

This book will be a tremendous help for those who want to reach their full potential and become great leaders. Dr. Gorveatte has masterfully interpreted some of John Wesley's eighteenth-century insights and leadership skills.

—L. D. BUCKINGHAM, CEO Buckingham Leadership Institute

Lead Like Wesley brings to light a valuable understanding of ministry leadership from two ministry leaders whose experience and understanding I value so much: John Wesley and Mark Gorveatte. You likely have heard of Wesley who changed the world in the 1700s. But you also need to hear from a contemporary mover and shaker—Mark Gorvette. Mark makes things happen. We need more like him!

—JIM GARLOW, lead pastor, Skyline Wesleyan Church, La Mesa, CA

Lead Like Wesley is easily one of the most outstanding books on helping leaders to be more effective. The subject matter is challenging, convicting, and consistent with scriptural principles. Gorveatte balances information with instruction, insight with inspiration, and intensity with investigation. This book reveals not only the standards leaders are called to know and do, but also challenges us to pursue them.

—ANTHONY M. GRAHAM, senior pastor, New Hope Family Worship Center, Brooklyn, NY

Gorveatte has masterfully culled powerful truths of ministry leadership from one of the great ministry geniuses in history and connected them to our church and community realities today. Learn to lead from the well-earned wisdom of Wesley.

—BENJI KELLEY, founding senior pastor, newhope Church, Durham, NC

Lead Like Wesley, is a must-read for any leader regardless of theological position. I learned a little more about Wesley and a whole lot more about leadership.

—KEITH LOY, lead pastor, Celebrate Community Church, Sioux Falls, SD

The world has been waiting for this book! How did Wesley lead such a movement? What principles guided him? How could he work with every level of society and see transformation take place? Mark Gorveatte has captured the heart of Wesley's leadership life and principles and makes a compelling case for character-based leadership.

—JO ANNE LYON, general superintendent, The Wesleyan Church

Mark Gorveatte's *Lead Like Wesley* delivers even more than it promises. The book is organized around John Wesley's twelve practical "Rules of a Helper" for lay church leaders. Not only does Gorveatte thoughtfully expand on each of these rules, but he also sets this eighteenth-century guidance in the context of today's leadership experts. This book offers a practical, substantial, and creative approach to preparing for the privileged challenge of church leadership.

—SHIRLEY A. MULLEN, president, Houghton College

Mark Gorveatte's knowledge of John Wesley is unsurpassed, and he does an exceptional job applying the leadership style of our movement's founder to the challenges we all face today. This is an excellent book written by an excellent communicator.

—EVERETT PIPER, president, Oklahoma Wesleyan University

Mark Gorveatte brings the wisdom of John Wesley into our current understanding of leadership and challenges us to rediscover the genius of the Wesleyan model that lies at the very core of our movement.

—KIMBERLY D. REISMAN, executive director, World Methodist Evangelism

Lead Like Wesley masterfully weaves history, illustration, and a bias to action into a compelling leadership primer that powerfully speaks to character as well as competency. The richness of insight reveals an author who has not only researched Wesley's principles, but also lived them.

—WAYNE SCHMIDT, vice president, Wesley Seminary, Indiana Wesleyan University

Mark Gorveatte models leadership in his everyday life. He has taken John Wesley's "Rules of a Helper" and wonderfully contextualized them for our twenty-first-century challenges in the local church. Wesley is no longer frozen in time; Gorveatte has brought him to life as a contemporary leadership expert whose teachings are housed in a biblical framework.

—DAVID SMITH, dean, Wesley Seminary, Indiana Wesleyan University

Mark Gorveatte is a leader and loves John Wesley, so when he writes on leading like Wesley, I want to read it. *Lead Like Wesley* is an excellent look at what Wesley did with helpful instructions about how we might learn from and follow his example.

—ED STETZER, executive director, LifeWay Research

Mark Gorveatte's *Lead Like Wesley* shows the relevance and potential of John Wesley's approach to leadership for the contemporary church.

—KEVIN M. WATSON, assistant professor, Wesleyan and Methodist Studies,
Candler School of Theology

Mark Gorveatte does a masterful job enabling Wesley to speak to pastors and lay leaders today, enhancing their leadership and godly character in wise and practical ways. This important new book is a timely resource for the global church.

—RICHARD WAUGH, national superintendent, Wesleyan Methodist Church of New Zealand

This excellent work teaches us how to lead wisely. *Lead Like Wesley* clearly promotes time-tested principles based on a model of leadership that fosters character, trust, intentionality, and lasting results.

