

Leading with Excellence: A Study of Three Levels of Bible School Leadership

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Introduction

Competent leadership is essential for the health and well-being of a Bible school. According to Oswald Sanders, “leadership is *influence*, the ability of one person to influence others to follow his or her lead.”¹ Leadership influence is a powerful commodity with many roles or functions which we should regard with much sobriety. One major leadership role, according to Robert Clinton, “is that of selection of rising leadership. Leaders must continually be aware of God’s processing of younger leaders and work with that processing,”² which is an apt description of the key task of all Bible school educators—equipping the next generation of leaders. This paper will explore the leadership roles of administrators, faculty, and students and discuss guiding principles for leadership growth in Bible school educators which will, in turn, increase the efficacy of the Bible school’s training programs for developing leaders.

Administrators as Leaders

The first level of leaders to be discussed is the administrators of the Bible school. Each school has its own unique structure, which means that the members of the administrative team may vary from school to school. For the purpose of this article, we will focus on the typical roles of President, Academic Dean, Dean of Students, and Business Manager.

¹J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 29.

²J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*, 2nd ed., (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), 182.

These members often form the Administrative Committee (AdCom) which is responsible for the day-to-day operational decisions of the school and makes recommendations for major decisions to the Board of Directors.

Serving in the Right Roles

Paul taught the Romans that God has given each member of the Body of Christ “different gifts for doing certain things well” (Romans 12:6).³ When selecting men and women to fill the administrative roles at a Bible school, it is crucial that a person with the correct characteristics, qualifications, and gifts is placed into each role. The Bible school president is the visionary. He or she must be able to see the big picture of the school’s role in the Body of Christ, determining how the school can most successfully serve its constituency, and the best way to promote the school to potential students and supporters. The academic dean needs to be detail-oriented, concerned with the particulars of the school’s programming and scheduling. The academic dean also recruits and manages faculty to ensure that the quality of classroom teaching is meeting the school’s standards. The business manager needs to have experience with managing finances, physical grounds and staff. The dean of students serves as a pastor to the students, overseeing student activities and monitoring the students’ spiritual growth. In addition to the specific skill set required by each administrator as described above, each person filling those roles must also be filled with the Holy Spirit who will greatly assist administrators in fully reaching their ministry potential as they rely on his guidance and equipping.

As mentioned earlier, appointing the right people to the right positions is critical for a well-run Bible school to reach its maximum effectiveness. Therefore, while using the descriptions above as a guide for finding an ideal candidate, reliance on the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit to fill each administrative role is crucial. Sadly, Bible schools often do not have a large pool of candidates from which to choose the ideal one. Sometimes an ideal candidate is not available or for cultural reasons cannot be placed into a position over someone else.

³All Scripture quotations are taken from the *New Living Translation*, 2007.

When this happens, it affects the ability of the school to attain its maximum fruitfulness.

So how can Bible schools deal with less-than-ideal administrators? Sometimes a role must remain vacant or leaders may need to serve in dual roles for a period of time because no one else is available. Most detrimentally, there are times when a less than “ideal” or even “wrong” person fills a particular role. In these circumstances, my experience serving at Cambodia Bible Institute (CBI) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia taught me that usually one of three things tends to happen. First, the person filling two roles or the “wrong” person filling a role does so temporarily until a suitable candidate is found to replace them. Second, the person grows in their leadership skills until they become the “right” person for the job. Or third, the person is removed either of their own volition or are asked to leave, which allows for a suitable candidate to move into the vacated role. When a Bible school has the right administrators serving in the roles that they are specifically gifted and qualified to fill, the school is positioned to proceed with their mission of equipping the next generation of leaders most effectively.

Serving with Excellence

After placing the right people into the right positions, the next step is to serve together with excellence. Stephen Covey gives seven habits that highly effective people commonly follow.⁴ I will apply Covey’s seven habits to the roles of the Administrative Committee at a typical Bible school.

