

Leading Like Francis - Building God's House: A Discussion Guide

The book has plenty of material for individual reflection and the bibliography in the back offers more sources of information about servant leadership and Francis.

Even so, I hope that communities, businesses, Board of Directors, and other groups study the book together. This Discussion Guide can assist groups in expanding their discussion beyond what is in the book. Each member of the community or organization brings wisdom to the table. These questions intend to help elicit that wisdom.

Introduction

1. What were some popular ideas or images of leadership when you were growing up?
2. How has Pope Francis begun to alter our images of papal leadership? Any examples?
3. Have you heard of “servant leadership” before? What do you think when you hear the term “servant?” How about “leadership?”
4. The author makes the case that both Todd and Peggy are leaders. Given what you were taught about leadership over the years, how would Todd and Peggy contradict the common notions about leadership?
5. Do you see any echoes from the Scriptures in Greenleaf’s description of servant leadership?
6. In your own words, describe the old model of leadership. Where have you seen the old model in action?
7. What do you think of the argument that the old model of leadership is being challenged today? Do you see any evidence of cracks in that model of leadership?
8. Which of the defining moments in Francis’ life do you think you would find most challenging for you? Why so?
9. Do you agree with the author that “now is the time for servant leadership in the image of Jesus and Francis?” Do the church and the world really need leaders like them? How so?

1 – Listening to God’s Word Wherever Spoken

1. How have you experienced the value of listening to a wide variety of people?
2. How do you feel when you have been carefully listened to?
3. What do you find to be the hardest challenges to listening well? What advice would Francis offer to help you meet these challenges?
4. What has been your experience of this statement: “The success of organizations depends on the development of trusting relationships that are built on a foundation of respectful listening.” Do you agree? Can you offer any examples?
5. How is good listening an “efficient way” to relate to people? Can you think of any examples that show how good listening saved time or made something go more smoothly?
6. Suggest that participants keep a log of listening to one person they find hard to listen to. At the next meeting, have them report on what they learned.
7. What are some ways that your family or community or organization systematically listens to those involved in it? Use Kent Keith’s ideas as a checklist. How could your family, community, or organization do a better job of listening to all members?
8. Do a session of *lectio divina* with your group, using the procedure described on pp. 35-36 and the passage from Sirach. Invite participants to share their reflections.
9. Ask participants to list issues or decisions facing the group or the larger community. As a group, apply the LISTEN discernment process to ponder and make the decision.
10. End the session with Francis’ prayer before the cross. Invite participants to share any reflections they wish to offer about listening to God’s word wherever found.

2 – Empathy with God’s People

1. Have you ever met a leader – someone who has influenced you – that showed the sort of empathy that Francis had? Can you tell us about her or him?
2. Empathy might not seem to be a prime characteristic of a military leader in the old top-down model of leadership. Why would it be important in military leaders now?
3. The book claims that empathy is “at the heart of all moral growth.” Can you expand on this notion with an example from your experience?
4. How might you “walk in someone else’s shoes?” Brainstorm about ways you could see life in general and maybe a specific job or issue from someone else’s point of view.
5. What do you think of James Autry’s single piece of advice about asking, “What you think you should do?” instead of just giving advice? What is the limitation of giving advice? How do you feel when you get advice, especially unasked for? Have you ever done something similar? What were the results?
6. Using the suggestions in the book, try writing a dialogue with someone with whom you are in conflict. How did it feel? Did it help?
7. Have you ever put yourself in an “undercover boss” situation or at least some situation outside your comfort zone like the pastors living on food stamps? If so, what did you learn? If you have not, what might you do?
8. Are there other ways we can help ourselves and others in our organization or community grow in empathy?