—DAMIAN WILLIAMS, founder and CEO, Leadership League

Through Mark Gorveatte's excellent work, John Wesley still speaks to us today. The timeless leadership principles of Wesley come alive once again and speak into our lives as followers of Christ and leaders of others. I commend *Lead Like Wesley*, confident it will speak to you as it did to me.

—H. C. WILSON, general superintendent emeritus, The Wesleyan Church

If you lead anyone, you need this book! Blending the best of contemporary leadership skills, rich wisdom from personal experiences, and timeless truths from the iconic founder of Methodism, *Lead Like Wesley* shares the essence of great influence. Author Mark Gorveatte practices these principles and is one of the most outstanding and inspiring leaders I've ever met.

—MARK O. WILSON, senior pastor, Hayward Wesleyan Church, Hayward, WI;
author, *Filled Up*, *Poured Out* and *Purple Fish* (WPH)

LEAD LIKE
WESLEY

HELP FOR TODAY'S MINISTRY SERVANTS

Mark L. Gorvette

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INTRODUCTION

JOHN WESLEY: LEADERSHIP EXPERT

Lead Like Wesley was written for leaders like you, serving in the church. This book was penned for people who volunteer to lead teams and small groups, serve on boards, and teach Sunday school classes, not just for those who serve as pastors.

The Hartford Institute estimates that there are 350,000 religious congregations in America.¹ If we conservatively estimate ten leaders per church, that means more than three million leaders like you serve their local church. You are not alone. And you are not crazy for investing your time and energy in the church. Every other human institution will perish in time, but Christ's church will endure. This book was written for you, with respect and appreciation, because you invest your leadership in the only cause that counts for eternity.

I kept two basic assumptions about you in mind as I wrote.



First, I assume that you have had a personal experience of the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. If you have not yet crossed that line of faith, there are still helpful principles in this study. However, to lead like John Wesley, you must tap into the power source that he relied on—an active relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Second, I anticipate that you have some appreciation for John Wesley’s adventurous life and effective ministry. You do not need to be a Methodist historian to learn from his “Rules of a Helper.” However, the more you know about their context and the challenges Wesley faced, the more you will appreciate the genius of his leadership.

WESLEY’S LEADERSHIP ENDURES

John Wesley (1704–1791) was a remarkable individual. A popularity poll conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation in 2002 placed him fiftieth among the one hundred most influential Britons of all time.² Wesley ranked above such notable figures as King Arthur and Florence Nightingale but far behind Princess Diana and John Lennon. It could be debated that this ranking was more of a commentary on those surveyed than on Wesley’s real and lasting impact. Nevertheless, it reveals one measure of the timeless and enduring nature of his influence.

Three hundred years ago, when there was no digital communication and the fastest means of travel was still horseback, John Wesley and his Methodist circuit riders blazed a trail of revival across England at a pivotal time in history. While the Methodists preached the good news of full salvation freely offered by God’s grace, France was embroiled in a bloody revolution. The spiritual reformation led by Wesley and the Methodists paved the way for dramatic societal transformation in the British Isles.



Most researchers agree that Wesley traveled approximately 250,000 miles in his ministry, mostly on horseback, and preached more than 40,000 times. He wrote, edited, or translated at least 200 volumes. These included sermons, hymns, commentaries, textbooks, and political tracts.³

His guide to health and home remedies, “The Primitive Physick,” went through thirty-six editions, sold more copies than any of his other books, and was still being published in the 1880s.⁴ The income from book sales during his lifetime, when adjusted for inflation, exceeded four million British pounds, or nearly six million US dollars. And Wesley gave nearly all of it away, choosing to live on the same salary as other leaders in the Methodist movement.

Wesley was more than a prolific speaker and writer. He launched schools, orphanages, microcredit loans for entrepreneurs, health clinics, and the first free pharmacy in England. He was equally at ease whether in the company of common people or the king of England. One of his great joys was being the beloved uncle to a host of nieces and nephews. When he died, more than 135,000 people were active members in the Methodist societies, and nearly one million people had been spiritually awakened by the Methodists’ faithful proclamation of the gospel.

Today, more than seventy-five million people around the world belong to the various denominational streams that flowed from the Methodist movement Wesley faithfully led for more than fifty years.

Wesley was a leader. He accepted leadership as a trust given to him by others, a trust for which he would ultimately account to God. The Holy Club at Oxford was formed when his brother Charles and two other students asked the young professor to provide leadership to their spiritual pilgrimage.

