

CHMIN 760 Advanced Leadership  
Book Reflection by Steven Poenitz  
*Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda*  
Co-authored by Henry and Richard Blackaby  
August 5, 2007

Agreement

I have read the book co-authored by Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda*. This book was a genuine call to effective, spiritual leadership as opposed to general business leadership and its principles. The Blackabys have captured the essence of being a spiritual leader for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Application

Certainly, as Blackabys note on page 5, this pastor is not a self-anointed saviour, but recognizes the call of God to the ministry as a servant leader. Blackabys call to spiritual leadership challenges me to recognize my inadequacies, strive to improve the weak areas, and become aware of blind spots in leadership.

The *Leadership Practices Inventory* (LPI) testing provided by Unlimited Learning Resources indicates my areas for leadership improvement include 1) inspiring a shared vision, and 2) challenging the process. Transferring those areas for improvement to the book by the Blackabys, I can see my need to spend significant time with creating, communicating, and completing the vision as a shared project. That's an area where I feel weak and need inspiration from time with the Lord. On the other hand, I do have a personal vision for the church; yet, it needs the cohesion of the collective church family. When leadership comes in conflict with other strong leaders of the local church, I'm challenged to negotiate through such independent-mindsets. Ideally, the leader must influence his/her followers to believe that the inspired vision is theirs also.

Blackabys assert that cultivating “an intimate relationship with God” (59) is absolutely crucial to the realization of vision. And one danger note that the authors sound is that success can be a curse. The temptation then is to mimic other successful leaders and end up with half-baked solutions. In the process critical thinking is lost. I’ve been caught in this trap with sermons, programs, and ministries borrowed from those who created them initially. However, I would argue like Solomon that there is nothing new under the sun; so, I believe that God influences His leaders to cull and filter the best ideas from the leadership practices of others and implement those bringing kingdom growth and in harmony with His Word. I perceive that my danger would be to ride the roller coaster of apparent success; thus, trumping the Holy Spirit’s work of collective vision.

In unsubstantiated reports I receive from some churches on the growing edge, it seems that pastoral leadership tends to be more “my way or the highway” approach. Possibly, my assessment is wrong, but I’ve watched numerous Seventh-day Adventist Churches (including large churches) have a “flash-in-the-pan” vision for a few years with a strong, almost dictatorial pastor (where only a small, central group orchestrates church life); and then, for a variety of reasons, the church and pastor fade from the cutting edge of leadership. I tend to think it is because the vision has been primarily the senior pastor’s and not shared by the lay leadership of the congregation. And there is some encouragement for this congregational-style approach to leadership in our church. Personally, I believe that sets a pastor up for empire-building. Maybe that’s why we discussed so strongly in class the issue of the Holy Spirit inspiring the vision, rather than the pastor going it alone with his personal vision?

With the Blackabys I would concur that there should probably be some caution with surveys. “People who are not born again cannot fully understand their own spiritual needs” state the Blackabys (61). Thus, when administering surveys to a congregation or community we run the risk of using the world’s method to discover God’s will rather than going to our knees as a church body and spiritual leaders. I might not throw out the use of surveys, but this has caused me to be very squeamish about developing the vision and mission of our church based upon people’s desires and wants as revealed in surveys. This thinking is based upon my experience as a pastor and the difficulty of pleasing all the people all the time—it just doesn’t work. Blackabys state, “While churches must be sensitive to the needs in their communities, a need expressed is not the same thing as a call by God” (61).

There’s another page (62) that makes such a contribution in the Blackabys' book on vision and dealing with a community’s perceived needs. It’s basically a call to Christ’s standard as opposed to the multiple needs of a community. One illustration is from Blackabys where they cite parents sensing they need a community center to keep their kids off the streets. Blackabys respond by stating, “In reality, what they need is to have Christ as the head of their home and to raise their children using God’s standard instead of the world’s. Need-based visions not only allow unregenerate people to set the agenda for churches, but they also tempt churches to focus on symptoms rather than causes.” They go on to assert, “The church must discover its vision not by seeking the opinions of people, but by seeking God’s will.” And then this gem, “If determining vision is nothing more than the result of tabulating a door-to-door survey, a relationship with the heavenly Father is unnecessary to growing a church.”

