



Loss of leadership passion

TN151 Training Notes series: Leadership

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These notes are written for leaders in any Christian sphere: Church Ministers, mission agency CEOs, team leaders, young people's group leaders, and more. But the principles apply too to any Christian staff member or worker: administrators, pastors, teachers and others.

They assume that our leadership can only be effective for God if we maintain some sense of call, privilege and excitement at the role we have. God has made us with emotions and how we feel about what we are doing has a significant impact on our effectiveness. If we feel unhappy or depressed about our role or ourselves we can hardly thrive.

So here are ten case studies of Christian leaders who struggle with a range of issues that adversely affect their mood. These are each followed by some general suggestions for possible ways forward. Which one or two of these cases might be relevant for you? What might you do about these?

Five reasons mostly about role

1 **Difficulties**

Adrian took on his present role five years ago with great enthusiasm. He was so excited at his new church's potential for growth and was full of ideas for new initiatives. But five years on his attitude is rather different. A major split in the church council, the daily demands of parish administration and a worrying deficit on the accounts have taken their toll. His only aim now is to keep going. Every day is a struggle and at night he is not sleeping well.

Effective leadership is not easy or straightforward. Responsibility for people and projects comes at a price. For Adrian, this is not a need for a shallow pick-me-up but

for a deep sense of calling by God for this role and a real enthusiasm to see it succeed. Perhaps he needs to recover his passion for discipleship first of all. Spending time in prayer and reminding himself of how God led him to himself and into this service may be helpful. The Psalmist often reminds people of the Exodus – Adrian, too, needs to be reminded of what he easily forgets. And that means writing out key marker points in his leadership journey, and thanking God for what he has been to him at each one.

2 **Impossible demands**

Bella was fulfilling her leadership responsibilities well but she knew she was working at her limits and could not cope with more. Then her Trustees insisted that the charity should take on a major new project which meant Bella had to spend hours of overtime coping with the workload. At the same time, her lack of leadership experience was becoming evident in her wider responsibilities with some rushed and ill-thought-through decisions. She was signed off work by her doctor.

Changing the context, many Ministers find themselves in a setting that is simply not going to work, or at least not going to work in the way we are used to it working. Take a Minister with ten rural churches and little pastoral assistance when the structure assumes one Minister for each church. Bella's situation calls for fresh thinking and perhaps radical rethinking. Perhaps she could have challenged her Trustees as to what they were asking. Or she might have met up with others in similar positions, or read relevant material, to consider creative solutions. She needs to admit that she requires help.

3 **Busyness**

Chris loved his job and especially managing his staff team. He thrived on being busy, loved interruptions which showed he was needed, but had so many projects on the go and leadership issues to solve that he had little time to lift his eyes up to see the bigger picture. Times of prayer became perfunctory, planning ahead took a much lower priority than coping with detail. He never had time to think and he was working inefficiently as a result. He wanted to pray more but life was too full.

We all need breaks from front line ministry. The sabbath principle can be extended from one day in seven to time away from service where normal time off is not really 'off' because you live on the job or belong to a church which you work for. For Chris this calls for some form of retreat on a regular basis, with opportunity to refocus on the what his priorities should be. And that needs to go in the diary first with daily demands required to fit round it. If he cannot afford the time for this, then that is a firm indicator that he needs it.

4 **Others' expectations**

Dai quickly found that a wide range of people in his new church had very definite expectations of what he would do. For a start he would have all the strengths of his predecessor and none of the weaknesses. The elders were hoping for a better Bible expositor, the elderly congregation wanted someone who would visit them at home. Dai's small number of families wanted him to grow young people's work. Fred, the organist, wanted him to agree with his very traditional views on music in worship.

One way forward here is to set up a small group of trusted advisers. Nothing as formal as an eldership and more of a prayer group. But Dai needs to choose people who will represent a wide band of view, not just his natural supporters. An outsider or two can

help avoid the advice being wholly internal. This group can then encourage Dai to learn to say 'No' and to be his own leader. Leaders need to be respected but not necessarily liked.

5 **Little challenge**

Ellie has a low expectation of her ability as a leader and so attempts little in the way of challenge. Perceptive friends would say she has too lowly a view of her abilities and she needs to trust herself and trust God to accept the challenges which her role presents. But perhaps she has been in her post for too long and it has lost its challenge for her.

