

The Art of Seeing a Leader in the Making

By Brian Newman

The questions began to come my way almost immediately. When we began what became known as *Leading Edge* in Amsterdam people frequently asked me, "How do you select people to participate?" How does one discern that one person walking down the street has great leadership potential and another person could not lead himself out of a paper bag?

I must confess that this is more of an *art* than a *science* in my opinion. It is especially an art when you consider leadership selection in the postmodern world. Where the modernist wants to quantify and rationalize every decision (thus making it a science to select leaders) the postmodernist seeks to experience life with other people and thus select leaders more on a relational basis. Nonetheless, the art of seeing a leader in the making is a crucial part of leadership.

In my previous position as Europe Director for Christian Associates International I regularly faced leadership selection decisions. I have made some good decisions and I have made some bad decisions. I am learning more and more as I go further into this process. Yet it is a fair question that people ask of me: How do I select people as emerging leaders? As a preface I must say that I rely on other team members around me to give input about the people with whom they serve. Leadership selection should be a *team* process, in my opinion. Some of this team process is intuitive and risky and a few of the things I will mention are difficult to label, but here is my attempt:

1. I look for ***genuine seekers of God***. Within Crossroads we have used the word "seeker" to identify someone who has not yet met Christ as Lord. In my view this is short-sighted. The Christian as well as the pre-Christian should *both* be seekers of God. One of those seekers (the Christian) has a relationship with God; the other seeker does not yet have that relationship. An emerging leader must hunger and thirst after God (see the Sermon on the Mount). He or she must seek the face of God for a vibrant, intimate relationship with Him. Not to seek Him as just the Truth Giver, but rather to fully experience His love and grace. This leader must not just *know* the Bible, but must struggle to *live* the Bible as an expression of relationship to God.
2. I look for people who are ***comfortable being appropriately authentic***. Emerging leaders who have more questions than answers often have cultivated a level of honesty in their lives, which is necessary to lead others. They need to be brutally transparent about their own weaknesses and struggles; they need to be transparent about their doubts, about their relationships, about their hopes and fears. At the same time they do *not* need to be transparent all the time and with everyone. They need to know when to be honest and open and when to be quiet.
3. I look for people who are ***reflective and developmental***. I have little interest in people who can "get the job done" but have no desire to discover where God wants them to go in life and what their ultimate contribution to the Kingdom of God might be. They don't have to have the "crystal ball" approach to life in which they know *exactly* who God has made them to be and what He wants them to be about. But they have to see themselves on a journey to discovering God's purposes for their lives. Many people have the ministry skills to church plant, preach, teach, lead small groups, develop church infrastructure as well as a myriad of other good things. And I would dare say that many people can do an outstanding job with those skills. But if they do not invest extensively in their own personal development they will end up on the trash heap of missionaries,

pastors, and lay people who have crashed and burned. Truly effective leaders see the need for ongoing renewal and development as a primary focus of their lives, not as a peripheral issue that they attend to only when in crisis. I learned this lesson in a personal and painful way some time ago when I took a six-month sabbatical as a result of *not* being developmental with myself for the year before that. I had made a couple of poor leadership choices and needed to step to the sideline for a number of months. Emerging leaders see the need for “self-care” on the spiritual, emotional, and physical levels.

4. I look for people who **embrace continual change**. You know the expression, “If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen!” In the 21st century this adage will be painfully true when it comes to change. The world, as well as the Church, will change more in the next decade than it has in the past century. Emerging leaders who not only acquiesce to change but rather embrace it are the leaders of the future. Brian McLaren calls it “maximizing discontinuity.” I seek out people who have leadership potential and who “thrive on chaos,” who handle ambiguity well, who adapt and flex with the situation. The days of logical, rational strategic planning and following through with a five-year plan are over. Leaders need to get comfortable with continuous change. This is not to say that everything is random and chaotic. God is a God of order, not of chaos. However, emerging leaders must continually focus on Jesus Christ to find stability rather than seeking stability in the leadership situation.
5. I look for people who are **bruised but not beaten**. You cannot tell someone, “Go out and have some experiences which break you and then come back and be a leader.” Nobody wishes brokenness on anyone else. And yet we are a generation of broken people, perhaps even more so in Europe than in America because of the sordid history of the European continent in the 20th century. I seek out emerging leaders who are experientially humble as a result of being bruised. There is simply no place for false humility. I would be the first to admit that I have been guilty of “faking it,” of tricking people into believing I am humble. That only lasts for a short time. People see through false humility in a leader. And they simply stop following. Emerging leaders who have been humbled for whatever reason (just as Peter was humbled when he denied Christ) begin to minister out of weakness rather than strength. In the process they increasingly rely on God for wisdom and guidance in their leadership and rely less and less on themselves. What this requires of me is spending time with potential leaders to assess their humility level; this is far from a science and there is much margin for error. It takes spiritual discernment to “see” a person’s humility.
6. I look for people who **connect voice and touch**. Max DePree says that in essence what leaders do is connect the vision (voice) of leadership with the relationships (touch) of leadership. I believe it is a supernatural ability to do both simultaneously and in the correct degrees with different people. The leader of the next century will be “high tech and high touch,” a phrase used very often in business contexts. Emerging leaders recognise that leadership is complex and involves vision, values, purposes, goals and many other things. They recognise that to achieve these goals we must be “high tech” and learn new ways to lead. And yet at the same time these leaders know full well that leadership is about leading *people*, not about pushing buttons on a computer. The effective emerging leader lives with all of the tensions of connecting voice and touch.
7. I look for people with a **vision for a postmodern future**. The leader of the 21st century moves into the future with hope and anticipation, not with fear and a “bunker mentality.” To embrace the future for the Church we must engage the postmodern world, whether it is in Europe or in America. For American Baby Boomers this is a

difficult process, to be sure. But it is a necessary one. For those of us in our mid-thirties who sometimes do not know which generation we belong to, we have a major learning curve ahead of us. And for those emerging leaders in their twenties the challenge is to engage with Postmodernism without buying into its down sides. Neither Postmodernism nor Modernism is a "friend" to the Christian worldview. Neither is "better" in relation to Christianity. The simple fact is that Postmodernism is the dominant worldview in Western culture and leaders must engage that culture.

Perhaps this list brings up more questions than it gives answers. Yet it is my attempt, as incomplete as it might be, to articulate the process we have used to select people for leadership development. No doubt this list will change – it will have to if we are to continue to seek God for His wisdom in this important process.

*Amsterdam
January 2001*