

6 Essential Commitments for Leadership

By Rick Warren

Leaders are always defined by self-imposed standards. I'm not talking about standards set by other people, but standards they set for themselves. Great leaders always expect more from themselves than they do from their followers. They put forth more effort as well. That's leadership.

If you were to look through the New Testament for the phrase "make every effort," you'd find it six times. They represent six important vows we need to make as leaders. I believe these six vows will lead to an effective and productive ministry.

1) Vow to maintain integrity

"Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him" (2 Peter 3:14).

God doesn't expect us to be perfect. No one is perfect. To be spotless and blameless means to live with integrity. How do you maintain integrity if you're not perfect? You need to be transparent. A person of integrity is not claiming to have it all together in every area. On the contrary, the person of integrity is willing to be open about their strengths and weaknesses.

Having integrity also means living what you say you believe. You model what you teach. And you tell the truth, even when it's tough. All leadership is built on trust. And trust comes from having the reputation for living out what you believe and for telling the truth. As a pastor and leader, people must trust you.

Will you make a commitment to lead with integrity? Will you be honest about both your strengths and weaknesses? Will you commit to living your sermons out every week? Will you tell the truth to those you lead even when it's tough?

2) Vow to forgive those who hurt you.

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up" (Hebrews 12:14-15).

Leaders forgive those who hurt them. You will be hurt in ministry. It's going to happen. It's a given. You will be hurt both intentionally and unintentionally. You will be hurt by those who recognize what they're doing and those who don't. You cannot be in ministry without being hurt. If you call the shots, you're going to take the shots.

But you've got to be willing to forgive those who try to take you down. If you allow bitterness to build, it will choke your heart for God and your love for people until your heart just shrivels.

Will you forgive when every bone in your body wants to retaliate?

3) Vow to relax and trust God.

"Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter into God's rest" (Hebrews 4:11).

If you're going to be in ministry, you've got to learn to relax. You need to be concerned about the people around you, but at the same time, you're not God. You can't bear everybody's burden all the time.

How do you release those burdens? First, you've got to pray. Ultimately, God is the one responsible for your flock. He's the one responsible for the growth of your ministry. Share your burdens with him in prayer.

Then you need to spend some time in God's Word meditating on his promises. Remember what God has done in the past – in God's Word and in your own life. God has a good track record of taking care of us. Remember what God has done for you when you're tempted to let the stress of your ministry position overwhelm you.

Will you commit to surrendering your stress to God?

4) Vow to be an encourager.

"Let us make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Romans 14:19).

As a Christian leader, you should build people up rather than tear them down. God has called you to be an encourager, not a discourager. Take the time to look beyond the problems and look at the potential of those you lead. People get discouraged in life; you need to be a source of encouragement.

As pastors, we are dispensers of hope. That's what it means to be a Christian leader. You bring the hope of Jesus into a hopeless situation. You help people who seem to be helpless. You let them know they can do it.

Will you be a voice of encouragement in your community, in your church, in your home?

5) Vow to be a peacemaker.

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

Leaders are called to make every effort to reduce conflict. Our society is filled with conflict. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” How do you make peace in such a fragmented society?

You’ve got to deal with different points of view. Not everybody is like you in your church. And that’s good. Everyone has something to contribute. The perspective of those who see the world differently can add something indispensable to your ministry.

At Saddleback we value unity, not uniformity. You can walk hand-in-hand without seeing eye-to-eye on every issue. God can overlook lack of programs in your church. He can overlook a lack of ability. But God will not bless a divided church.

That means one of your most important jobs is to promote unity. Ten times in the first five chapters of Acts, the Bible says the church was unified. When you have the unity of Acts, you will have the power of Acts.

Will you have the courage to unify your church when it is being pulled in many different directions?

6) Vow to never stop growing.

“Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive...” (2 Peter 1: 5-8).

Learning is the lifestyle of leadership. The moment you think you know it all, you’re dead in the water. You must never stop growing. Growing ministries require growing leadership. You’ve got to train yourself continually.

Keep reading. Get a mentor. Solicit feedback. Ask questions. Always look for ways to keep growing in your character and your skills. The very nature of leadership is tied to growth. You’ve got to grow if you are going to lead others to grow.

Take a regular look at yourself. Where do you need to grow? What do you need to learn? What’s the best way to get the training you need?

Make a learning plan every year. Your future leadership depends upon it. Will you commit to keep growing as a leader and as a person?