Be Proactive

Intending to do something, even planning to do something will not bring the task to completion. Until we are proactive and actually do the work of accomplishing the task, the goal cannot be achieved. For Bible school administrators, being proactive includes having a clear vision for the school and taking the appropriate steps towards fulfilling that vision.

⁴Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Mango Media, Kindle Edition, 2015. List of habits taken from this book.

A clear vision for a Bible school will include looking back, assessing the present, and dreaming for the future.

In looking back, the AdCom must remember the reason for the school's existence: the equipping of the next generation of leaders. Coupled with this mandate is our mandate to be true to our Pentecostal roots. Temesgen Kahsay describes this delicate balance as "a call to be *unapologetically academic* and *unashamedly spiritual*."⁵ Maintaining this fragile balance is a challenge but one that is essential for the preservation of our heritage.

When assessing the present, the AdCom must consider the changing times in which we are now living. The 21st century has brought tremendous shifts culturally, socially, and technologically that continue to change at an exponential rate. Bible schools must be aware of these changes and their effect on the students and faculty and implement modifications to curriculum and learning formats in response, or a Bible school's future is tenuous at best.

After looking to the past and taking account of the present, the AdCom must next look toward the future and plan how to maintain programs that remain relevant and valuable for years to come. By being aware of the social and cultural changes in Asia, Bible schools can help future leaders learn to lead fruitfully in those new contexts.

Begin with the End in Mind

One cannot know whether one has accomplished a task, if you are not clear what task one was supposed to complete. In order to know whether a student who has graduated from our Bible school is adequately equipped for pastoral ministry, it is helpful to "identify the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to be most effective in ministry" in this context and in this day and age.⁶ Faith Rohrbough encourages Bible schools to ask the question, "What talents, education, and experience are

⁵Temesgen Kahsay, "Theological Education in the Majority World: A Pentecostal Perspective: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Theological Education," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 2021): 101. Emphasis added.

⁶Karen Stiller, "Enthusiasts, Skeptics, and Cautious Explorers: A Snapshot of the Seminary Community's Differing Viewpoints on Competency-Based Theological Education," *In Trust* (New Year 2019), 5.

needed in pastoral leaders today?”⁷ Rohrbough recommends bringing together faculty and administrators of the Bible school with church and denominational leaders who are responsible for the future pastors in order “to develop recommendations regarding pastoral preparation that need attention by the seminary.”⁸ Dialogues of this nature will help the academic dean in planning and implementing the academic calendar ensuring that the necessary courses are included in the curriculum each semester. Thus, beginning with the end in mind will aid Bible schools in designing the most effective program for producing fruitful ministers.

Put First Things First

Good managers must run a Bible school, in particular, the business manager who handles the day-to-day decisions of operation in the areas of finances, resources, and time. This habit encourages leaders to assess the tasks needing to be accomplished, to rank them by their importance, and then to determine which tasks are the most important. Following this process will assist Bible school leaders in ensuring that they do not neglect crucial tasks. Sanders warns, “When problems are neglected, morale drops and performance decreases.”⁹ Taking time to prioritize tasks will aid Bible school leaders to ensure that the most important tasks are accomplished first and that the overall needs of the school are being met in a productive manner.

Think Win/Win

Covey explains, “Thinking Win/Win sees life as a cooperative, not a competitive arena” where both parties receive benefit.¹⁰ Solutions that are mutually beneficial for the churches, the students, and the Bible school will not be easy to find and even more difficult to execute. Relevant curriculum and some options for varying programs and formats

⁷Faith E. Rohrbough and Laura Mendenhall, “Recommendations of the Task Force of the Theological Schools and the Church Project,” *Theological Education* vol. 44, no. 1 (2008): 95.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Sanders, 135.

¹⁰Covey, *Kindle* Loc. 3996.

are potential elements that will point Bible schools in the right direction to accomplish the aforementioned end goals.

First, in their traditional format, Pentecostal Bible schools have typically sought to maintain a balance in their curriculum. Focusing on what a graduate of the Bible school needs to know (biblical knowledge), to be (character development) and be able to do (ministry skills), Bible schools can then design a holistic curriculum that fits these needs while maintaining accreditation standards. Since creating a curricular program that clearly meets the needs of a Bible school's graduates and those who send them to study makes it more likely that more students will be sent in the future, it is in everyone's best interest to find a win/win curriculum design for the school's training program.

