

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Servant Leadership

Being a leader involves making tough decisions. But those decisions should always be tempered with a sympathetic understanding of the needs of the followers.

“Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, and he said, ‘How do you advise me to answer these people?’ And they spoke to him, saying, ‘If you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever’” (1 Kgs. 12:6-7).

The Israelites who had lived under Solomon’s long and prosperous reign benefited from his administration; but they also chafed under the tax burden required to pay for his empire. Thus, their request to his son Rehoboam when he ascended the throne was genuine: “Lighten the burdensome service of your father, . . . and we will serve you” (v. 4). His father’s elders supported that position; if Rehoboam was to secure the loyalty of his people, he had to be sympathetic to their concerns. Even though he was king, he needed to “be a servant to them”; in return, they would serve him forever.

One of the most difficult concepts for those in positions of authority to

grasp is the concept of servant leadership, that is, leadership that grounds its legitimacy in a policy of listening to and seeking to address the concerns of its followers. Only by submitting the privileges of his role to the service of those under him can a leader earn their respect and devotion.

This submission must not be confused with weakness. A leader whose leadership consists of merely mimicking the whims of those under him is not a leader at all. By definition, leadership means having to make tough decisions, including some that may not be popular. An effective leader must be prepared to stand alone and do what is best for his people, even though they may not appreciate it at the time.

But therein lies the challenge: “What is best for his people” may not be readily apparent to the one at the top either. The wise leader, therefore, takes care to listen to what his people are experiencing, and adjusts his policies when he realizes that their welfare is being threatened by those policies. That is not weakness, but wisdom. When peo-

ple can see their leader—even a tough leader—bend his will to make their lives less stressful, they will respond with gratitude and loyalty.

This principle has application in a wide variety of scenarios involving leaders and followers: managers directing employees in the workplace, husbands and fathers leading their families, elders overseeing a local congregation, and politicians ruling a nation. The best leaders are those who listen to their followers and accommodate their needs, without abdicating the responsibilities of leadership.

King Rehoboam did not understand this principle. Fearful of appearing weak, he rejected the counsel of his father’s advisors and increased the people’s tax load. That fateful decision cost him his kingdom; ten of the twelve tribes of Israel revolted from his rule and appointed their own king. The nation never recovered from that disaster. The nation was divided because a young king failed to recognize that being a wise ruler means having to do what’s best for the people, not for himself.

– David King