Although George Whitefield, his beloved friend and sometime rival, had already preached to large crowds in the fields of Kingswood, it was Wesley who determined to preserve the fruits of their labor.



He did this by mentoring the newest converts in small groups. Soon after, Wesley laid the cornerstone for what would become Kingswood College, the first educational institution for the Methodist movement.

WESLEY WAS A LEADER OF LEADERS

One of the clearest evidences of Wesley's leadership ability was his capacity to recruit, develop, and deploy hundreds of Methodist laypeople as class leaders, stewards, and managers of their properties and collective enterprises. With more than a hundred thousand Methodists gathering in weekly classes and averaging a one-to-ten ratio of leaders to members, it is possible that there were as many as ten thousand people serving in leadership at this primary level. John Lenton, a Methodist historian, has identified at least 802 lay and ordained leaders who served under John Wesley's oversight from the early days of the movement in 1743 until his death in 1791. There were 541 active leaders under Wesley's direction at the time of his passing.⁵

That is a complex organization even by today's standards. How did Wesley manage so many volunteers? How was Methodist leadership structured to sustain the movement? Wesley did not leave a detailed operations and policy manual. He did not implement rigid rules that stifled creativity on the frontlines. So how did he manage to keep so many leaders moving forward together?

One brief but compelling set of rules embedded in the minutes of the Methodist conference opens the window into Wesley's strategy for aligning leadership. These guidelines or principles, called "The Rules of a Helper," are Wesley's response to the challenge of providing leadership for this growing movement. These rules were formative as Wesley mobilized the first few volunteers who joined him in leading this rapidly expanding enterprise, and these rules



were invaluable as he deployed thousands of lay leaders first in the British Isles, then globally, to advance this great cause.

It is telling that few of the early Methodists were managers or leaders in business or community organizations. Leadership was not a topic of study in any academic setting. No leadership seminars or best-selling books covered the topic. Most of these “helpers” had never served in any leadership capacity outside of their own homes. Wesley’s critics were not always impressed with his choice of co-laborers. Augustus Toplady, best known for his hymn “Rock of Ages,” was one of Wesley’s fiercest opponents. He accused Wesley’s team of “prostituting the ministerial function to the lowest and most illiterate mechanics, persons of almost any class, but especially common soldiers. . . . Let his cobblers keep to their stalls. Let his tinkers mend their brazen vessels. Let his barbers confine themselves to their blocks and basons [*sic*]. Let his bakers stand to their kneading-troughs. Let his blacksmiths blow more suitable coals than those of controversy.”⁶ Yet today, Toplady is remembered for one hymn while Wesley is remembered as the leader of the vast Methodist movement. Wesley grasped something about leadership in God’s kingdom that eluded Toplady. He knew that God does not always call the equipped, but God will not fail to equip the called.

Jesus, too, called everyday people like fishermen and tax agents to join his leadership team. There was no shortage of priests in Jerusalem, whom Jesus might have recruited. Instead, he selected his team from among people working hard to make a living in the marketplace. Wesley did the same. He recruited soldiers and bakers who had experienced a changed life through God’s grace. He gave women a meaningful place of leadership in the Methodist societies and enterprises long before they were given the right to vote.

However, Wesley did not simply give people a title and send them on their way. Early on he recognized the need to provide direction



and boundaries to his team members for the work they would undertake on his behalf. Clear expectations were essential then and today.

“Rules of a Helper” was first recorded in the minutes of the 1744 conference. This list of rules, in various editions and forms, has endured as a rich source of guidance to leaders for almost three hundred years. But there seems to be only limited awareness of these rules in contemporary Methodist circles. To my knowledge, *Lead Like Wesley* is the first published effort to drill down for the underlying leadership principles that are embedded in these rules.

Wesley was no leadership guru, but I suspect that he would have written more extensively on leadership if he was alive today. He was a prolific writer on a wide range of topics. There is no reason to doubt that he would have added his voice to the many who write on leadership in our generation.

WESLEY CREATED A LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

To be clear, Wesley was not focused on creating a leadership development organization. He was laser-focused on accomplishing the mission of “spreading scriptural holiness over the land.”⁷ Leadership development was a means, not the end. These rules of Wesley’s are not exhaustive. He could have given his leaders much more direction. But what he did provide as counsel in his day endures in our own. It merits our careful consideration.