The second area where a win/win solution would greatly benefit the Bible school is in the varying of programs and learning formats. While the traditional, full-time, on-campus study program is usually the most comprehensive and effective one, not everyone has the time or financial means to choose this path. Therefore, leaders must explore other options that would allow non-traditional students to receive the training they require. This may include a "mashup" of various models and formats. Some potential program variations may include part-time classes, evening and week-end classes, extension classes as well as online and hybrid classes. While finding teachers and staff to run these kinds of classes may be challenging, they cannot be dismissed outright if the Bible school is truly seeking win/win solutions.

Concerned with the decreasing enrollment at the school, the leaders of CBI began to seek strategies by which they could better serve their constituency and reach more students. When the AdCom of CBI spoke with the Assemblies of God of Cambodia (AGC) leadership, a need for discipleship materials and training was expressed. So, CBI organized a team who translated Global University's 18-book Christian Life series into the Khmer language. In conjunction with the translation of these books, CBI launched a Christian Life Discipleship Program at six different sites throughout the country. The Christian Life Program was designed to partner with local churches to help them achieve their Discipleship, Lay Leadership, and possibly Bi-vocational Leadership training goals.

Although our highest motivation was to develop the traditional Bible school program that meets face-to-face on campus, in order to find

win/win solutions to adequately address the various needs of our constituency, CBI's AdCom had to think outside the box. We had to be willing to include programs and formats that were not our preference in order for our partners to also win.

Seek First to Understand, then to be Understood

Covey compares not following this habit to prescribing medicine before one diagnoses the sickness.¹¹ Until one knows the diagnosis, one cannot really know what medicine is needed to treat that sickness. If one does not seek to understand the other person's point of view, it will be difficult to know what they truly need and the best way to fulfill that need. Implementing this habit can be done in a number of ways in order for all involved parties to feel they have been heard. One essential way is by asking those receiving Bible school graduates to discuss what qualities, characteristics, and skills are needed to fulfill the ministerial roles our graduates will seek. Second, leaders in administration also need to hear what needs and/or grievances faculty and staff are requesting they address. Last but not least, leaders also need to hear the students' voices regarding all aspects of the learning experience. Sanders advises, "True leaders know that time spent listening is well invested."¹² When Bible school leaders utilize this vital habit regularly, it will position them to discover more win/win solutions to the problems presented.

Synergize

Covey describes this process as everyone bringing their input to the mix in order to "create new alternatives—something that wasn't there before."¹³ In order to nurture this process in a Bible school, leaders may create learning communities. These learning communities can take place in the classroom with students as well as among faculty members as they endeavor to collaborate.

In the classroom, teachers can create an atmosphere of safety where they encourage students to explore and learn. Paul Corrigan explains, "In

¹¹Covey, Kindle Loc. 4669.

¹²Sanders, 88.

¹³Covey, Kindle Loc. 5325.

our classes, we would do well to encourage students to engage with each other and with us as well as with the subject at hand.”¹⁴ This is done by “engag[ing] the minds and hearts of our students.”¹⁵ To achieve this objective, creating a safe learning environment and intentionally varying activities to enhance each lesson is crucial.

Achieving synergy among faculty requires an intentionally noncompetitive atmosphere of cooperation. Covey explains, “The essence of synergy is to value differences—to respect them, to build on strengths, to compensate for weaknesses.”¹⁶ This synergy might transpire in formal meetings called by Bible school leadership; meeting over coffee to talk about teaching theory and practice; praying together for students; swapping successful syllabi, teaching activities, and assignments; troubleshooting teaching problems together; visiting or co-teaching each other’s classes; or recommending resources to each other.¹⁷ When done intentionally with a spirit of cooperation and learning, these communities can lead to collaboration on a variety of teaching tasks.

