

Values and Value Commitment for Leaders

By Paul A Dumais

Introduction



What are values? From where do they come? Webster defines values as to be of worth, be strong; something intrinsically desirable. People usually think of values as something they hold dear and which mean much, for which they are willing to sacrifice. Examples of values are: hard work, honesty – always being truthful, generosity, understanding and compassion, and many more.

In Western societies, there are many discussions taking place about the decline of values and the need to revive old values or find new ones. Often we hear of the decline in family values. In America today, there is a suspicion harbored by some that a discussion of values is an attempt to impose values on someone. They prefer a value free orientation – peaceful cooperation and communication, respect for differences and all inclusive tolerance. However, given that even their desire for value free orientation is itself an imposition of their values upon others, I will take the step here and present the case for the genesis of values using a biblical worldview, and I will show how such values can make you a more effective leader.

Values and Value Commitments

How do values and value commitments come about and develop? Hans Joas, in his book "The Genesis of Values," says that values arise in experiences of self-formation and self-transcendence (altruism and moral willingness, at least occasionally, to sacrifice individual interests in favor of collective or higher goals). He further states that values cannot be produced rationally or imposed upon others. Ulrich Wickert says that values cannot be stolen nor transferred nor bought on credit, and a purpose in life and obligations to community cannot be simply prescribed. Further, as stated by Harry Frankfurt, value commitments clearly do not arise from conscious intentions, and yet we experience the feeling of 'I can do no other' which accompanies a strong value commitment not as a

restriction, but as the highest expression of our free will. Values evaluate our preferences. They do not express desires, but instead imply what is worth desiring. They cannot be imposed on another – they must be embraced by individuals. James O’Toole, in his book, *Leading Change*, says that the ultimate in disrespect of individuals is to attempt to impose one’s will [values] on them without regard for what they want or need and without consulting them.”

Our values result from our identity. William Taylor articulated a combination of a theory of values and an objective theory of identity formation. He says, “[o]ur identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not...” What is important to us and what is not determine our values. Therefore, to determine where values come from we must answer the question, “Who am I?”.

In order to do that, I desire to look for the deeper values that are self-evident truths. For that, I will examine the biblical account of creation. First, the Jewish concept of truth is completely opposite that of the modern concept of truth, as the Jewish concept is open to discussion, open to rationality and is not an existential leap of faith. It is rooted in history. In the Genesis account, we see that the giving of human life involved the giving of oneself – God breathing his breath into man. This was a matter of God exercising his will and not merely a display of his power. The Genesis account presents a relational view of human existence and not a monolithic view. It shows God setting in specific relations certain elements – humans, animals, vegetation, etc. It shows that people are related to the divine through God’s exercise of will, but people are not an integral part of the divine. God does not need us. It also shows man and woman belonging together in the garden (with the divine), while they are not an integral part of the garden, as they are denied access to the center of it– the tree. In the Genesis account, God establishes a space in which people can have freedom of choice, but such space is strictly delimited. By people attempting to transcend their own nature, as did the first people, they end up not in the divine realm but alienated from the divine (they were in fear and hiding).

What does the Genesis account of creation tell us of these deep values that are self-evident?ⁱ First, God makes it clear who people are and who people are not. This helps people not to strive to be someone or something that we are not. God will be God and people need to be human beings. Second, people are meant to live in relationship with God and with one another. We see in the Genesis account that human existence is based upon and defined by the power of Yahweh [God]. Man’s power and ability is relational; it derives from their relationship to God. The important understanding here is that God determines the nature of people. As Francis Schaeffer says, people are created to relate to God like none of the other created beings.

I will now relate this back to leadership. God formed people because He is love. He gave of Himself so that people could be created – He breathed into people the breath of life. If God is motivated by

love, people, being made in God's image and in relationship to God, should also be motivated by love. There is a moral love to which the Bible refers – it is called agapao love and is described more fully in the book, *Be a Leader for God's sake*, by Dr. Bruce Winston. Agapao love is doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason. As Dr. Winston says, “[i]t means to love in a social or moral sense, embracing the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety.” Once someone asked Jesus how to sum up everything that is important in the Torah and in the Prophets (the Old Testament). His response was simple and straight-forward – love God and love people.

As articulated by James O'Toole, “[m]oral leadership emerges from, and always returns to, the fundamental wants and needs, aspiration and values of the followers. [By moral leadership,] I mean the kind of leadership that can produce social change that will satisfy followers' authentic needs.” Effective leaders “...enlist[] the hearts and the minds of followers through inclusion and participation. Such a philosophy must be rooted in the most fundamental of moral principles: respect for people.”

Application in Contemporary Settings

Leadership begins with the overarching value of love which then forms the basis for the lesser values. Loving leaders treat their people as though they possess creativity and insightful ideas, and they understand that the success of the organization depends on every individual. “You can employ men and hire hands to work for you. But you must win their hearts to have them work with you.” Relationships do not exist on a transactional basis solely (though there is a transactional element to relationships). Relationships exist predominantly in the realm of transformation, just as they have from the beginning. If leaders do the right thing at the right time for the right reason, they will create the conditions under which all followers can perform interdependently and effectively toward a single objective. In other words, the organization will have everyone rowing in the same direction.

The values of an organization are the responsibility of senior leadership. There are two approaches to value determinations in organizations. Senior leaders can define the values and look for people who embrace those same values, or they can initiate a process by which the people in the organization determine the values. For an organization, using the words of Jim Collins and Jerry Porras from their book, *Built to Last*, the organization's identity and values are called its core ideology. Senior leadership must initiate a process of discovering and defining the organization's core ideology. The “...core ideology provides the bonding glue that holds an organization together as it grows, decentralizes, diversifies, expands globally and attains diversity.” An organization discovers its core ideology by looking deep inside. The core ideology must be authentic and is made up of two things: core purpose and core values. The core purpose is the fundamental reason for being – the

importance people attach to the organization's work. It must be simple and clearly understood. The core purpose makes work meaningful, which enables organizations to retain, attract and motivate outstanding people. It is the organization's identity. Core values are those essential and enduring tenants that have intrinsic value for and are important to the people inside the organization – the key value being love.

Conclusion

I have presented an approach to values and value commitment that I believe is founded in truth and supported by history. Having done so, I stand before my reader with the recognition that my perspectives are incomplete and limited. That makes me genuinely open to others, as I have much to learn.

Values are wrapped up in our identity. As Francis Schaeffer says, man, apart from God, cannot distinguish himself from other things. However, "...a Christian does not have this problem. He knows who he is. If anything is a gift of God, this is it – knowing who you are. From this identity flow values. As James O'Toole says, "...the role of the leader is to create followers; the task of the leader is to bring about constructive and necessary change; the responsibility of the leader is to bring about that change in a way that is responsive to the true and long-term needs of all constituencies; and the greatest source of power available to a leader is the trust that derives from faithfully serving followers" – agapao love.

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ⁱ For this explanation of the value in the creation account, I relied upon the work of Patte and Parker - A Structural Exegesis of Genesis 2 and 3. *Semeia*, 18, 55-75 and Bryce - A Response to Patte and Parker. *Semeia*, 18, 77-81.