Leadership Training: Problem-Solving

Perhaps the most vital leadership quality is being a good **<u>decision</u>** maker.

Anyone can make decisions – today you made a decision for what to wear, you can decide which restaurant to visit for lunch, or even how to arrange the furniture in your house.

It is inevitable that you as leaders, will be faced with decision-making. Some decisions will be minor and may not affect anyone but you. Other decisions may be bigger and have the capacity to affect others.

Today we are going to talk about .. Problem solving, decision making, crisis management: I may not have all the answers so feel free to share examples if they think it will benefit the group)

A baby is brought to King Solomon and he has to solve the problem and make a decision of whose baby this is? Crisis management.

Acts 15, the question came up that had to be dealt with was about whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised like Jews in order to be saved?

The Bible has many example of decisions that needed to be made, problems that needed to be solved.

For us, the problems that we might encounter as leaders might be things like… the service is getting to start and you are short 2 ushers, 1 greeter, short on nursery workers, children's workers, no one is running PowerPoint – (by the way.. all of these have happened). It starts pouring rain outside – and the welcome tent volunteers don't know what to do. We are almost of out cookies or water in the lobby. We are out Sunday morning handouts! Forgot my Bible lesson at home by mistake – oops! Forgot my Bible! We are getting ready to do a baptism and someone forgot to turn on the heater and the water is ice cold. A person in the lobby is not feeling well and collapses. The pastor passed out on the platform near the end of his sermon 😊

Did I leave anything out?

Problem solving, decision making, crisis management. Some of biggies, but most are not. Some require quick decision making, some give you time to take it in and think about it longer.

But all of them have to be handled.

Bible Teaching about Problem Solving

The Bible teaching about problem solving can be extremely helpful as we serve, but also just in everyday life. Life simply involves making one decision after another.

Let me start with the example of Nehemiah. If you could open your Bible to Nehemiah 1.

Nehemiah's Background

After years of settlement in the Promised Land where Moses had led the enslaved Jews out of Egypt, the Jews again found themselves in 70 years of captivity by a people known as the Babylonians who overtook Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

Years later, a Jew named, Nehemiah, served the Persian king, who had toppled the Babylonian kingdom. The Persians then allowed the Jews to return home to Jerusalem and so the Jews had begun to trickle back to Jerusalem, to their homeland.

But Jerusalem and the temple were in ruins, and that bothered Nehemiah. So Nehemiah's heart to rebuild Jerusalem. He encountered quite a bit of problems along the way in his service project, but was able to overcome them. What were the steps that he used?

Step 1 - <u>Identify</u> the Problem

The first step in the Bible teaching about resolving issues is to identify the problem.

Nehemiah **<u>inquired</u>** into the condition of the Jerusalem and the Jews there. He discovered this (read 1:3)

When you and I approach a situation, we can ask questions such as…

- What exactly is wrong?
- What is the norm and how has the situation deviated from the normal?
- Who has been affected? Ministry involves people… so you know no matter what the problem is, someone has been affected.

We should get as many **facts** as possible, then weigh them carefully. "*He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.* (Pro 18:13)"

The clearer we define the problem, the better our solution.

i.e. There is a unfamiliar man wandering the parking lot.

Question: You are Nehemiah and are inquiring - what kind of questions do you ask?

- What is he doing?.... Staking out the joint? Hitting people up for money? Putting unsolicited flyers on windshields of cars? …. Who would you go to ask to go talk to him (don't say Pastor Rich)?

Step 2 - Analyze the Problem

Like we said before, some problems require quick decision making (like the example I just gave you), while others give you time to take it in and think about it longer.

So after you become aware of the problem, the next question to ask yourself is this:

At what stage is this problem?

This helps you identify the **urgency** of the problem, and there are generally two stages.

- The **emergent** stage is where the problem is just beginning to happen. It does not cause an immediate threat to the way the ministry operates. It is just beginning to happen and you have time on your side to be able to correct it without it causing much damage to the processes it is affecting.
  - o i.e. Maybe one of your volunteers that serve with you has given you 2 weeks notice – that is a problem, that person needs to be

replaced. As a leader in that ministry, you should take the responsibility to recruit someone to take that person's place, rather than 1- do nothing, 2 – pawn it off on someone else or on a pastor. Remember, ministry is a team effort – it is not 3 or 4 pastors running the show.

- o Sometimes problems like that come our way but you don't need to act right at that instant, you have a little bit of time to work with.

- The **mature** or **crisis** stage is where this problem is causing more than just minor damage. Damage has been done, and you need to jump on it immediately to fix it before it becomes a problem where the consequences may be greater, deeper, and more expensive if we don't solve this problem fast.

- o Do we any problems like that that arise in our ministries?

Nehemiah put into practice what we are talking about today.

