

LEAD ON

FIVE PRINCIPLES TO IMPROVE YOUR IMPACT

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INTRODUCTION

Talk of Christian leaders having an ‘impact’ and being ‘effective’ can provoke resistance when it sounds like what is being discussed is replacing God with secular managerialism. But what if there were simple ways Christian leaders could think about impact that were aligned to Scripture itself?

In our work at Eido, we offer practices for Christian leaders to improve their impact. Here are five practical principles that we’ve found helpful across contexts and situations.

Principle 1

ADDRESS THE CAUSES OF THE SITUATION

Almost everything leaders do is directed at creating change. It might be a problem that needs resolving or an opportunity to be realised. But this begs an important question: what is responsible for the way things are right now?

Every problem has a cause. Various influences created the status quo, and most likely are maintaining the status quo. Therefore the first lever in being more effective is knowing the causes of the status quo.

In Acts 6, we see an example of this. The problem is that the widows in the community were being overlooked in the daily provision of food. One response could have been to try harder. However, we read that the disciples understood the cause of the problem: they had become too busy to oversee the distribution of food. This knowledge enabled them to address the problem at its source, by increasing their leadership capacity.

We often come up with solutions for change without understanding the causes of the situation we are trying to improve. Sometimes these causes are simple and sometimes complex. Either way, knowing them makes all the difference.

Principle 2

UNDERSTAND THE PEOPLE YOU WANT TO INFLUENCE WELL ENOUGH TO ALLOW THEM TO PARTICIPATE

A decade ago I was in a workshop where the trainer began ‘The biggest reason most programmes are not effective is...’. I don’t know what I expected, but I certainly didn’t expect what he did say: ‘...not reaching the right people.’ He went on to say that the context, communication, or design of your activity can sometimes make it inaccessible to the very people the activity was designed to support.

I heard someone speak recently about how some churches desire to diversify their leadership and actively invite lower-income church members to become leaders. However, these efforts often do not account for the fact that many church members in this situation may find it difficult to attend traditional evening meetings due to holding a second job or working night shifts. Leaders’ failure to understand these church members defeats their attempt to include them.

At its heart, this principle is about listening well and asking those you most want to engage: ‘I’d like to do x better in the church; how can we do that in a way you could be involved?’

Principle 3

DEFINE 'SUCCESS' CLEARLY ENOUGH TO DESIGN ACTIVITIES THAT HELP YOU SUCCEED

I can still remember my first experience of putting in contact lenses because immediately the possibilities for sport were endless. I'd be able to see where I was aiming! This experience is the third principle for improving impact: be clear-eyed about what success looks like.

We often aim for success or change without actually knowing what it would look like if we achieved it. And if we've not defined 'success', how can we design or plan our work to facilitate it?

If you're in parish ministry, here's an interesting question for you: if I asked you what success looked like for your Sunday services, how specific could you be?

In his book *Transforming Worship*, Rory Noland makes the case that Sunday worship services are intentionally designed for spiritual formation. In doing so, he describes various beliefs, behaviours, and experiences that result in Christians who attend them.

Lest we think this is a modern invention of managerialism and targets, Paul's pastoral letters regularly go into specific detail about what Christian life should look like. As one example among many, Ephesians 4 is full of specific beliefs, practices, and experiences that presumably Paul expected to see in the Christian communities he was writing to.

Principle 4

UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS ABOUT YOUR ACTIVITIES THAT CREATES CHANGE

Our fourth principle to improve impact is considering how your work needs to be delivered to facilitate change. What conditions need to be in place for change to occur? This is not about what you do or what the desired result is. It is conditions that will facilitate one to lead to the other.

In our work at Eido, we ask this: 'Why do you think your approach will be effective at facilitating the change you want to see?'

We call answers to this question 'success factors'. As leaders, we rarely do anything without some theory of why we think it's going to be effective. We communicate with people in certain ways, we chair meetings in certain ways, and we train church volunteers in certain ways – all, presumably, because we think these ways of working will be effective.

The question is whether we can name why we think what we do will be effective, and whether our assumptions are borne out in reality.

Again, we have simple examples of this concept from scripture. Jesus regularly used images from daily life. Why? At least in part, it seems that he did this to make his teaching relatable, to shape more deeply those who heard them. In 1 Corinthians 9:20, we also read one of Paul's intentional success factors: 'becoming like' those he was sharing the gospel with so as 'to win them' for Christ.



Principle 5

INTENTIONALLY PARTNER WITH GOD

Our final principle for increasing impact is the foundation of all effectiveness: intentionally partnering with God. Some of you will read that line with a theological sense of relief, but we'd ask you a question that often challenges leaders we speak to: 'If we came and observed your leadership meetings or one of your programmes, would it be clear how you are intentionally partnering with God?'

In John 15 we have Jesus' famous teaching that 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.' And yet one observation within the richness of this passage is that we have to choose to remain and abide in Jesus.

We often ask organisations: 'How do you understand the role of God in making you effective?' We find that while clients frequently have theological answers to this question, there is often the opportunity to push beyond these answers to reflect on which intentional practices actually exist.

Applying the Principles

So how are you doing with these five principles for being effective? Perhaps reflect on one current goal of your leadership or one of your church programmes using the questions below.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What are the causes of the situation you are addressing?
- Do you understand the lives of those you're seeking to influence and empower?
- Can you define success with enough detail to effectively aim for it?
- Are you confident you know what will make your approach effective?
- How are you intentionally partnering with God to be effective?