If you are not being challenged enough life slows down and you work at less than your capacity. Ellie, like all of us, needs a certain level of stress in her life to function well or she will lose her passion. If she is an employee this sounds as though her line manager is not doing their stuff and letting Ellie get away with the poor performance that might not be tolerated in many work situations. Someone needs to talk to the manager. But it may be that it's time for Ellie to move on to a different post. She needs advice from close friends.

Five reasons mostly about us

6 **Poor health**

Fi used to work out at the gym each week and was a keen member of the local cycling club. But pressure in her role in a large national charity means she has had to cut back on times for exercise, and she has put church attendance on hold as, she hopes, a temporary measure. But Fi's health is suffering and she admits that her discipleship is at a low ebb just now. She feels utterly exhausted. She seems fine as a Christian to others, but she knows that things are not what they might be in his relationship with God. She feels a hypocrite.

Perhaps Fi needs to unburden herself to a mentor or coach who can help her get back to personal priorities. And that may mean creating priority time in the diary for exercise and prayer which will in turn make her feel so much better as a person. Perhaps she needs to escape for a real holiday away from her work-base. Fi may also need to understand the symptoms of too much stress in her life, or a thorough check over by her GP may be helpful. It is not a weakness to admit a need for such things.

7 **Chaotic surroundings**

Grant is a wonderful Christian leader but lives in chaos. His study carpet is hardly visible at all, the room is in any case damp from windows that do not close properly, he has several thousand emails in his Inbox without being sure which he has dealt with and which have been forgotten. Those who know him best know that leaving a message on his voicemail gets you nowhere.

The answer here may be a work consultant who can come in and clear Grant's study for one day and then set up systems to ensure it stays tidy. That in itself needs someone to ensure that happens afterwards: a family member or a very close friend. Grant's emails also need external advice so that he controls them rather than the other way round.

8 **Comparison with others**

Halima is single and this is her first church as Minister. Her predecessor had been in post 35 years and hardly ever took a day off. His wife worked full time with him. Now Halima's church leaders are expecting her to have the same capacity for work that her predecessors together had. Meanwhile the four teenagers in one village have left the church to attend a new start-up in a nearby town where an exciting new Minister is wowing the crowds. Halima feels an utter failure.

If the unfair comparison comes from others, is there any way that they can be educated to see the situation from a more realistic perspective? This may need to be undertaken by someone who is senior to Halima. But the comparison may be internal, with Halima's own longing to see the success like the nearby leader has. She needs one-to-one advisers who perhaps show her that her own work has much more success than she appreciates and the nearby leader is not as effective as she is making out.

9 **Isolation**

Ian was the young people's leader at his urban estate church. The Minister had three other churches and appeared infrequently, and the congregation lived in distant suburbia and only came into the church building on Sundays. They gave Ian the freedom to make what he wished of the job but he was longing for support and guidance from those with more insight than he had. Life was lonely and his flat next to the church was a target for vandalism. Youth work was hard and numbers disappointing. Living on his own he longed for someone to share his frustrations with.

Leadership is often lonely so it is important to build teams around yourself. Ian might consider a team of distant supporters who receive regular news for prayer (that most Ministers do not have this amazes me). A second idea might be a set of quasi-Trustees or a board of some kind with people who take accountability for his work but who do more than just turn up for meetings. Another would be a team of peers involved in similar work who come together for regular means of encouragement and ideas.

10 **Personal/family factors**

Jules is working well for most of the time but this week has hit a range of stresses she was not expecting. Her teenage daughter is being bullied at school, her husband is away on a business trip in America, the house boiler is playing up and the heating engineer cannot find what is causing the problem, and she was caught on a local speed camera last week. The cumulative effect of all these issues means that Jules is struggling to cope when last week everything was fine. She is only getting through half the workload she would normally expect.

Most of us can cope with stressful circumstances for a short time but we need to see the end is in sight. If things appear more long-term the tension builds. As with so many of these situations Jules needs an external viewpoint from a discerning mentor or coach who can suggest some straightforwardly practical solutions. But close friends are also vital. Just explaining the issues over a cup of coffee can enable a sense of support and help Jules see such problems in perspective.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN151. See also Training Notes TN18, *A leadership team checklist*, TN54, *Creating space for a planning retreat*, TN67, *Stress and the Christian worker*, and TN78, *The role of a church leader*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN151 under Leadership.

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