Sharpen the Saw

Daniel Topf states, “the staff, teachers, and administrators of Pentecostal theological institutions need to become life-long learners and constantly update their skills, so that they are aware of the social, technological, political, economic, and demographic realities of their local and global contexts.”¹⁸ Bible school leaders who intentionally create learning communities and provide opportunities for faculty to receive ongoing field training, pedagogical training, and training in technology usage will reap great benefits in the quality and well-being of their teachers.

In addition to training in these areas, Bible school leaders must also continuously renew or “sharpen” their personal walk with the Lord as well as their ministerial skills. Everett McKinney explains, “Pentecostal

¹⁴Paul T. Corrigan, “Pedagogy and Koinonia,” *The Pentecostal Educator* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 22.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Covey, Kindle Loc. 5339.

¹⁷Corrigan, 27.

¹⁸Daniel Topf, “Ten Characteristics of Pentecostal Theological Education in the Twenty-First Century,” *Pentecostal Education*, Vol 5. nos. 1 & 2 (2020): 55.

educators must ever keep in focus that the leadership effectiveness of our graduates is shaped and influenced equally as much, or perhaps more, by a teacher's attitudes, lifestyle, example in righteousness, and pursuit of spiritual renewal and a fresh Pentecost than by his academic degrees and performance."¹⁹ The dean of students' tasks are especially affected by this need for spiritual acuity and fervor as he seeks to lead students in their spiritual walks as well as leading chapel services and other activities outside the classroom. From the president to the faculty, outstanding Bible school leaders are those who intentionally keep their saw sharpened in their personal walks with the Lord and in their sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit as they minister and teach both inside and outside the classroom.

Faculty as Leaders

Robert Clinton defines a biblical leader as "a person with a God-given *capacity* and a God-given *responsibility* to influence a specific group of God's people toward his purposes for the group."²⁰ This definition can readily be applied to teachers. A teacher has gifts, skills and training (capacity), a teaching assignment (responsibility), and has tremendous influence over the group of students to whom he/she is teaching. James warns those who accept this responsibility to use their influence as teachers for God's purpose, "Not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1). Wilkinson warns that teachers "are responsible to cause students to learn" and will "stand accountable to God for their influence."²¹ Excellent teachers intentionally sharpen their saws by improving their teaching and communication skills, maintaining a healthy physical and emotional lifestyle, and maintaining a strong relationship with the Lord. This section will focus on the sharpening of a teacher's pedagogical skills in order to lead their classes most effectually.

¹⁹Everett L. McKinney, "Some Spiritual Aspects of Pentecostal Education: A Personal Journey," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3, no. 2 (2000), pp. 271.

²⁰Clinton, 217.

²¹Bruce H. Wilkinson, *The 7 Laws of the Learner*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1992), 29, 32.

Teaching to Change Lives

In his book *Teaching to Change Lives*, Howard Hendricks challenges teachers to sharpen their teaching skills by giving a list of seven principles for “mak[ing] your teaching come alive.”²² This section will explore each one of these principles and apply them to developing faculty leaders at a Bible school.

The Law of the Teacher

Teachers must be lifelong learners. No teacher, no matter how gifted, can ever attain a level that they no longer need to continue to grow and learn. Bruce Wilkinson explains, “Master teachers are not born, not manufactured, but just improved! . . . Of course, there are varying degrees of innate ability, but the majority of people who achieve in their fields do so with persistent effort over a long period of time.”²³ Ken Bain describes excellent teachers as “learners, constantly trying to improve their own efforts to foster students’ development, and never completely satisfied with what they [have] already achieved.”²⁴ To encourage ongoing learning, Bible school faculty should participate in formal training once or twice per year and informal and nonformal training as often as the opportunity arises. Faculty training and development is most effective when done as a pre-service faculty-in-training program followed by continuing in-service development of all faculty serving in the school.

