

CHARACTER AND TRUST

A T R U S T W O R T H Y S A Y I N G

NO. 7

No rational person will follow a leader who is perceived to be deceitful, dishonest, or untrustworthy. Even in Westerns and gangster movies, there is honor among thieves. This noble code of conduct – even within the ignoble ranks of the ‘bad guys’ – is a bond that allows decisions to be made and acted upon with some level of trust and certainty.

Leaders cultivate trust within their followers as they act in a manner that is consistent with accepted and anticipated moral norms. They keep their word (at least to each other). Their actions are congruent with their values. They speak truthfully and honestly. They make sacrifices for the good of the group and the success of their mission.

In many arenas of life, character defers to accomplishment. The salesman who exceeds his quota, the batter who hits homeruns, the singer who sells millions of albums all seem to gather followers based on their skills, performance or ability. Few people seem to care who they sleep with, what they ingest, or if they misuse their celebrity status. Turning a blind eye to deceit and decadence, society says, “Just keep being popular and making me happy!”

In other life venues, character is critical. Some walks of life demand congruency between the inseparable worlds of stated beliefs and action. Pastors, priest, and rabbis are held to a higher standard, and they should be. Teachers, coaches, and youth workers are expected to be good role models. Politicians are expected to practice what they preach.

The best way to get elected is to paint one’s opponents in the worst possible light. If the perception sticks, and character is called into question, trust begins to erode. And as trust evaporates, so do votes.

Productivity and character are valued differently in business and ministry. Ministry leaders generally receive a great deal of rope to hang themselves when it comes to management of time, money and people. Missed deadlines, overspent budgets, and poor staff management are too often the norm in churches, camps and mission agencies, and that seems to be accepted by many boards and supervisors. However, there is little grace when the preacher runs off with the secretary or the building fund.

In business the opposite is true: exceed your quota, surpass your goals and turn a profit and many will cast a blind eye at the moral lapses and ethical compromises that greased the path to “success.”

Leaders – real leaders – care about their character. They are not perfect, but they strive to be better tomorrow than they are today. They admit mistakes. They say, “I’m sorry.” They ask for forgiveness. Real leaders grow more consistent, welcome accountability, and embrace the trauma of transparency.

Character is critical when it comes to trust, especially in ministry settings. Trust cannot grow outside of the fertile soil of consistent, Christ-like character. And trust is the critical cement that bonds the leader-follower relationship.