USING THE WORK TO GET THE PEOPLE DONE

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

This is a short article taken from one of "Daniel's Travel Journal" entries he made while traveling, sharing relationship and ministry with friends and churches in various parts of our country and overseas.

Strange, isn't it, how the primal instinct of people is to try climbing higher, getting up and over others, rather than to get down where they can serve and come under others? I think the Christian life butts against that tendency more than almost all others. To find significance in becoming less obvious, to work toward making ourselves superfluous in the very endeavors in which we labor, to aim at making others more (or, at least as) successful as ourselves—this is the primary calling for servant-leaders.

Just as Jesus gained His ultimate standing in Creation by letting go of the place He had as the Father's equal, and becoming a suffering man-servant, so spiritual leaders rise to their highest good by determining to get lower and lower in their organizations. To be servant of all is to be leader of all—and, to be leader of all, one must become servant to all.

I start this writing with such philosophical rumblings, not because I have recently seen leaders who operate differently than as servants, but as a reminder to all of us who lead that our nature is inclined toward ruling more than toward serving. That means we can, at times, fully subscribe to the servant-leader model on the macro-level, but succumb to the ruler model in the details. I do not know any pastor in all the world who thinks the servant-leader model is the wrong one. No pastor I've met believes it is best to rule people rather than to serve them. And yet, few pastors deflect the urge to rule.

For instance, if my goal is to make my leaders as successful as I am, I must, at some point release them completely from my oversight. In other words, they must be given opportunity to lead

without me "checking" their work. Though coaching is an important phase to take leaders through in preparation for delegating responsibility to them completely—if I continue to coach and suggest how they ought to do things, after they have demonstrated they can take care of things—my legitimate-sounding concern about whether or not they will do the job "right" (i.e., how I would do it) is simply a cover for control.

The temptation to control (making sure everything is done right) is stronger in leaders who forget their ultimate assignment. If leaders focus on church as an entity (building, services, program, events, etc.) more than on individual people in the congregation, those leaders will worry that the program won't be as excellent as it could be if overseen by anyone other than those leaders. But if leaders aim to make great people and "raise up" more leaders for the future of the church, they will use the program and events of the church as training devices in the leadership development of the people they are raising up. The real question is, *"Do we use people to get the work done, or do we use the work to get people done?"*