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Strategic Skills For Today's Leaders

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The source for many of the ideas, paradigms and concepts within the resources at Leader Breakthru come from the teaching of Dr. J. Robert Clinton. (www.bobbyclinton.com).

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Strategic Skills

Warren Bennis is one of the most respected authors on the subject of leadership and is the founder of The Leadership Institute at USC. Bennis has said that “the crisis of leadership in our institutions and government is in many ways the most urgent and dangerous threat facing the world today because “it is insufficiently recognized and little understood.”

Lists abound in regards to what are the essential skills that leaders need today to provide the type of leadership that Bennis talks about as missing today.

The skills required today are different than even twenty years ago. Today, leaders must possess skills related to the strategic use of resources, people and information. Strategic leadership involves both skill and art.

Strategic leadership involves being able to navigate the critical moments in the life of a ministry or organization. Here are some characteristics of strategic leaders:

1. Leaders who *think strategically* and see a wide range of possibilities, not just for the current phase of organizational development, but also for stages ahead.

Like a good chess player, it was said of Napoleon that he could envisage several steps ahead, with the various permutations of competitive response. For the Christian leader, there may not be a competitive response, but rather a series of internal and external reactions that may alter the action that needs to be taken at subsequent stages.

2. Strategic leaders are *pragmatic* rather than having their "heads in the clouds". The strategies developed will lead to tactics, which will need to engage with, and succeed in, the real world.

These strategies must therefore be based on a realistic appraisal of the environment in which the organization finds itself, the resources at its disposal and the opportunities that exist.

Nehemiah had a great vision for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, yet was pragmatic enough to make tactical decisions, which prevented his enemies from blocking progress towards the vision.

3. Strategic leaders have a great *understanding of timing*. They have the patience to wait until the timing is right to make a major intervention, yet have the boldness to strike decisively when the moment is right. They, and their organizations, are alert and ready to seize an opportunity.

4. Strategic Leaders work are *future focused*. They invest their time in developing people and capacity for the future of the organization as well as managing the current needs of the organization.

Joseph, as Prime Minister of Egypt, after his time in jail, was ensuring that the appropriate provisions were made for the time of famine that lay ahead.

5. The strategic leader is willing to work with others in *alliances and agreements* to make a more significant intervention than either party would be able to make alone.

If necessary, they are willing to subjugate the organization's need for recognition to making progress against a broader agenda for change.

Bennis and Nanus provided another look at key leadership skills. Their list looks at the balance of the “doing” in ministry, with the more “soft” people skills or “being” skills. Their list also consists of five skills:

1. The ability to accept people as they are and not as you'd like them to be.

Wise leaders hold this ability in tension with a great desire not to leave people where they are. This reflects our Lord's treatment of us. He accepts us where we are and He takes us where we are not.

2. The capacity to approach relationships and problems in terms of the present, rather than the past.

Great leaders are great forgivers. To modify Santayana, those who will not forgive the past are destined to repeat it.

3. The ability to treat those who are close to you with the same courteous attention that you attend to strangers and casual acquaintances.

The old saying says that familiarity breeds contempt. And such contempt leads to the breakdown of an organization. In truth, familiarity should lead to deeper admiration and respect.

4. The ability to trust others even if the risk seems great.

Great leaders have great faith. And their faith is not simply in the Lord, it is in the Lord's desire to work through deeply flawed people...people who are just like them.

5. The ability to do without constant approval and recognition from others.

Successful leaders experience failure, but they do not focus on it. Successful leaders have problems but do not fixate on them. Instead they see failure as an opportunity to begin again and problems as an invitation to do better.

Those who would be effective in church ministry must not only seek to be mentored, they must also become mentors themselves.

Main Point: Effective leaders are breeders of leaders. (Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader*, pp. 66-67.)

Writing in the July, 2005 issue of *Executive Excellence*, Bennis himself produced an additional list of key skills for leaders, this one reflecting what effective leaders share in terms of five. key characteristics.

Leaders who have provided effective leadership for their organizations, and for other leaders all stated that:

1. I have a strong sense of purpose, a passion, a conviction a sense of wanting to do something important to make a difference.

2. I am capable of developing and sustaining deep and trusting relationships. I am seen to be constant, caring and authentic with other people.

3. I am a purveyor of hope and have positive illusions about reality.

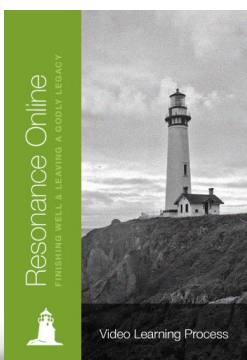
4. I have a balance in my life between work, power, and family or outside activities. I do not tie up all of my self-esteem in my position.

5. I have a bias toward action and while not reckless, I do not resist taking risks.

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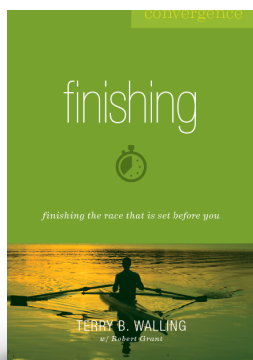
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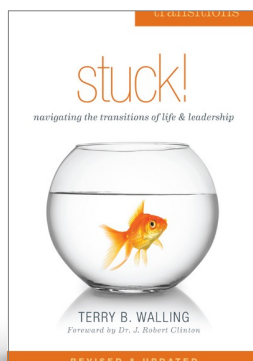
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