

The Softer Side of Leadership

- Discussion Guide -

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to accompany

The Softer Side of Leadership:
Essential Soft Skills That Transform Leaders and the People They Lead
by Eugene B. Habecker

Note from Dr. Habecker

Dr. Sherilyn Emberton, president of Huntington University, has compiled this helpful study guide to facilitate further discussion about the ideas set forth in *The Softer Side of Leadership*. Her insights and questions are based on her experiences in using the book for group discussion. I am grateful for her work.

Eugene Habecker

Introduction

Questions

1. In crisis situations, leaders often must face challenges with excellence in three areas: “absorb chaos, give calm, and provide hope.”

Which of these three gives you the most concern in light of your leadership experience?

How have you observed leadership failure in any of these three areas?

What are some contemporary leadership scenarios that have demonstrated strength in all three?

2. If you were to ask people in your leadership circle to describe your leadership skills, would they say you were more likely to excel in your “soft” or “hard” skills? Would you agree with their assessment?

Group Think Activity: Working with the idea of embedding “soft skills” within the fabric of your institution or organization, what are three top priorities for implementation? What group or individual could best begin this process? What resources and cooperation would they need?

Chapter One

Protect Sacred Space and Enable Deep Thinking

Questions

1. In understanding the concept of “sacred space,” do people often expect congruency in public and private leadership demonstrations? What difficulties can those you lead experience when the gap is too wide?

2. How important is *soul care* considered in your work environment? Describe some ways in which you have seen it done well.

Personal Reflection Activity: Scripture instructs us to keep the Sabbath as a gift of God to us. Can the practice of the Sabbath be applied to work? Are there times in your workday or workweek where the practice of rest and sacred reflection could be used to develop “soft skills”? What role does Sabbath play in your life?

Chapter Three

Welcome Self-Discover Learning

Questions

1. Dr. Habecker writes, “What is learned after the leadership role is accepted will likely matter much more than what was learned prior to it.” It is important to be on a continual path of self-discovery. What types of assessment have you done to understand how you lead? Verbalize your efforts to be self-aware during your work of leading others.

2. How does your current schedule help you maintain a healthy work-life-spirit balance? Are there people or events in your life that contribute to an imbalance? If you could make one change in your regular leadership pattern or routine, what would that be?

Conceptual Exploration: SABBATICAL. Many organizations and institutions offer a sabbatical experience for various levels of leadership. The success of this type of *Sabbath* or *respite* usually hinges on proper preparation. What steps would you need to take in your life to be ready to step away for renewal? How can you create a renewal experience for those you lead?

Chapter Six

Cultivate Creativity

Questions

1. Leadership as creativity can be viewed as helping people activate their thinking. Can you think of a time that a special act of creativity made an initiative or project successful? Have you ever not contributed an idea you had and later had someone else move that same idea forward to action?
2. How can leaders contribute to a creative culture while also maintaining realistic boundaries?

Conceptual Exploration: IDEATION. Leaders do not have to be the conceptual architects behind every successful project. However, leading others implies that you can foster an environment where the best ideas are brought forward. How comfortable are you in leading a think tank scenario? What can the leader contribute to an already great idea?

Chapter Seven

Enhance Trust

Questions:

1. The notion of *mutual trust* can be aligned with our personal relationship with Christ. We know that He desires a familial fellowship with us and we should desire that with Him. How do we demonstrate trust, as leaders, when we are not quite sure it is mutual? How might we casually test the waters of trust?
2. How have you seen leaders inspire trust? How can we overcome past trust issues while also demonstrating transparency in leadership?
3. What are some ways we can prepare ourselves as leaders to face issues of trust (mistrust)? What roles can other organizational leaders play in helping you initiate conversation on trust?

Chapter Eleven

Understand That the Greatest Soft Skill Is Love

Questions:

1. How has your organization or institution demonstrated *love* toward you during your leadership development?
2. Understanding the *messiness* (frailty) of the institutions and organizations that we lead allows us to model the restorative work of leading. Can you share a situation in which the transparency of a *messy* event or situation allowed you to share love for a fallen world?
3. Have you worked in an environment that promoted a culture of loving the leader? How did the leader(s) respond?

Conclusion

Reflection: As you prepare to continue your call to lead, what are the “soft skills of leadership” that you desire to incorporate into your current role? How will this also prepare you to face the challenge of doing the work you have been given?