Wesley modeled leadership. He did not offer theories from an ivory tower. He was engaged in the front lines of the Methodist movement. Wesley understood that while you can impress people from a platform, you impact them only by stepping into their world and modeling the behavior you expect from them.

Leadership theorists refer to this concept as “transformational leadership.” Wesley certainly qualifies as a transformational leader.



Against incredible odds, he challenged the status quo and empowered others to join him in a movement that deeply influenced the spiritual climate and culture of a nation. Wesley was not interested in passing along tips, tricks, or five easy lessons to become a better leader today. His purpose in writing about leadership was to assist his helpers toward becoming leaders worth following. He had little patience with those who used titles of positional authority to exert their will over others. Wesley had his fill of people holding ecclesiastical titles but lacking the spiritual and moral authority that inspired others to follow.

Wesley made high demands on his leaders. Those who led one or more class meetings each week were also to meet every Tuesday night with their direct supervisor for accountability and training. Those appointed as circuit riders were expected to travel tirelessly for weeks at a time, leaving behind the comforts of home and family. Any compensation for their labor would generously be described as a living wage. To those who accused him of being authoritarian, Wesley replied,

It is nonsense, then, to call my using this power, “shackling free-born Englishmen.” None needs to submit to it unless he will; so that there is no shackling in the case. Every preacher and every member may leave me when he pleases. But while he chooses to stay, it is on the same terms that he joined me at first. . . . All I affirm is, the preachers who choose to labour with me, choose to serve me as sons in the gospel. And the people who choose to be under my care, choose to be so on the terms they were at first.⁸

No leadership challenge is more daunting than that of leading a volunteer organization. Business leaders can offer financial inducements for cooperation. Military leaders can ensure compliance with



the threat of court martial. Leaders in volunteer organizations have few carrots and fewer sticks. The individuals they serve can be motivated only by the organization's mission, a sense of personal fulfillment from making a contribution, and the value of relationships within the organization.

Wesley's method of developing leaders was to entrust them with responsibility. A prospective leader would be put in charge of one group. If that went well, the leader might be entrusted with another group. Those who served well became assistants, supervising the work of class leaders in a particular community. Those who had exceptional speaking gifts were enlisted as preachers and dispatched to the far corners of the movement. Eventually, Wesley deployed Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke to America, entrusting them with oversight of the Methodist movement flourishing in the New World.

Wesley found leaders more open to learning after they had encountered the fires of adversity. He regularly called for conferences in which he and a team of leaders would discuss their experiences and what they had learned in the various fields to which they had been appointed.

Wesley was a voracious reader. He modeled the principle that leaders are readers. His approach to leadership was deeply impacted by what he read of Thomas à Kempis, William Law, Richard Baxter, and others. Likewise, Wesley expected his team to make continuing education a high priority. When asked, "Why is it that the people under our care are no better?" Wesley replied, "Other reasons may concur; but the chief is, because we are not more knowing and more holy." The follow-up question was, "But why are we not more knowing?" Wesley responded,

Because we are idle. We forget our very first rule, "Be diligent. Never be underemployed a moment. Never be triflingly



employed. Never while away time; neither spend any more time at any place than is strictly necessary.”

I fear there is altogether a fault in this matter, and that few of us are clear. Which of you spends as many hours a day in God’s work as you did formerly in man’s work? We talk—or read history, or what comes next to hand. We must, absolutely must, cure this evil, or betray the cause of God.

But how? . . . Read the most useful books, and that regularly and constantly. Steadily spend all the morning in this employ, or, at least, five hours in four-and-twenty.⁹

A few of Wesley’s team members must have been reluctant to follow his instructions on reading. To those who protested, “But I have no taste for reading,” Wesley bluntly replied, “Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade.”¹⁰

WESLEY HAD HIGH EXPECTATIONS

For Wesley, other than the direct providence of God, the rise and fall of the Methodist movement depended chiefly on the strength of its leadership corps. If the people in the movement were to keep growing, the leaders must keep growing.

He insisted that the leaders of the movement keep growing in grace. Wesley was adamant that they give high priority to spiritual growth and development. Nurturing their own spiritual vitality was a responsibility that could not be delegated to others. Wesley spoke frequently on the need to work out our salvation, to persist in the pursuit of a holy heart. This was not to earn salvation but to give full expression to the salvation so freely received by the grace of God.

The apostle Peter put it this way:



His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:3–11)

The apostle Peter said it twice for emphasis: “Make every effort.” This especially applies to leaders who accept responsibility to ensure the well-being of the people serving with them.