Read Nehemiah 2:11-15, 17a

Sometimes problems like come our way but you don't need to act right at that instant, you have a little bit of time to work with, so, after you have identified the problem, what do you do next? You do what Nehemiah did.

Step 3 - <u>Pray</u>

Don't leave God out of the process. Remember, this is His ministry and if something goes wrong, we need to ask Him what do we need to do to make it right. We need to ask him who would be the best person for me to ask to serve with me in this ministry. I can tell you from personal experience, if you seek Him, God will provide the answer.

In our humility, we need to capture God's perspective on the matter.

Nehemiah wrote that he, "…*prayed before the God of heaven*" (Nehemiah 1:4). Surely, in faith we must approach God for wisdom, direction, and strength (cf. James 1:5-6).

Step 4 – Come Up with <u>Solutions</u>

When you come up with a solution it is important to first identify the **causes** of the problem. Why? Because you want your solution to be good enough so that hopefully this problem won't happen again and if it does, you are ready.

The Bible's teaching about making good decisions reveals that Nehemiah identified several causes of the problem that Jerusalem was dealing with before ever making a decision. He determined that the causes of the problem were spiritual (1:6-8), the people were discouraged (1:3), but there was also some opposition from other people – imagine that! (2:10).

In the Bible's teaching about problem solving, Nehemiah had several options. He could have done nothing; He could have made a deal with Sanballat and Tobiah, who opposed the Jews, to get them of their backs, or He could have come up with a plan to help the Jews based on what he identified as being the causes to the problem.

Nehemiah probably thought – how can I help lift their spirits but also offer them protection, fortification in their city.

He carefully considered before God what to do.

Involve **others** in the decision making if you can.

There is nothing wrong with that. They say two heads are better than one – remember that we are a team. You don't need to fly solo or be the Lone Ranger. You don't need to and you will not have all the answers to the problem that you encounter. And if you don't, guess what, others probably do – you just have to ask them – get their input!

You tell them, I am having this problem – you know.. kids are coming in to the volunteer refreshment area and leaving it a wreck… do you have a suggestion of what I can do?

Hey, some of the parents are checking their kids in using their check in system, they are just sending their kids in the building to do it – hey kids know how to use electronics better than adults anyways.. do you think that is OK?

Get others' feedback and suggestions!

Let me give you an example of what I mean. We've all heard – or read – the story of the old "half empty, half full" question. A speaker holds up the glass of water and asks if the glass is half empty or half full, and you generally expect some sort of lesson in optimism, etc. from it. But in this version, an engineer is in the room and answers another way and says, "I see this glass of water as being twice the size it needs to be."

You see, sometimes when you are the one in charge solving a problem, you tend to see the problem and a solution from your own perspective. But, that sometimes it is helpful to get an alternate perspective from which to consider all the best options for a solution.

What I am sharing with you will not only help you in ministry, but in life! We also need counsel from others. It's the smart thing to do.

Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. (Pro 11:14)

Step 5 - Pick the <u>Best</u> Solution and Do it

Sooner or later, you must choose what you think is the best solution. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of each position.

Nehemiah chose to approach the king and secure the resources and permission to fix the problem in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:5, 7-8). He took action, and made a decision.

Here at CrossRoads, the problems we encounter as leaders probably will not be at the magnitude of what Nehemiah faced, but the steps are still the same – big problem or small problem:

(review steps) –

- Identify the problem - What exactly is wrong?
- Analyze the Problem – Does this require immediate attention or do I have some time to make a decision?
- Pray
- Come up with Solutions
- Pick the Best Solution and Do It
- Evaluate the Outcome of Your Decision

Step 6 – Evaluate the <u>Outcome</u> of Your Decision

Why do we want to do that? Because we want to know whether we made a good decision or not. Did it work? Was this a good solution?   (in case that problem occurs again, you know what to do).

The Bible teaching about problem solving teaches that evaluation is necessary. It makes sense, doesn't it?

There needs to be an evaluation to determine what **worked**, and what can be improved the next time around.

We can detect Nehemiah's careful eye to detail in his problem solving and evaluation. Read **Nehemiah 6:15-16**.

These steps will help you become a more effective, efficient problem solver and will become more natural to you to the point that you are using them without noticing!

People problems -

We are living in a world of incredible change and turbulence. Because people are complex, misunderstandings can and will take place. Personality and performance problems can and will arise.

So, when a problem of any kind arises, deal with it quickly if you can. You should go and see the person immediately to deal with the difficulty, whatever it is. Thankfully, many problems are temporary and fleeting, and they blow over quickly.

Resist the temptation to blame, accuse, or pass judgment. Instead, be supportive, be encouraging to others. Ask questions to get clarity about what has happened that is affecting their service. Listen patiently to the answers.

You see, we all have the same goal – to glorify God in our service to Him and we are all part of the same team.

As we have seen, the Bible teaching about problem solving can be extremely helpful as you and I serve and navigate through life.

