A philosophy of leadership
by Rick Warren

When you become a pastor, you become a leader. I'm often asked specifics about my administrative style, but I think it's more important to understand some basic concepts about leadership:

1. Nothing happens until someone provides leadership for it
This is a law of life. For instance, the Civil Rights movement made little progress until a man came along named Martin Luther King Jr., who said, "I have a dream." The NASA space program was quite limited until John Kennedy said, "We're going to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade." Saddleback Church started because God said, "Rick, I want you to be a leader and get the thing off the ground." When problems arise in your own family, nothing happens until somebody assumes leadership and says, "We're going to do something about it." Everything rises or falls on leadership, and most problems can be traced to a lack of competent leadership. I believe one of the greatest problems today is a leadership shortage within our churches.

2. Leadership is influence
If I had to summarize leadership in one word it would be influence -- for good or for bad. Have you ever watched a playground at school? Within about five minutes you can usually determine who the leaders are -- and whether they're good leaders or bad. Have you ever been with a group of teenagers and within five minutes you know who the leaders are?

What about a committee meeting, as you figure out the chairman is not really the leader? Every time you influence somebody, you're assuming leadership. In 1 Timothy 4:12(paraphrase), Paul told Timothy, "As a young man, be an example in leadership." Age has nothing to do with leadership. You can be an influence at any age, and you're a role model whether you like it or not.

3. The test of leadership is "Is anybody following?"
If you want to know whether you're a leader or not, simply look over your shoulder. My friend John Maxwell says, "He who thinketh he leadeth and hath no one following him is only taking a walk."

If you have to remind people that you're the leader, then you're not. The Sunday I stand up at Saddleback and say, "Folks, we're going to do it my way because I am the leader" -- that's the Sunday I've ceased to be the leader. You don't have to remind people. Leadership is influence and if you're not influencing anybody, it doesn't matter if you think you're the leader -- you're not.

4. The foundation of leadership is character, not charisma
You may have enough charisma to be a TV evangelist, but if you have no character, you bomb. The foundation of leadership is character, not charisma. In fact, you don't have to have charisma to be a leader, but you do have to have character. This kind of credibility is essential because without it, no one will follow you.

5. Leadership can be learned
Everyone can be a great leader. Philippians 4:9 (NIV) says, "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me -- put into practice." Contrary to conventional wisdom, leaders are made, not born. There is no such thing as a born leader. Leaders are made by the way they respond to circumstances. The priority of training leaders can be
seen in the ministry of Jesus. Mark 3:14 (NIV) says, "He appointed twelve -- designating them apostles -- that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach." Jesus had a public ministry and a private ministry. His public ministry involved preaching, teaching and healing. His private ministry involved training the disciples. Even within the twelve, he had an inner circle -- Peter, James, John -- who got to go to the Garden of Gethsemane and the Mount of Transfiguration. They got extra attention. In Galatians, Paul said Peter, James, and John were the pillars of the church. Jesus invested the maximum time with those who would bear the maximum responsibility. He fed the masses, but he spent most of his time training leadership, and that's one reason why I believe leadership can be learned.

6. The moment you stop learning, you stop leading
All leaders MUST be learners. The moment you stop learning is the moment you stop leading. The moment I, as a pastor, stop growing, then I believe Saddleback Church will stop growing. You must always be developing and growing and becoming what God wants you to be. Learning to be a leader takes a lifetime.

Until next week,

Article by Rick Warren
Rick Warren is the founding pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., one of America's largest and best-known churches. In addition, Rick is author of the New York Times bestseller The Purpose-Driven Life and The Purpose-Driven Church, which was named one of the 100 Christian books that changed the 20th Century. He is also founder of Pastors.com, a global Internet community for ministers. Copyright 2005 Pastors.com, Inc. Used with permission. All rights reserved.