People sometimes ask, “Are leaders born or are they made?” An exhausting amount of research has been done in search of an answer. The majority of research concludes that innate factors (such as temperament or talents) may orient people toward leadership, but leaders are shaped the most by their life experiences (for example, family dynamics and early opportunities to lead) and what they learn from those experiences. Whatever your starting point, you can improve as a leader. You can cultivate skills and practice behaviors



that make you more effective in your role. You can invite feedback and welcome coaching to deal with blind spots that hinder your progress.

John Wesley fervently believed that God’s people should keep growing in grace. However, he did not believe in improvement by osmosis. Growth in grace would require effort. “No idleness can consist with growth in grace. Nay, without exactness in redeeming the time, you cannot retain the grace you received in justification. . . . Let him [who] is zealous for God and the souls of men begin now.”¹¹

The fact that you are reading this book is a positive demonstration of your desire to become a better leader. Whether you are doing this on your own or with a group of leaders, read slowly and reflect on these “Rules of a Helper.” My hope is that you will learn along with me from the leadership principles John Wesley offered to his generation. There is little debate that Wesley was a purposeful, if imperfect, leader. What else explains the fact that this Methodist movement endures centuries after his death?

Walter Lippman (1889–1974), an American journalist and political commentator, said, “The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on.”¹² That is the true test of a leader. Will the people we lead carry on the mission after we leave the stage? Will we leave a legacy? Wesley passed that test with flying colors. You can too. Thank you for joining me in this discovery of the timeless leadership lessons in John Wesley’s “Rules of a Helper.” Let’s learn to lead like Wesley.

BACKGROUND

Wesley’s original version of “Rules of a Helper” may be found in *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 8, available online and from a number of publishers. The rules are included in their entirety in



appendix A of this book. Several versions of the list have been revised and updated by various branches of the Methodist family.

Some of the more recent versions of these rules either edit or leave out Wesley's counsel to only "converse sparingly and cautiously with women; particularly, with young women."¹³ While leaders are still wise to establish appropriate boundaries with members of the opposite sex, Wesley's language reflects a vantage point that was more relevant to his original readers.

Wesley's fourth rule, "Take no step toward marriage, without first consulting with your brethren,"¹⁴ wisely values the counsel of our fellow leaders, but matters of the heart were not Wesley's strongest point. Given the changing perspectives from eighteenth-century England to today, this rule is omitted from some recent versions. For example, the Methodist Discipline of South Africa updated the original rule 3 to read: "Be guarded in your conversation and friendships lest you be led into temptation" and revised rule 4 to read: "Take no step towards marriage without solemn prayer to God, and consulting your colleagues."¹⁵

The Wesleyan Church of North America revised the list by excluding the third and fourth rules. Their revised and renumbered list forms the framework for this book.¹⁶ You will notice that each chapter is introduced by a phrase that, for me, best captures the principle behind the rule. I used those key words to help me reflect on and begin to apply these rules to life. As you read and consider Wesley's rules, you may find another key word to be more applicable. You may be the one closer to being right, and I would welcome your feedback. My hope is that you will benefit from the substance of Wesley's practical guidance without being distracted by the frame in which I placed it.

One other consideration in writing this book may be helpful to state here. Wesley used some words differently than we do today. A simple example is the word *wanting*. We usually define *wanting* to mean "longing for" or "desiring." Wesley used the word *wanting* to mean "that which we lack." I trust that you, my intrepid reader, will




become familiar with Wesley's antiquated language. My attempts at updating or paraphrasing his vocabulary seemed to be more confusing than clarifying, so I chose to let Wesley speak in his own words. If a particular phrase in Wesley's quotes seems especially confusing, you may find it helpful to consider it in its full context. Searchable editions of Wesley's works are available online for free.

A basic understanding of the structure of the Methodist movement is helpful to better understand the genius of Wesley's leadership methods. Early Methodism was similar to what we would now call a parachurch organization, existing alongside but not officially a part of the formal church. There are whole volumes written on this topic, but here is a simple explanation of the organization's structure. From the converts and spiritual seekers awakened under the preaching of the itinerant evangelists, Methodists gathered in groups of fifty or more called *societies*, which were open to both men and women and met weekly, usually on Sunday evenings, for practical preaching and teaching. Members of each society were required to participate in a *class*, a group of ten to twelve men and women who met weekly for fellowship and encouragement. Classes functioned similar to today's small groups. *Bands* were even smaller groups that were something like accountability groups. Bands were segregated by gender, age, and marital status and met weekly for "close conversation." The Methodist system included other groups as well, including *penitent bands*, which were much like today's recovery groups, and *select societies*, which were very small groups of Methodists, hand-picked for leadership training. By the time of Wesley's death, there were as many as 135,000 members in Methodist societies and more than 500 itinerant preachers.


