gospel is supposed to transform the world, then why isn't it changing our own organizations?" If an unhealthy Christian organization and its leaders proclaim the transforming power of the Gospel, then the sincerity of their message will be in doubt. In short, observant people are asking, "If your Gospel hasn't changed you, how can the Gospel that you proclaim be true?" These questions imply not only that our organizations are in danger, but the core of our message is also at risk. In light of this trend, we need a reformation in our organizations.

In the end, we believe that only God can truly bring about such a needed reformation. As we understand more clearly the available tools, we can labor as proactive catalysts to help our organizations acknowledge the real values and begin again to practice what we proclaim.





During the 2004 Lausanne Forum in Thailand, participants from around the world expressed with one voice the urgent need for “Christ-centered” leaders in our organizations.

However, we face an impending crisis. Many committed, capable, next-generation leaders are confused and frustrated in their current organizations. They cannot reconcile the evident chasm between Jesus’ way of leadership and their organizations’ dysfunctional cultures.

Sessoms and Buckland have written this book to clear the confusion. They ask tough questions that reveal any organization’s culture. They also offer practical, proven tools to build a “healthy” organization, one whose members demonstrate real values that are consistent with the teachings and example of Jesus.

This is a must-read book for “culture crafters,” those leaders who want to influence their organizations toward better health.

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