

# Lessons in Leadership from Nehemiah

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## **The Leadership of Nehemiah**

In the book of Nehemiah there are at least seventeen lessons in leadership.

1. Establish a reasonable and attainable goal
2. Provide a sense of mission
3. Be willing to get involved
4. Rearrange your priorities in order to accomplish the goal
5. Wait patiently
6. Show respect to your superiors
7. Make requests with tact and graciousness
8. Be prepared and think of needs in advance
9. Go through proper channels
10. Take time to rest, pray, and plan
11. Investigate the situation firsthand
12. Inform others only after you know the size of the problem
13. Identify with the people
14. Display self-confidence in facing obstacles
15. Do not argue with opponents
16. Do not be discouraged by opposition
17. Courageously use the authority of your position

## Leaders are Missionaries

### Providing a sense of mission

Nehemiah didn't come with rhetoric he came with a vision and a mission. He came with purpose for the people. Their response was 'we will join with you; we will rebuild our city.' As a leader one of the greatest contributions you can bring and cultivate within people is purpose. Many of us spend 8 - 10 hours a day at work and to do so without purpose typically leads to burnout.

As a leader you are the missionary bringing the message of purpose to your team. It isn't a one and done type of activity. It is a consistent message you will need to repeat every day. When I worked at Great Plains Software our mission statement was brought up at every company meeting. The CEO tied it into just about every talk he gave. He inspired us to do great things for our customers and partners. Other executives and managers referred to it in meetings and when we made decisions. It was who we were.

There were three different versions of the mission statement during my 10 years at the company. I still remember each one to this day. And what kind of software did we develop? Accounting software! The most exciting, leading-edge topic in all of the software universe. Yeah, maybe not so much but a fabulous technology company was built in Fargo, ND because a group of small-town people were given purpose for their work, a mission to follow and a missionary who led them. How are you and I being missionaries in our roles as leaders?

### Be the Picture

"But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God. I also applied myself to the work on this well; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work."  
Nehemiah 5:15, 16

Nehemiah understood that accomplishing the goal meant he needed to be as committed to it as the people were. If they were shedding blood, sweat and tears he would be doing the same. Leaders lead by example. Nehemiah applied himself to the same work the people were doing and in what was probably a shocking action he did not burden the people with providing for his food and living expenses. He was a government official who thought it better to support himself having seen the conditions the people were living in.

Warren Bennis wrote, "Managers do things right. Leaders do the right things." Good leaders are also good managers, and they figure out how to do the right things in the right way.

People who inspire change know that it is not enough to talk the talk, they have to walk the walk and inspire through their actions just as much as they do through their words. For this small group of Jews living in Jerusalem with little protection the action of Nehemiah spoke volumes, and they were inspired to rebuild a wall in fifty-two days.

When we don't "practice what we preach," it becomes demoralizing, almost impossible for a team to work together to achieve a goal. How can team members trust a leader who talks about one thing, but does another? Nehemiah led by example because he was committed to the cause. He was willing to sacrifice to see the city of his people, the city of God restored to its place of usefulness. When we are committed to the cause we are willing to sacrifice much for the advancement of it. When our teams see our commitment played out in our actions of sacrifice, they are inspired to do things they didn't think possible, which in turn inspires the leader to press on. When you and I lead by example, we create a picture of what's possible. People will look at us and say, "If he can do it, I can do it." When we lead by example, we make it easy for others to follow.

## Certificate of Authenticity Please

"So, neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water." Neh. 4:23

As you read through the book of Nehemiah, you will see a pattern of sacrifice in his life. He sacrificed a high position within the Persian government, and he sacrificed living in the manner of life expected of a governor all to lead the people in a grand project to rebuild the walls of a city not many people cared about. Nehemiah rearranged his priorities to see the goal accomplished. There were potentially many other things he wanted to do but at some point in his life the vision of this project took hold and all other priorities and goals in his life fell to the side. He became an authentic leader. A servant leader. A sacrificial leader.

One of the ways Nehemiah did this was through sacrifice and identification. He sacrificed not only in what he didn't accept but in what he did by following the same demands he made of the people. He identified with them in their nationality but also in the struggles and challenges they faced, such as protecting their homes and families.

In all the history of humanity the great things that have been accomplished have never been accomplished by just one person. It takes a team to get the work done, to reach the goal. People want to be engaged and committed to the work they do. They want to know their work matters. They want to believe in the people who are in charge. An authentic leader learns how to inspire passion, confidence and trust in the people they're leading. And he does so not for his own personal gain but at much personal sacrifice for those he is leading and the vision you are working to attain.