Wesley's task in formulating these rules was to develop leaders who could help create and sustain a movement of spiritual transformation. These enduring rules have helped shaped the Methodist movement for more than 250 years. Join me as we learn more about what it means to lead like Wesley.

LEAD DILIGENTLY

Make every moment count.



“Be diligent. Never be unemployed a moment.
Never be triflingly employed. Never while away time;
neither spend any more time at any place than is strictly necessary.”



John Wesley’s “Collection of Prayers,” first printed in 1733 and revised through the years, included this reflection question to be considered every Monday morning: “Am I resolved to do all the good I can this day, and to be diligent in the business of my calling?”¹

Diligence. This is the same word that the apostle Paul used in writing to Roman believers, encouraging them to invest themselves fully in serving with the gifts God had given them: “If it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully” (Rom. 12:8).

According to Albert Barne’s commentary, the word *diligence* “properly means *haste* (Mark 6:25; Luke 1:39), but it also denotes *industry, attention, [and] care* (2 Cor. 7:11). ‘What carefulness it wrought in you’ (2 Cor. 7:12); ‘That our care for you in the sight of



God' (Rom. 8:7–8). . . . It means here that they should be attentive to the duties of their vocation [and] engage with ardour in what was committed to them to do.”²

Wesley wanted to make every day count in serving Christ. He avoided long conversations, even with friends, believing that these lengthened talks gravitated toward unprofitable topics or even to gossip. Wesley's most distinguished dinner hosts were surprised to find that he usually excused himself after an hour. Wesley pointedly asked his leaders about their use of time: “Do not you converse too long at a time? Is not an hour commonly enough? Would it not be well always to have a determinate end in view; and to pray before and after it?”³

REDEEM THE TIME

John Wesley considered time management a serious responsibility and part of Christian stewardship. He believed this so deeply that he wrote an entire sermon on the subject entitled “On Redeeming the Time.” In it, Wesley went into great detail about the amount of sleep a Christian should need. He concluded, from his observation and personal experiments, that men need at least six hours of rest and women needed closer to seven hours.⁴

His own consistent practice was to be in bed by ten in the evening and to arise promptly at four in the morning. To sleep more than necessary was, in his view, to deprive the Lord of the hours needed for worship and productive labor. Wesley went so far as to say that sleeping beyond what is needed for sound health is a sin against God.

Whether you agree with Wesley on this specific point or not, you must concede to his larger argument: Every minute is precious. The twenty-four-hour treasure called today is equally distributed to rich



and poor, to diligent and slothful. Wesley wanted every minute to count.

For the past few years, I have kept an index card on my desk that asks this question: What is the next step I can take to move closer to my goal? Another way to frame that question is this: What is the most important thing I can do right now to help fulfill my life calling?

One of the best things about leadership is that there is always something more you can do to better serve your organization. One of the worst things about leadership is that there is always one more thing you can do, so the temptation to hurry is omnipresent. It is always possible for leaders to stay busy, but always being busy can result from failing to focus.

Time is a treasure leaders must steward wisely. Few positions in any organization allow more discretionary time than that of leader. A diligent leader has no trouble finding something to do. The bigger question is whether that leader is doing the most important work that only he or she can do. Effective leaders are not slackers. They tend to arrive earlier and stay later than the rest of the team. They also have tremendous flexibility in the use of the time entrusted to them. They can choose to be incredibly effective with that time. But, if not careful, they can also find themselves wasting time on low-priority projects as easily as a lower-level employee wastes time on social media.

CHOOSE HIGH-IMPACT ACTIONS

Peter Drucker, the father of modern management theory, emphasized the need for diligence in his best-selling book *The Effective Executive*.⁵ He made the case that improving time management is essential to a leader's effectiveness. Here are the key points I gleaned from his book:



- Know where your time goes. Without awareness of your current practice, you will not be able to make the needed adjustments for greater effectiveness.
- Eliminate unproductive activities.
- Delegate productive activities to people who can do them as well or better.
- Free up and focus your best time for activities with the highest value to the organization.