Bible school leaders can structure a faculty-in-training program where they assign a new teacher to an experienced mentor teacher who will give them feedback on lesson planning, classroom management, delivery methods, and assessment strategies. Kaysay expounds, “beyond the transmission of theological and doctrinal facts, the practice of Pentecostal educators includes mediating a Spirit-filled life through mentoring, coaching, discernment and helping students grow in their

²²Howard Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives: Seven Proven Ways to Make Your Teaching Come Alive*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 1987), 14.

²³Wilkinson, 41.

²⁴Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 20.

understanding of their calling and ministry.”²⁵ The guidance of an experienced teacher can greatly enhance the preparation to tackle this sizeable task by escorting a new teacher through the challenging waters of teaching for the first time.

The second step in the training process is the ongoing, intentional development of faculty at a Bible school. If we are to teach well, we must arm ourselves with the necessary skills and tools necessary to best equip our students to fulfill their God-given calling. Covey points out a necessary element for acceptance of this training requirement, “Admission of ignorance is often the first step in our education.”²⁶ Self-awareness, acknowledging the fact that one does not know all there is to know and accepting the benefits of ongoing training are keys to the success of any faculty development program.

The Law of Education

Hendrick’s Law of Education states, “the way people learn determines how you teach.”²⁷ He explains that the “ultimate test of teaching is not what you do or how well you do it, but what and how well the learner does.”²⁸ Wilkinson states it like this, “True biblical teaching doesn’t take place unless the students have learned. If they haven’t learned, I haven’t taught.”²⁹ Bain’s research discovered some common goals shared by excellent teachers: (1) They stimulated student interest in the subject. (2) Helped students learn content and know how to apply it to their lives and ministry context and (3) Produced important educational results (skills, can pass qualifying exams, etc.).³⁰ In summary, Ken Bain’s definition of excellent teaching is “helping students learn in ways that make a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on how those students think, act, and feel.”³¹

²⁵Kahsay, 101.

²⁶Covey, Kindle Loc. 526.

²⁷Hendricks, 39.

²⁸Ibid., 40.

²⁹Wilkinson, 26.

³⁰Bain, 5-13.

³¹Ibid., 5.

The Law of Activity

Hendricks' Law of Activity tells us, "Maximum learning is always the result of maximum involvement."³² Engaging in activities with real-life application that require the student to actively engage rather than passively receive information are what generate change in our students. This does not mean that there is no room in our classrooms for lecture or other passive learning styles. However, teachers should be careful not to fall into the habit of only using one "proven" method simply because it is the most familiar or convenient. Instead, excellent teachers will employ a variety of teaching methodologies both passive and active in each teaching session to create the most fertile atmosphere for genuine learning to ensue. Teachers must have courage to step outside their comfort zone from time to time in order to find methods that will most effectively cause learning and generate change in their students. A lifetime of learning and experimenting with these methods will only begin to scratch the surface of the possibilities to be discovered in this regard.

The Law of Communication

Hendricks declares, "Communication is the reason for our existence as teachers" and sadly is also "our number one teaching problem."³³ In the previous section, it was pointed out that there may not be one "right" way to teach that is effective in every situation with every teacher and every student. On the other hand, I am convinced that the one "wrong" way to teach is to bore students until they dread coming to class or drop your class, despising the subject you attempted to teach. Bain writes, "My decision to teach the class includes the commitment to offer sessions worth attending."³⁴ Just like using the right bait when fishing, it is the teacher's responsibility to put an attractive worm on the hook to attract students to the content they are to learn. Communicating in an engaging, active manner with feeling is an excellent bait that will attract

³²Hendricks, 56.

³³Ibid., 69.

³⁴Bain, 113.

most learners. When students are engaged with the teaching method and content, learning is far more likely to occur.

The Law of the Heart

Hendricks states, “Learning means a change in your thinking, a change in your feeling, a change in your behavior.”³⁵ Equipping men and women for ministerial service involves holistic training that touches their head (cognitive), heart (affective), and hands (behavioral). Each lesson taught in the Bible school should include at least some elements that develop all three of these domains.