Wow! I'm standing up and cheering for the Blackabys. They have hit the proverbial nail on the head. "Spiritual leaders should be motivated by the Holy Spirit" (63). I've seen this demonstrated by God in our church at Greeneville—when God literally takes over without any (well, at least minimal) human devising. He did bless our prayer team's efforts! Anyway, there was a burden by some in our church community to have the Three Angels' Broadcasting Network (3ABN) on local cable television in our community. It was a very worthy vision, but how to make it happen. Yes, there were letters sent to Adelphia Cable Company at the time, but seemingly no results. But one day I got a phone call from a widowed church member mentioning that she knew the local cable company manager and would it be all right if she called her? I encouraged her to make contact and within a short time Channel 68 opened on our local cable TV with 3ABN. There are times when I wonder about all our efforts to be so visionary and proactive—God is so far in advance of our feeble efforts. But I definitely think He wants us to pray and lift up our requests and He will impress hearts of business people and community friends to help establish His work locally. Call that reactionary if you please, but that's the picture of so many Bible stories I read. God provides the resources when we faithfully move forward in our duty. Yes, there will be the courageous episodes like David and Goliath. There are times for that, but I don't find that the norm in scripture. David and Goliath are rather the exception. Isaiah 55:8, 9 keeps leaders humble; because God doesn't always work the way we envision, plan, or even desire. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

We see God's plan revealed via Jesus' ministry on this earth to the Samaritans. Man's plan (68) would have been to call fire down on the village that rejected Jesus and His disciples and their need of food and lodging. But Acts 8:14-17 later reveals God's plan. Word came back to the disciples of the Holy Spirit working with the post-Pentecostal Samaritans in such a remarkable manner that Peter and John were sent to investigate. This time the fire of the Holy Spirit filled those citizens of Samaria. Blackabys suggest that "Man's vision for that place would have wreaked total destruction. God's plan produced joyful deliverance" and eternal life (68). "Every time leaders choose to develop their own vision for their people instead of seeking God's will, they are giving their people their best thinking instead of God's. That is a poor exchange indeed" (68). God is a marvelous revealer of His will in His time (Eccl 3:11). When God sets the agenda and vision it is so much better than a leader-generated goal or dream. I prefer God's revelation to my own!

So, for me the major question is: How do I sell God's vision? Blackabys exhort spiritual leaders to simply "bear witness to what God says" or reveals (75). That makes tremendous sense; because once the people know and understand God's vision for the church or community, the Holy Spirit will take the people's hearts and convict them of this special direction. That's why I'm so excited about building Seventh-day Adventist Christian's relationships with the Lord. If I, as their pastor/spiritual leader, encourage them to grow in the Lord—they'll hear and discern the vision of the Lord when it is communicated. We are presently purchasing the book by Morris Venden entitled, *It's Who You Know*. I believe that's what augments vision so well. When we have a deep

connection with Jesus rather than simply a didactic understanding of the facts, God can work in marvelous heart-changing ways to use us to facilitate His vision.

Now, with regard to Blackabys' two ways to communicate the vision, in symbols and by stories—I'd support the second one mostly. It's good to have visual symbols if they are distinctive, but when the symbol is used, but doesn't fit—that's worse than not using one at all. I'd throw my best support to storytelling with stories rich in meaning and illustrative of the mission. Homer Trecartin recently held a weekend series of mission-focused meetings for our church at a nearby retreat site. His simple story-telling of God-endorsed and God-blessed efforts of our faithful missionaries made a deep impact upon our people. Church members are still reciting and recalling the blessing of that weekend with Homer and his wife, Barbara. It's obviously strategic to have the story parallel to and draw substance to the vision. The best stories are recounted in testimony fashion by church members themselves, the ones being affected by the vision of the Lord! Just yesterday I had a brand new member of our church share the details of what influenced him to start coming to our church. I remember how the visitation/singing evangelist felt impressed to deliver a Bible to this potential member that had come almost every night to the meetings by John Earnhardt. That *It is Written* Bible with the accompanying helps in the back provided resource and study material for this budding Bible student. The Holy Spirit definitely impressed that singing evangelist to deliver that Bible to this hungering Christian; and thus, we have a story of God fulfilling His vision for souls in Greeneville.

I have chosen basically to focus on "The Leader's Vision" for this reflection. I could have spent specific time on decision-making, where I also need improvement, but the area of vision is where I sense the need for clarity and growth. Henceforth, this paper.