Drucker's counsel proved useful in helping me to prioritize my time in my three major leadership roles:

- Lead pastor at New Hope Church in Williston, North Dakota (1992–1998),
- District Superintendent for Wisconsin (1998–2000) and West Michigan (2000–2010), and
- President of Kingswood University (2010–2015).

In each of these roles, I learned that my most significant contributions were: (1) clarifying, modeling, and casting the vision for the organization; (2) recruiting, developing, and encouraging the leaders; and (3) cultivating and aligning the resources with the mission.

Funding the mission is always a priority for a leader, especially in churches and other nonprofit organizations. What differed in each of my three roles was the range of activities required to achieve our funding goals. For example, at New Hope we raised the largest portion of our funding through the congregation's weekly donations. That was adequate until we faced a relocation project. Weekly donations would not close the gap between our regular giving and the added cost of purchasing property and constructing a new worship center. We needed significant pledges from some and additional generosity from all to make this possible. We launched a capital



campaign that nearly doubled our annual income over the next three years and enabled us to relocate far sooner than we'd thought possible.

When I moved to a new assignment, leading a statewide association of churches, I was not responsible for personally increasing weekly donations in each congregation. My role was to ensure that we had maximum cooperation from the leadership teams in those churches. They wrote the monthly checks to the district and made it possible for us to reach the annual budget that their delegates had approved.

Leading a network of geographically dispersed churches meant my opportunity to influence any one congregation was limited. I no longer had the privilege of teaching and working with the same group of people every week. The key was to unite the congregational leaders around a vision and key priorities. Both in Wisconsin and West Michigan, we concluded that developing next-generation leaders and planting new congregations were essential priorities for which the district team would be primarily responsible. My principal contribution was to communicate a clear vision and to align our existing resources with that vision. By doing so, we were able to triple our results in church planting.

Later, I led a small Christian university during a highly challenging era for post-secondary education. Clarity of vision is essential in any organization, but for this specific school, managing our way out of a fiscal crisis was the top priority. Lowering costs and raising the level of financial support became my primary focus. Unlike the local congregation, where weekly donations are the bread and butter, colleges depend on annual fund campaigns and capital project donations from alumni and friends. Preaching an annual sermon series on tithing to the college students would not produce the funding we needed to reduce our indebtedness or balance our budget. We had to make sure our graduates succeeded in their new responsibilities and became goodwill ambassadors for the university. Improving our connections with alumni and friends was critical.



Fund-raising events and direct mail initiatives played a large role in raising our support level. Direct donor solicitation was also critical to our organization's fiscal health.

The leadership principles were similar in each role, but my activities varied in each context. The first challenge in being diligent as a leader is to be clear about which activities will add the most value. The second challenge is to allocate premium time to those activities.

CHOOSE WHAT NOT TO DO

Take a few minutes to identify the three activities you're responsible for that contribute the most value to the organization you currently serve. What percentage of your time do you spend on these high-priority activities? If you looked at your schedule like it was an investment portfolio, which tasks would be yielding the highest return on investment?

Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), an Italian economist, is best known for observing a phenomena that is now commonly termed the “Pareto principle.” This principle is rooted in his observation that 80 percent of the effects in any endeavor can be attributed to 20 percent of the causes. This is commonly known as the 80:20 rule. For the purpose of our conversation, the Pareto principle would indicate that 80 percent of your results come from 20 percent of your activities. To apply this principle, you first have to be clear about the results you want to achieve. You must be equally clear about the activities that most closely correlate with those results. Once you've established the most effective 20 percent of activities, the challenge is to give the greatest percentage of your time to them.

In order to focus on your highest priority, highest impact tasks, you will have to say no to many other good, desirable, even important opportunities and tasks. Dick Wynn, former president of Youth for



Christ USA, was a good friend and mentor to me. He often shared the story of a learning encounter he had with Peter Drucker, the management theorist and educator mentioned earlier. At the close of the seminar, Drucker asked Wynn and the other executives present to consider what they had learned during their time together, and to list the new activities they would implement upon returning to their organizations. Wynn said his own list was long, and most of the other leaders easily filled two or three pages with action steps.

Then Drucker gave the class a more difficult assignment. He directed them to make another list, this one identifying the activities and tasks they would stop doing so they would have time to do the things they had just identified as higher priorities. Wynn said the room grew quiet and hardly a page was turned. While all the executives acknowledged that they couldn't just keep adding more things to their already full schedules, deciding what to let go of was much harder than deciding what to add.