3 – Opening Mind and Heart

1. How is it easy for leaders to just be pushed along by automatic responses and unconscious drives? Can you think of any examples in which lack of personal awareness has caused a leader to make troublesome mistakes?
2. What are some forces in our lives that can hinder our taking time for reflection or “going to the mountain” to think and pray?
3. If we do not take care of our “soul” side – as McCollum says, what can happen to us?
4. How can writing down the blessings of each day keep us balanced and aware? How does concentrating on blessings change our energy?
5. Try the “unstructured meditation” described in the book. If anyone has experience with this, how has it helped you?
6. Have you ever worked with or experienced a leader who you felt acted in harmony with her or his deep convictions and from deep awareness? If so, describe how they acted and, if you know, how they maintained their balance.
7. What ways of paying attention, of meditating or reflecting, of staying in harmony with your values have you found to be helpful in your life?

4 – Healing the Body of Christ

1. Does thinking of leaders as healers seem strange? If so, how so? If not, how not?
2. What would a “dis-eased” community or organization look like? Can you describe any characteristics of an unhealthy organization?
3. Do you know anyone that you would consider a “healer?” Could you describe what they do or did to make you feel that way about them?
4. Where have you seen examples of public figures like Aaron Feuerstein who have helped community’s heal, at no small cost to themselves?
5. How can leaders stay healthy themselves: physically, emotionally, and spiritually? Why is this important and challenging?
6. After reading through the health habits listed on pages 64-65, discuss two of the habits that you find especially difficult to do.
7. Is forgiveness as important to health as the book says it is? Can you offer any examples in which lack of forgiveness caused real damage to a person? A community? An organization? Can you offer any examples of inspirational forgiveness?
8. Brainstorm several conflicts facing your community or organization. As a group try to apply the “friendly disentanglement” method of healing.
9. After reading and reflecting on healing as part of servant leadership, how are you feeling about further developing this characteristic of leadership?

5 – Drawing All to God’s Reign

1. Can you describe someone from your life that preaches the Gospel through their life -- vividly and powerfully?
2. You have likely been with “leaders” who coerced or manipulated to get things done. How did that feel? How effective in the long run was this approach?
3. How do you feel when someone leads by exerting power *with* you? What are the effects on the community or organization when leaders share power with others?
4. Why is it so important to effective servant leaders to acknowledge the dignity of people, even those with whom they are in conflict? How is this persuasive in resolving problems?
5. In the story of Jesus and the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus opens their conversation by basically asking them, “What’s up?” Why is this a helpful approach for leaders to take with others? What are the effects of asking people their story from the start?
6. Desiring “control” is a strong temptation for anyone in a leadership position. We are often expected to “be in control.” But, how does this need to control lead to fear on the part of the leader and the led? How does an expectation that we should be in control set us up for frustration and failure?
7. How would you answer the questions in the first reflection activity on page 75?
8. Brainstorm some policy that needs to be implemented or decision that needs to be explained. Then, using the process of persuasion described on pages 76-77, devise an approach to persuading those who will be affected by the policy or decision.
9. What other approaches to persuasion have you tried that respect the dignity and competence of others and have proven effective in influencing them towards a common goal?

6 – Gospel Vision

1. How have you experienced the truth behind Greenleaf's statement, "Not much happens without a dream?" Share some examples.
2. How have you seen the importance of "setting your heart" on some goal as essential to success and making your vision bear fruit?
3. What are some examples that illustrate the truth of reaping a destiny by first planting an act? How is this anecdote an accurate description of how things happen?
4. What would a contemporary description of the Reign of God be? Reword the passage from Isaiah so that it would make sense for your contemporaries.
5. Warren Bennis says that we need leaders "who know what is important in the long term." What are some goals for the long term that you, as a leader, would see as important for the long term?
6. If you outlined your key beliefs and wrote your "creed," how does this feel? Did you learn anything new and helpful?
7. Write your mission statement. How useful will it be in informing your decisions?
8. What will help you keep your eyes on your goal? What books, people, organization, or other sources of support will keep you headed toward what is "important in the long term?"