The Law of Encouragement

This law states, “Teaching tends to be most effective when the learner is *properly* motivated.”³⁶ Excellent teachers find ways to spark a fire of curiosity and excitement in their students. This fire will far outlast the forty hours or so spent together over one semester. Instead, it will continue to burn on for a lifetime. Students will not quickly forget the influence of a good teacher on their lives.

A number of ingredients are needed to properly produce motivation in our students. One of these vital ingredients is respect. Jane Vella states, “The basic assumption is that all learners come with both experience and personal perceptions of the world based on [life] experience and all deserve *respect* as subjects of a learning dialogue.”³⁷ When faculty take into consideration their students’ knowledge and prior experience and build upon it, learning becomes a more meaningful and beneficial endeavor.

Another ingredient that affects the motivation of the students to learn is the expectations of the teacher. Finding the optimum level of expectation for any class requires a teacher to be sensitive to the needs and ability of each student and to be willing to create the necessary helps and scaffolding to enable them to achieve that level. A master teacher

³⁵Hendricks, 88.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 100.

³⁷Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*, revised edition, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 27.

must know how to properly motivate their students to attain maximum learning thus increasing their students' likelihood of success.

The Law of Readiness

This law says, "The teaching-learning process will be most effective when both student and teacher are adequately prepared."³⁸ The teacher's half of this equation commences with the creation of the syllabus. The course objectives should determine the course's outline and assignments. Designing meaningful tasks that have a clear objective and purpose are far more interesting and engaging for students, which in turn affects their motivation to complete them. Additionally, choosing a variety of classroom teaching methodologies and activities will more likely engage the students in the learning process. Hendricks states that having "lower predictability" in your use of various teaching methodologies will result in "higher impact" for learning.³⁹

Students as Leaders

One of the main objectives of Bible school ministry is equipping men and women to build up the Body of Christ. When administration and faculty successfully do their jobs of equipping the next generation, it will culminate in students becoming great leaders. Bible schools are secure places for students to launch the use of their newly-acquired ministry skills. In chapel services, students can lead worship, give testimonies and preach from time to time. Students can also lead clubs or ministry groups or serve on the student council which acts as a liaison between the student body and the administration and helps to plan and lead special events on campus such as communion, prayer and fasting, as well as Spiritual and Missions Emphasis Weeks. Informally, upper classmen often serve as mentors to the new students, encouraging them and helping them navigate the daily routine of studying at the school. These opportunities allow students to develop their ministry skills in a safe environment with others who are in similar phases of ministry growth.

³⁸Hendricks, 115.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 119.

Many Bible school programs also require students to be involved in ministry at their local churches on weekends. At CBI, one of the requirements for acceptance into the school was to already be involved in local church ministry. We held classes from Monday afternoons through Friday mornings so that students could travel back home on weekends to continue to serve in their home churches. Our students were involved in worship, youth, and children's ministries and some were even the lead pastors of their churches, preaching and doing pastoral care. Their weekend ministry aided students in developing their leadership skills in real-life contexts while the Bible School provided opportunities to discuss their experiences or to troubleshoot problems in classes or small groups.

Another area that students' leadership skills are honed is through practicums or field education programs. CBI requires students to attend one-week practicums where they work alongside one of our recent graduates doing evangelism outreaches, children's programs, and even lice treatment programs according to the needs of the local community. During these practicum experiences, students are asked to step up and minister in contexts that are brand new to them. This often results in students' skills and faith being stretched so that they are forced to call on God to help them. This experience teaches students that God will always be with them and will send his Holy Spirit to enable them to do whatever he calls them to do. All of these ministry-building activities are part of the curriculum of the school that develops students for the ministry roles they are currently filling or will be filling in the future at their local churches.

Conclusion

This paper has explored principles and suggestions for leading with excellence on three levels of leadership in Bible schools: administrators, faculty, and students. All three levels have the *responsibility* of increasing their *capacity* by preparing themselves both professionally and personally to become the kind of leader that is above reproach, that inspires others to greatness, and that uses their *great influence* for God's purpose. In other words, to be a person who leads with all your heart, mind, and strength to fulfill the Bible school's

mandate to “equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12).

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