Lead diligently. Identify what you do that adds the most value to your organization. Eliminate unnecessary and low-priority activities. Keep the main thing the main thing. Make every day count.

John Wesley both modeled and taught the importance of leading diligently. Adam Clarke, beloved commentator and protégé of John Wesley, passed along what he had learned from Wesley in this advice to a young friend: "The grand secret is to save time. Spend none needlessly: keep from all unnecessary company; never be without a praying heart, and have as often as possible a book in your hand."⁶ Even the songs of early Methodism communicated the need for diligence. Charles Wesley, John's brother and partner in ministry, captured these thoughts in his hymn "Give Me the Faith Which Can Remove":

I would the precious time redeem
And longer live for this alone,

LEAD DILIGENTLY



To spend, and to be spent, for them
Who have not yet my Savior known;
Fully on these my mission prove,
And only breathe, to breathe Thy love.

My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,
Into Thy blessed hands receive;
And let me live to preach Thy Word,
And let me to Thy glory live;
My every sacred moment spend
In publishing the sinner's friend.⁷

Legendary basketball coach John Wooden said, “A leader’s most powerful ally is his or her own example.”⁸ The most compelling reason to lead diligently is that people are following in our footsteps. We will inevitably reap what we model for our team.

One Sunday in May 1760, Wesley attended the morning service at the Church of England in Newry. Following the worship service, he learned that very few people attended the afternoon prayer service held in the church. Wesley’s response? “I resolved to set them the example, and the church was full in the forenoon. Of what importance is every step we take, seeing so many are ready to follow us!”⁹ Wesley knew the power of example, as did missionary-physician Dr. Albert Schweitzer. He said, “Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing.”¹⁰

Diligence matters because the mission matters. The leader’s consistency in doing the right thing sets the standard that others on the team will use as the measure of their own diligence. Thomas J. Watson, Sr., former chair of IBM, observed that “nothing so conclusively proves a man’s ability to lead others as what he does from day to day to lead himself.”¹¹



LEAD DILIGENTLY

Dr. Anthony Graham leads New Hope Family Worship Center, an incredible congregation doing effective ministry in the urban core of New York City. When he planted the church with just twelve members, the small congregation could not afford a full-time minister. So Graham taught in the public school system and carried on his pastoral responsibilities during the early morning hours and late into the evening.

The church grew rapidly under Graham's gifted preaching and visionary leadership, and the church board offered him a full-time salary if he would leave his teaching position. Graham prayed about it but clearly felt led to continue teaching while providing leadership to the church. He asked the board to instead employ an assistant who could cover administrative tasks and oversee the church's daily operations. The board agreed, and the church continued to flourish under this arrangement.

In time the church grew to the point where it could afford both the assistant and a full-time salary for Graham. He again declined and redirected the funding into additional staffing. This happened several times, and each time Graham was convinced that God had placed him in the public education system to be a positive influence, and there were others who could be meaningfully deployed in the ministry.

I had the privilege of preaching at New Hope Family Worship Center the weekend Graham celebrated his fiftieth birthday. That Sunday began with a first service at eight in the morning on their main campus in Brooklyn. We then drove to the church's Coney Island site for a second service at ten, then returned to the main campus for the final service of the morning. I was humbled that day when I saw how Graham led this dynamic congregation of more than eight hundred people while continuing to teach full time. This



gifted leader also serves on the board of trustees at Houghton College and on the national governing board for his denomination. He accepts invitations to speak internationally and across America and still finds time for his responsibilities as a loving husband and proud father of a growing family. How could he do all of that? Anthony Graham leads diligently. The leaders in his congregation are keenly aware of his willingness to do whatever it takes to accomplish the mission, and his example is both inspiring and contagious. Parishioners rise to the challenge of his example.

Ronald Heifetz, author and Harvard leadership professor, makes a compelling case that “attention is the currency of leadership. Getting people to pay attention to tough issues rather than diversions is at the heart of strategy.”¹² Leaders do that best by example. The leader’s diligence is one of the best ways to capture the team’s attention. How we invest our time and energy is the most easily observed measure of what we believe matters most in our organization. Lead diligently.

REFLECTION

1. Do I view diligence, especially in management of my time, as an act of worship and stewardship before God?
2. In what ways could I improve the way I plan and track my use of time?
3. Which activities or inputs yield the greatest value for my team and for the results we are trying to achieve?
4. What do I need to stop doing so I can do more of what is most important?

NOTES

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