7 – Attending Now, Looking Ahead

1. Why was Francis' resignation as "prelate" of the friars an important example of servant leadership?
2. Earlier in the book, we talked about self-awareness as a key characteristic of servant leaders. Part of awareness is staying in touch with how our ego is influencing our decisions. Clearly Francis put his ego aside to resign. Can you think of any examples from your experience in which ego got in the way of good decision-making?
3. How can good planning or looking ahead seem to be in conflict with being attentive to the present moment? Do they need to be? Can "planning" *be* the present moment: When we plan, we only plan – not something else?
4. On page 89, foresight is called "the central ethic of leadership." What additional arguments could be made for this? What happens when we do not engage our foresight? What examples show the high value of foresight?
5. Especially if you have never used this tool, apply the SWOT process to some decision you or your organization need to make. If you have done SWOT analysis, how can it help looking ahead?
6. Too often mistakes in planning are made when we fail to generate as many possibilities as we can. Granted some options will be far off the mark. But, using a process like the "Tree of Possibilities" can generate options that we might not have thought of. Once again, try using the Tree on some situation facing you or your group.
7. Take time to write your "testament" as described on page 95. How did you feel about what you wrote? Did you learn anything new?
8. Thinking like a grandparent puts present choices in a wider perspective. How would thinking about the consequences of some decision on the lives of your grandchildren cause you to look at a decision differently? Offer Francis' prayer on pages 95-96 to ask for help.

8 – Being the Good Steward

1. How difficult is it to accept the notion that “all of Creation is the Body of Christ?” How does this notion challenge you?
2. How does understanding *eco* or *oikos* as meaning “household” put a different spin on *eco*-logy or stewardship?
3. In what ways does seeing ourselves as a servants or stewards of Creation run so counter to what our culture and upbringing have taught us? Think of some specific examples.
4. If we acted as if all goods of the earth were on loan from the Creator, how would we live differently?
5. Share your reflections on the ways in which you have cared for Creation over the last two days.
6. What are some simple changes we can make in our patterns of consumption that are good stewardship?
7. Do you garden? If so, how has this helped you understand stewardship?
8. If you have done a sustainability audit in your organization, how did learning the results help your group become better stewards?
9. Pray the Canticle of the Creatures. Reflect on it. How is it both a celebration and a challenge?

9 – A Resource for Growth

1. Sometimes non-profits, communities, service organizations, and certainly businesses become so outwardly focused that they pay too little attention to the needs of their members or co-workers. Unfortunately, the internal health of the organization suffers and begins to affect the mission of the group. Have you ever seen this happen?
2. Francis forbade titles like “superior” or “prior.” What are some titles that organizations commonly use that have the same meaning? What effects do titles tend to have on people? Brainstorm alternatives to titles like “director” or “supervisor.”
3. On page 106, Joseph Badaracco, the Harvard ethicist, describes “quiet leaders.” Albert Schweitzer describes leadership done by “small and obscure deeds.” Have you ever known a quiet leader? What made them so? And, how were they effective as leaders?
4. How can all of us be resources for the growth of other people – in our family? In our workplace? In our community?
5. How does thinking of all members of any organization as “volunteers” change the way we would deal with the people in the organization?
6. How did you feel reading Francis’ letter to Leo? Who are the Leo’s in your life? How might you reach out to them?

10 – Building Community

1. Translate the description of the friars' fraternal love – page 114 – into language that means the same, but would appeal to modern readers, starting at “There were chaste embraces”
2. Does your community or organization feel and act like a community that Francis could affirm? If so, how? If not, how not?
3. If you are in a position of leadership, how could you apply the “Get the Heck Out of Your Office” dictum?
4. Think of one meeting that you recently attended. How did it match up with the criteria of meetings that build community? What changes might you make to improve the community-building quality of your meetings?
5. What are some events that your community or organizations is not celebrating but could – and maybe should?

Epilogue

1. What are the most important lessons you learned in reading and reflecting on leading like Francis?
2. How can you become an even more effective servant leader?
3. What one or two steps can you take right now to become the servant leader that Francis would invite you to be?