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Pentecostal Leadership For the Long Haul

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By [Byron D. Klaus](#)

One does not need to be particularly astute to know that books and materials on leadership are hot items today. Whether in the business world or in the church, leadership is a buzzword. But is this reality merely a fad?... a growth industry?... marketing ploy? Are the trends and priorities of a changing world unduly influencing the church?

The rhetorical questions I have posed can provide substance for lengthy and heated conversations. The emerging new century/millennium creates a plethora of realities that simply have not been faced before. Business gurus like Peter Drucker warn that we are facing a severe deficit of business leaders equipped to deal with the complexities, volatility, and new rules of a global marketplace. We are painfully aware that effective political leadership globally is in short supply.

Rather than further describe the dearth of leadership in the church, the focus of this article is to offer perspective on how we take a long-term view toward the uncharted waters that Pentecostal leaders are presently navigating. The Assemblies of God is facing some unique challenges. Unlike many denominations in the U.S., we are growing, but our growing edges are changing and will continue to change the fabric of the Assemblies of God significantly. If current growth trends continue, the Assemblies of God will be 30 percent ethnic minority by 2006. Over half our people worship in just 16 percent of our churches, signaling a significant dilemma for churches in smaller communities and congregations without a sense of purpose for their churches. We are facing the graying of our ministerial ranks; nearly one in four of our ministers is over 65 years old, and only 27 percent of ministers are under 40 years of age.

Ethnic shifts, the plateauing of growth in Anglo-majority churches, and the graying of our ministers are just a few challenges that the A/G is encountering. We must face these challenges in a world where the church as a whole is no longer the first place people look for help when in personal need. The influence of secular humanism is still enormous and the cauldron of relativity called postmodernism spreads its tentacles in ever-expanding cultural control. These new realities force our leadership priorities and skills to be critiqued. Can we maintain business as usual and hope to see quantitative growth and the raising of spiritual maturity and effectiveness in our churches? My long-term colleague, Roger Heuser, has synthesized some crucial guidelines, taken from a recent book by VISA card founder Dee Hock, that are applicable to our present situation (see sidebar in this article, "Chaotic Realities and Timeless Truths"). According to Hock, when our

interpretive framework is in conflict with changing realities, we can respond in at least three ways:

1. Cling to the old framework and impose it on new realities.
2. Engage in denial and pretend the external changes are not really profound.
3. Attempt to understand and change our internal model of reality (which can be terrifying, not to mention extremely difficult).

Which of these three pathways of response to changing times will you take as a leader? I could recommend books to read, seminars to attend, Web sites to consult, or even a seminary degree at AGTS. These suggestions may or may not be of short-term pragmatic impact. Yet, if your only response to significant shifts in our world today is to participate in short-term strategies, then you will be at the same point 5 years from now as you are presently. You will be further entrenched in mediocrity.

Charting a course for Pentecostal leadership in the 21st century is a daunting task. Consider the following three crucial marks of Pentecostal leadership for long-term ministry effectiveness in the 21st century.

PENTECOSTAL LEADERS IN THE 21ST CENTURY ARE MARKED BY A DIVINE CALL

While a significant aspect of a Pentecostal doctrine of the church has been that the ministry belongs to all believers (1 Peter 2:5), the present cultural priority is toward professionalization and specialization. In the current atmosphere, we can sometimes think that being a leader in the church is a personal choice for which professional training will certify effectiveness. In reality, the pressures of 21st-century ministry require more than a vocational choice to enter full-time ministry. Our present situation necessitates an affirmation that a divine call is necessary for those gifted by God to lead (Ephesians 4:11–16). Ultimate authority for ministry is derived from the Spirit who calls.

A call from God to serve as a Pentecostal leader is not merely the actualization of personal plans for professional ministry effectiveness. The destiny to which God calls us is to participate in His kingdom's eternal redemptive mission. One of the significant results of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a clear realization that you have been called to a task bigger than the largest of your personal dreams. You are part of an eternal agenda of God that cuts through cultural complexity, modernist self-centeredness and postmodern cynicism. Call connects you with a destiny to participate (as a Spirit-called leader) in the eternal and ongoing redemptive mission of God. The Spirit-initiated call, which creates a sense of eternal destiny as a Pentecostal leader, yields the seedbed in which vision for ministry can emerge. This will not be personal vision or wish-dreams, but a Spirit-empowered vision/perspective on the significance of God's eternal redemptive plan. This divine initiative will come to pass because not even the gates of hell can prevail against its inevitable victory (Matthew 16:18). The call-destiny-vision nexus is crucial for effective Pentecostal leadership in the 21st century. Without these key

elements leaders will not be able to make the courageous decisions necessary to lead God's people through the complexities of uncharted waters in the 21st century.