Closing Exercise: Break into small group and do an exercise: identify a real ministry problem that have encountered or could encounter in your ministry and write out the steps you would take to solve the problem using

the 5 steps that we have talked about and we will come back together in 5 minutes and see what you came up with.

STOP HERE

The second principle of solving problems is to be open to new ideas. *It's in the Bible*, Proverbs 18:15, TLB. "The intelligent man is always open to new ideas. In fact, he looks for them."
The third principle of problem solving is to hear both sides of the story. *It's in the Bible*, Proverbs 18:17, TLB. "Any story sounds true until someone tells the other side and sets the record straight."
How does God want us to respond to problems? Realize that problems are inevitable and grow as a result of them. *It's in the Bible*, James 1:2-4, NIV. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING

Perhaps the most vital leadership quality is being a good decision maker. This especially applies to tough decisions, the ones that have a lasting impact on the trajectory of your business. Anyone can make easy decisions for what to wear, which restaurant to visit for lunch, or how to arrange the furniture in their office

It is inevitable that leaders, no matter what type, will be faced with many different decisions. Some decisions will be minor and may not affect anyone but themselves. Other decisions can be quite large and have the capacity to affect everyone and anyone under their leadership. Decision making is part of a leader's daily expectations. This makes decision making important for those in a leadership role. Leaders have a responsibility to make good decisions for everyone involved, and therefore, should have some kind of framework for which to make those decisions.

There are four basic decision-making styles that effective leaders use. These styles can vary by department or organization, the leader's own philosophy and style, as well as other outside influences, such as money or subordinates.

1. Command

Leaders who tend to make decisions without consulting anyone on their team are said to be command leaders. However negative it may sound, it can be a good style of decision making, especially for quick moving situations that need guidance immediately. Leaders use this style most effectively and strategically when they apply it to monetary decisions and crisis decisions. In these types of situations, there may be no time to consult with others, and doing so could lead to bigger problems and an outcome determined by a delayed decision.

2. Collaborative

Collaborative decision making requires and uses the opinions and insight of others on the team. Leaders who routinely ask those under them for their feedback and viewpoints are seeking to make a collaborative decision. This doesn't give those under the leader the right to make the decision, however, it can give the leader the information need to make the best decision fit for the situation, especially if it affects a lot of people. Collaborative decision making also falls under evidence based decision making. If a leader is using collaborative decision making, it is actually best to not surround him or herself with people who always agree with them. People should feel open and willing to argue either side of the coin. Even if the leader ends up not taking their advice, it will help bring the decision and situation more clarity.

3. Consensus

Decision making done with a vote is called consensus decision making. It is similar to that of a democratic vote. Leaders can gather their teams, explain the decision at hand, and then everyone gets a vote.   If a leader needs to make a decision that will not affect the bottom line, but does, however, affect a vast majority of those under him or her, then a consensus is a good way to go. When using a consensus, leaders need to remember that they cannot please everyone. Decisions made by consensus tend to help mold the culture of a company or organization and can help give everyone a voice. Being heard is important to most people on a team or in a group, and satisfaction will go up when they feel like they are heard.

4. Convenience

Some leaders choose to delegate their decision making tasks. This can be out of convenience and can have several benefits, including the empowerment of team members and evaluating the decision-making skills

of other team members. It is important for leaders to remember that those new to making decisions may have some fresh an innovative ideas or ways of looking at a problem and its solutions.

Applying Ethics to Decision Making

Ethics is an integral part to decision making for every type of leader. In order to understand ethics in decision making, the values of the leader and the organization must be taken into careful consideration. Leaders who are effective have an understanding and an awareness of their own morals, values, and system of ethics. Integrity, transparency, and solid character are cornerstones of good leadership. Leaders should know that transparent and consistent ethically based decisions will help build the team and the business. Leaders who apply ethics to their methods of decision making will consider the following:

- Keeping promises
- Not being deceitful
- Treating others as they wish to be treated
- Not blaming others
- Making informed decisions without favoritism
- Working to make the work or organizational environment better
- Operating within the law
- Minimizing hardships and helping others when possible

By taking these factors into account and exercising them, leaders can create an ethical environment, causing those underneath their leadership to also work and live ethically. There may be times, however, that two values of equal importance clash in the decision making process and cause an ethical dilemma. In this situation, the leader will need to carefully balance both values in order to make an ethical decision. This can be easier said than done in most situations, though going back to the core values and goals of the company and of the leader can help give clarity in these situations.

Decision making can be difficult, especially for those in positions of leadership. Making the wrong decision can impact the bottom line of the business or organization, it can turn people against a leader, and it can cause many other people to be affected. Leaders should consider what decision framework they use, as well as the ethical standards and principles of the business, as well as their own when making a

decision. However, leaders should not be afraid to make a decision, as it is a key component to being a leader.