

Generosity:

the secret resource in wielding power God's way

Annika Greco Thompson suggests that a relatively neglected area of Christian leadership is generosity. This includes not only financial generosity but also the sharing of a leader's ideas, giving due credit to others for the wins, and trusting stakeholders. She illustrates the power of generosity in God's handing over Creation to us, and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

This year's Faith in Business theme is about power and influence in responsible leadership, and what an important topic this is! There are many directions in which our exploration can take us, and I suspect that generosity is not the first thing that springs to people's minds. But I posit that generosity is a Christian leader's secret resource and ought to underpin everything they are and do.

Out of curiosity I recently typed the question 'What makes a good leader?' into Google, and the first thing to appear was an AI-assembled list of characteristics that included humility, integrity, patience, empathy, visionary thinking, etc. Generosity didn't feature. As I continued scrolling, I found a number of websites that listed the top 12 characteristics that make a good leader (Center for Creative Leadership)¹, the top 11 characteristics (GOV.UK)², the top 17 (Asana)³ and even the top 21 (BetterUp)⁴. Not a single list mentioned generosity.

Many of us will link generosity to money, but generosity can be manifested in many different forms: through hospitality, by volunteering our time and skills, through a generosity of spirit, and of course, giving of our finances to meet a need. Ultimately, I believe that generosity is about laying down one's own power in order to empower someone else.

The ironic thing is that operating in a spirit of generosity can be an incredibly effective way to make friends and influence people, yet it doesn't often make 'the list'. Business peers love a leader who shares resources and ideas. Employees love a boss who doesn't feel the need to take credit for his or her wins because they know it was a team effort. Clients love someone who's happy to buy them lunch, and not just because they want to secure the sale. Stakeholders love a business partner who isn't quick to make judgements about them, choosing instead to trust and give

them a chance to prove themselves. And there's something to be said for a leader who gives of their time and attention without making you feel like it's being bestowed unwillingly or in a hurry. Generosity is winsome.

The corrupted version of this looks like a bribe, leveraging power (often in the form of money) to coerce people and systems to get what you want. But the biblical version of this looks like Nehemiah, modelling integrity and generous leadership to inspire and persuade people to move in a common direction and get something done.

Nehemiah is often looked to when teaching on leadership, but how often do we explore his leadership through a generosity lens? For example, for 12 years Nehemiah held a position as governor in Judah during which he did not take advantage of the governor's food allowance. Not only did he choose not to use the allowance for himself; he chose to provide for other state



Nehemiah providing food
Credit: <https://tomvanderwell.com/>



officials at his own expense rather than charge the public purse because he was aware of how financially burdensome it was on the people (Nehemiah 5:14–19). That same portion of scripture also indicates that Nehemiah was entitled to land which he chose not to acquire, leaving it instead for others to take. Throughout his story, we see opportunities for Nehemiah to have used his power in ways that were within his rights, but he chose not to for the sake of people in less fortunate positions.

Support in Scripture

Generosity is everywhere in Scripture, and its core is the laying down of one's power in order to empower someone else. That's what God did in the Garden of Eden when he handed the proverbial keys to Adam and Eve. And it's what Jesus did on the cross when he gave his life to save ours.

When God created the world, he didn't do so with the intention of ruling it himself. He created it for Adam, Eve and their offspring, for their pleasure and provision. He told Adam and Eve to rule and subdue the earth, to have dominion over creation, to steward it and make it flourish. He gave

them a most incredible gift that, in his omniscience, he knew would be stewarded poorly (to put it mildly), but he gave it to them anyway. Why? Because he is a generous God. A spirit of true generosity doesn't seek to take back a gift if it's misused. The gift is given freely, without a desire to control its outcome.

Jesus demonstrated this when he went to the cross. He knew that sacrificing his body would mean eternal life for millions of people. He also knew that even more people would choose not to receive the gift, or would perhaps accept it and then reject it (as illustrated in the parable of the Sower). But he did it anyway. He never intended to control our response to his gift.

Another beautiful illustration of what it means to generously lay down one's power to empower someone else is the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). Not only did he choose to help his enemy; he also engaged his wallet. He gave of his money, the thing that most tangibly gave him power, to see the wounded man through to full recovery. And there is an additional element to this generosity that is worth noting, one that we might even

consider *wasteful* or *irresponsible*. Innkeepers at that time had a shady reputation, and the Samaritan had no way of knowing that the innkeeper wasn't going to take advantage of him; yet he made the point of saying 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I return' (v.35). This is staggering generosity.

Be a generous leader

Power is not evil in itself. The Holy Spirit wants us to use the power given to us in order to leverage business as a force for good. Being intentional about exercising generosity is a healthy check on how we use that power. It may not appear on everyone's list for what makes a good leader, but without a spirit of generosity, leadership can fail miserably. As we can see from Nehemiah's example, if generosity is present as one of the characteristics of leadership, a leader won't need to exert power because people won't need to be coerced into working for them. They'll want to. Christians working in business have a tremendous opportunity to model God's love and ethos by leading with generosity and pointing to a Father who gave us everything. 

1. <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/characteristics-good-leader/>
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/what-makes-a-good-leader>
3. <https://asana.com/resources/qualities-of-a-leader>
4. <https://www.betterup.com/en-gb/blog/leadership-characteristics>



Annika is a Swedish-American, married to a Brit and living in Liverpool. Before coming to the UK, she lived in Lebanon, Sweden, Spain and the U.S. and has had a varied vocational trajectory. Her current role as Growth and Relationships Manager at Stewardship sees her travelling the country and encouraging Christians to live a life of biblical generosity. She enjoys writing on the topic of generosity for Stewardship's blog and other publications.