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For Missional Leaders in the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas and Beyond

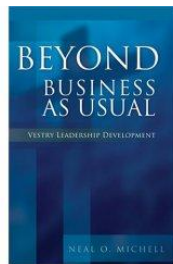
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The Leader's Character Checks

Canon Neal Michell

This Month's Recommended Book



[Beyond Business as Usual](#)
— [Vestry Leadership
Development](#)
By Neal Michell

Ancient Wisdom

It's not all about success . . .
but he said to me, "My grace
is sufficient for you, for
power is made perfect in
weakness." So, I will boast all
the more gladly of my
weaknesses, so that the power
of Christ may dwell in me.
—1 Corinthians 12:9

*The practice of the presence
of God . . .*
I cannot imagine how
religious persons can live
without the practice of *the
presence of God*. For my part,
I keep myself retired with
Him in the fund or center of
my soul as much as I can; and
while I am with Him I fear
nothing, but the least turning
from Him is insupportable.
—Brother Lawrence

A Remedy for Wandering

Most aspiring leaders, as well as those in the second or third chair in the organization often look at the leader of the organization and imagine what they would do if they were in charge. What sometimes seems to be a critical spirit can really be rooted in leadership gifts that recognize how the key leader could do things better.

It is easy for the not-the-main-person-in-the-leadership-position leader to imagine what he or she would do if he or she were in charge. We all would like to think we know that if we were given the opportunity, or if there were a crisis, we would "rise to the occasion." Will you? How do you know?

Past Performance is the Best Indicator of Future Performance

Throughout our lives, each of us face moments when our character is tested. I call these "character checks." These character checks are moments that define us and reveal our character as leaders.

A principle that guides me when I interview prospective staff members and clergy is that past performance is the best indicator of future performance. How you responded to a test of your conscience and character in the past will give you (and others) an indication of how you will respond to a similar test in the future. In other words, times of crisis reveal character; they do not, in and of themselves, produce character. Honest and critical self-reflection will prepare you for those moments when you need to "rise to the occasion" and will give you an indication as to whether you will stand firm in a time of testing or "shrink back."

How we face those critical moments where our character is put to the test will form us for future responsibility. Even where we have failed, how we respond to our own failure will form our character in positive

Thoughts . . .

I believe one remedy for this is to confess our faults and humble ourselves before God.
— Brother Lawrence

Why do you serve . . .

God deliver us from people who wish to serve Him yet who are mindful of their own honor . . . the very act of desiring honor robs us of it.
— Teresa of Avila

The dark night of the soul. . .

Before transforming the soul, it [the divine loving fire of contemplation] purges it of all contrary qualities. It produces blackness and darkness and brings to the fore the soul's ugliness; thus one seems worse than before and unsightly and abominable.
— St. John of the Cross

Wounded by divine love. . .

This enkindling of love occurs in the spirit. Through it the soul in the midst of these dark conflicts feels that it is being wounded by a strong and divine love, and it has a certain feeling and foretaste of God.
— St. John of the Cross

Lighten Up

(A true true story)

Bishop Alexander Garrett in Philadelphia.

At Philadelphia, when Bishop Garrett got up to speak, he was introduced by a noted layman in this way:

"I have visited Texas myself, I consider it the most God-forsaken country on the face of the earth. I hope you will give the poor Bishop, who by the cruelty of the Church is expected to reside there, a patient hearing and a generous response."

Bishop Garrett got up and said, "It is true my friends that we have some undesirable citizens

or negative ways that will either help us in the future either to "rise to the occasion" or will be a warning sign that we will likely shirk from passing future character tests.

Examples of Character Checks

Here are several examples of character checks:

- Facing a personal failure
- Taking a stand on a difficult issue
- Encountering a personal loss or personal suffering
- Dealing with an integrity check
- Being asked to forgive someone who has hurt you
- Asking someone to forgive you

As you reflect on these character checks in your personal history, how did you respond? At some point, every leader faces one or more character checks. Certainly, some are more critical than others. But each is designed by God to test and to form our character to make us more holy, more mature, more formed after the image of Christ.

If you passed that character check, give thanks to God and reflect on what you learned.

What if You've Blown It?

We don't always pass those character checks (if you have not passed every character check, welcome to the human race). Where you have failed a character check, that failure should not necessarily be a bar to future leadership. Chances are that God will bring you further character checks to give you the opportunity to pass. Remember, God is not finished with any of us, yet.

When reflecting on a character check, or a critical moment in your life, ask your self the question: did you **react** to that failure, or did you **respond**?

When you react you lash out at the person who aggrieved you. You may seek revenge, or harbor bitterness (remember, bitterness is the only pill that poisons the person it is not intended for). You might react by isolating yourself, by pretending it didn't hurt, or by acting cool toward the person who harmed you. Or, you might react in expressing real horror or being apologetic for your actions without really amending your life.

When you respond, your heart is softer, even if you were in the right. You respond by listening to truth tellers in your life, not just listening to those who take your side of the story. You can respond by connecting with people, particularly emotionally and spiritually healthy people in your life. You respond by reflecting before you chart a course of action to insure that you don't make any rash decisions (that you will regret later).

in the State of Texas, but we are catching them as fast as we can and sending them back to the various States of the Union in which they received their early training. My friend need not be alarmed. All who belong to him will return in due time."

Next month we will look at the topic of "Bloom Where you're Planted" as a response to disappointments in life.

'Till next time,

Neal+

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