



## **Introduction: Defining Leadership**

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### **Course description:**

This course explores a working definition of leadership. This introductory course focuses on how leadership was defined throughout history, how we define it in the twenty-first century, and why leaders have been hindered from leading.

### **Course Objectives: By the end of this class students will have...**

- A. Defined leadership in one word.
- B. Considered various definitions provided throughout history and how those definitions affect our understanding of leadership today.
- C. Identified a minimum of three areas that have hindered the development of leaders in the past.

### **Outline of the class:**

- A. Divide the class into groups with 4 to 6 in each group. Ask them to discuss how they would define leadership in one word and then to write a sentence defining leadership using that word. Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.
- B. After the allowed time, ask each group to share what word they chose and the sentence they developed to define leadership. If possible, use the large sticky pad sheets or poster board for each group and hang these words and definitions on the wall of the classroom.
- C. Following this discussion, ask the class to consider the following definitions.
  1. A person that leads (directing, commanding, guide, head)
  2. Among several definitions listed in Webster's Dictionary, a leader is defined as "a short piece of fishing line often used to attach the hook, lure, etc. to the fishing line."
    - a. In most cases, this type of leader is not seen, but provides strength.
    - b. In other cases, this type of leader is made of steel, the toughest part of the line to keep fish from cutting the line with their teeth.
  3. Over the past 100 years, a number of definitions have been given.
    - a. "The ability to impress the will of the leader on those led and induce obedience, respect, loyalty and cooperation" (Steward, 1927).

- b. “Interaction between specific traits of one person and other traits of the many, in such a way that the course of action of the many is changed by the one” (Bogardus, 1934).
  - c. “The art of influencing...people by persuasion or example to follow a line of action. It must never be confused with *drivership*...which is the art of compelling...people by intimidation or force to follow a line of action” (Copeland, 1942).
  - d. “The process (act) of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts towards goal setting and goal achievement” (Stogdill, 1950, 1958).
  - e. “Acts of persons which influence other persons in a shared direction” (Seeman, 1960).
  - f. “A process in which an individual takes initiative to assist a group to move towards the production of goals that are acceptable to maintain the group, and to dispose the needs of the individuals within the group that compelled them to join it” (Boles and Davenport, 1975).
  - g. “Leadership is about articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished” (Richards and Engle, 1986).
  - h. “Leadership is influence” (Maxwell, 1993).
  - i. “The art of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal...the inspiration and director of the action” (Ward, 2000).
  - j. “Leadership is wise, adept choices by person who singularly and collectively respond to and/or anticipate stirrings, embrace the challenge and courageously and faithfully serve the welcoming promise of authenticity” (Terry, 2010).
4. From a more academic perspective, leadership is further defined in the following ways.
- a. Marc Summerfield simply defines leadership as someone who “makes things better” (Summerfield, 2014).
  - b. James Kouzes and Barry Posner identify five practices as having stood the test of time in leadership. Leaders...
    - 1) Model the way
    - 2) Inspire a shared vision
    - 3) Challenge the process
    - 4) Enable others to act

- 5) Encourage the heart (Kouzes and Posner, 2007).
  - c. “Leadership is a process that involves influence, occurs in groups, and involves common goals” (Northouse, 2012)
  - d. Leadership is “a dynamic process in which a man or woman with God-given capacity influences a group of God’s people toward His purposes for the group” (Clinton, 1988).
5. These definitions affirm the importance of recognizing that leadership is a process in the development of character; it is who one is rather than simply what one does (Ford, 1991).
6. A summary to consider: Leadership is a process wherein godly men and women work to influence the direction, alignment, and commitment of God’s people to provide hope that things will be better.
7. The point in this exercise is to understand that leadership is not always easy to define and understand.
- C. Remember, God has always demanded leadership of His people. We will discuss several biblical leaders in future lessons.
- D. Questions for further consideration:
  1. What qualities do great leaders commonly possess?
  2. How would we answer this question: Are leaders born or made? Discuss the possibilities of both.
- E. Ask each group to use the next 5-10 minutes to list a minimum of three areas that have hindered the development of leaders in the church today.
- F. After they have completed their list, ask each group to share one of their answers and explain why it has hindered leadership development. A few suggestions for consideration are listed below.
  1. Difficult
  2. Fear of...
    - a. Failure (based on perspective)
    - b. Rejection by followers
    - c. Mistakes in decision-making
  3. Lack of motivation
  4. Lack of training
  5. Lack of priorities or the wrong priorities

**Conclusion:**

- A. Leadership is challenging to define, and several obstacles have prevented leadership from developing in the past. Take a few minutes each day this week to think about how you can overcome the obstacles that have hindered your leadership in the past. Write out details that are daily reminders of how we must work to lead regardless of the obstacles.
- B. In order to change this trend, we must begin now to think about how we can prepare for the future.
- C. Once we understand the obstacles that have prevented leadership development in the past, we can work to overcome those obstacles and move forward.
- D. Next week's lesson focuses on the various qualities leaders need to possess and the qualities of great leaders we find in the Bible.