PENTECOSTAL LEADERS IN THE 21ST CENTURY ARE MARKED BY COMPETENCE

Matthew 7:21–23 records the sobering reality that some well-meaning ministers will one day have their efforts evaluated and found wanting. Their measurement of spiritual competence was assumed but was critiqued harshly by Jesus. For all intents and purposes, Jesus said you may have cast out demons and ministered with signs and wonders following, but frankly you didn't do it in my power. Imagine not knowing the difference between the ministry of Jesus Christ and some "other" ministry?

Competence for Pentecostal ministers must include the skill of discernment. The ministry competence of discernment is the spiritual maturity to know the difference between works of human effort and the continuing ministry of Jesus empowered by the Spirit. Pentecost certainly includes the guarantee that the Jesus whose redemptive ministry on earth is authoritatively recorded for us in the Gospels is the same Jesus who continues His ministry today among us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our competence as Pentecostal ministers is ultimately not measured by our capability to produce results but to discern between the results wrought by human effort and the eternal results that only the Spirit can generate. To competently serve in Jesus' name we must develop and participate in only those ministry efforts that fully reflect the ongoing "present-tense" ministry of Jesus empowered by the Spirit.

Jesus' own ministry is the clearest picture of ministry competence that could possibly exist. His eternal purpose is captured in His affirmation that He had come to serve the redemptive will of the Father and give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Jesus' source of empowerment was certainly the Holy Spirit, who enabled Him to carry out the will of the Father, and who in turn would empower God's people to do the same (John 1:32,33; 20:21; Acts 1:8). The continuing ministry of Jesus does not detour from the ministry He exemplified while on earth. Only the Spirit's power can effect ministry of eternal consequence, and only ministries aimed at the redemptive purposes of the Father qualify to have the Spirit's power flowing through them. You will be competent to know the difference between the flesh and the Spirit in contemporary ministry in direct proportion to your tenacity to know the purposes of Jesus' ministry on earth. The authoritative record of Jesus' ministry in the Gospels is not a mere historical document; it is the revealing of the character of God that is ultimately redemptive and reflects a mission to redeem.

The competence-discernment-mission nexus is crucial to effective Pentecostal leadership in the 21st century because our postmodern world longs after experience (of any kind). Hunger for an encounter with the supernatural is rampant globally. Therefore, the Pentecostal minister must have the competence to discern that only ministry that introduces, affirms, and embodies the redemptive mission of God (seen most clearly in Jesus Christ) is of eternal significance. The competence to discern the presence of Jesus'

continuing ministry among us is not for a select group of super leaders. This leadership quality is the bottom-line necessity for every Pentecostal ministry today, lest we end up on the most sobering end of Jesus' evaluation of supposed Pentecostal ministry recorded in Matthew 7:21–23.

PENTECOSTAL LEADERS IN THE 21ST CENTURY ARE MARKED BY CHARACTER

Most any person living in our country today can access the "gospel words" 24 hours a day. Between Christian media and Christian publications, we have saturated our nation with the gospel. But why is our nation increasingly clueless about the central figure and content of the Gospels? Part of that vacuum is explained by the short supply of character in Christianity as a whole and leadership in particular. Research increasingly demonstrates little difference between professed Christians and non-Christians in practice of biblical morality. People are rejecting the gospel because they perceive little connection between professed Christianity and its impact on the crucial dimensions of life. The reason that character is so crucial to effective Pentecostal leadership is that it embodies the spiritual resources that you bring to the task of leading God's people. You cannot effectively lead a congregation to participate in the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ if you are spiritually dead on the inside and demonstrate that in destructive relationships. Character is the visible effect of holiness, which may be described as living a life set apart solely for the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ and refusing to participate in any attitude or activity that would cast a shadow on the gospel of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:1–3). Holiness has no existence as a solitary religious condition. Holiness must be exemplified in an ethical life, thus exhibiting integrity or an integral relationship between religious belief and religious action.

The character-holiness-integrity nexus is crucial to effective 21st-century Pentecostal leadership because the measure of a leader's character signals the capacity of that leader to effectively embody the redemptive nature of the gospel personally. Leading God's people to effectively carry out the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ in an increasingly resistant world requires a long view for eternal results.

How will the grace of God continue to flow through our Assemblies of God churches? How will we continue to minister to the brokenness of our culture in reliance upon the Spirit of God and not our own strength? The plan of God is leaders divinely called and gifted by God to establish communities of Spirit-filled people who are caught up in the destiny of participating in the eternal redemptive mission of our Lord. The competence of those leaders is not measured by the same standards that our culture values. Rather, the effectiveness of Pentecostal leadership is measured by the capacity to discern whether or not the presence of Jesus and His ongoing redemptive ministry are alive in the ministry efforts they offer to the world in His name. Integrity is the bottom line for Pentecostal leaders because the world recognizes the stench of religious belief without accompanying religious action. Our task is challenging; simple formulas will not suffice; but call, competence, and character are central to any understanding of Pentecostal leadership for the 21st century.

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