

## ESSENTIALS OF GREAT LEADERSHIP: COMMITMENT

As a character trait, commitment is one of sincere and steadfast fixity of purpose. It is the act of binding and engaging oneself (emotionally or intellectually) to a particular course of action. Commitment separates doers from dreamers. It is important because on the journey of life, and pursuing our dreams and goals, there are many obstacles. Commitment will keep us going in the face of adversity and challenges.

Commitment is a word that often strikes fear in the hearts of people. We frequently relate fear of commitment to romantic relationships and marriage; however, it has application to other relationships as well. There is the relationship we have with ourselves, including the promises we make. There are relationships with family and friends that require commitment. And there are the relationships a leader has with those he or she leads or influences.

When it comes to commitment, people tend to cop out, drop out, hold out, sell out, or go all out. As a leader, commitment is essential. A great leader cannot afford to cop out, drop out, hold out, or sell out. If one aspires to leadership, he or she must evaluate his or her willingness to commit to people, or to a cause or purpose. He must question whether he is willing to go all out.

When I think of commitment, I am reminded of first-time parents just bringing home their awaited infant. No matter how great their joy may be, they are often shocked by the realization that they are responsible for this new life, this infant who is entirely dependent upon them. It takes unselfish love and commitment to deny their own personal needs - example, for sleep – to meet the needs of their child. It can be frightening to realize they have consciously or unconsciously committed to caring for their child for a very long time. It's too late to change their minds; and they can't return the baby to the hospital!

Someone has said, "There's a difference between interest and commitment. When you're interested in doing something, you do it only when circumstances permit. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results."

I will admit that I came into leadership reluctantly. I hesitated to begin anything that I might not be willing to complete. The fear of becoming bored or of being put in a position or relationship that required more than I might want to give caused me to resist. I didn't want to be responsible for others because that meant commitment. Was I willing to pay the price of leadership? Was I figuratively willing to "feed by demand, change dirty diapers, listen to whining and complaining, sacrifice, or lose sleep?"

Not being able to easily commit didn't mean I didn't care. I cared enough that I didn't want to let people down. And knowing myself to be basically selfish and self-absorbed, with many varied interests, I doubted that I could commit to a long process. There were too many unknowns and too many perceived sacrifices. Yet, when we understand our purpose, we must garner courage and wade out into deep waters. Fortunately, there are rewards. Commitment is a two-way street. We only receive what we are willing to give.

Leadership is a great responsibility that requires constant courage. Once committed to, it is not easily discarded. The influence of a leader whether for good or for bad continues to make ripples within his or her circle of influence. This is one reason some would prefer to follow. They would prefer to stay in the shadows out of the limelight. Hidden or not, we all influence others in some way. While we may not be in a highly visible position of leadership, there are still those counting on us. Commitment ignites action. Unfortunately, leaders often underestimate the power of commitment. There is something very powerful about truly being committed to a people, a vision, cause, or meaningful purpose.

Very often people do not try new things because they are afraid they are going to fail. If they fail, they might not feel good about themselves, and we all want to feel good about ourselves. Or if they fail, maybe other people will ridicule them or lose respect for their abilities. This can be a big problem. When someone is afraid to take a chance of failing, he also loses the chance of learning something new and feeling good about his success.

Every leader faces many new experiences and challenges. Fatigue, discouragement, criticism, isolation, self-denial, and pressures of all sorts assail him or her. Sometimes he or she may not even “like” those being lead. But commitment to an unerring purpose enables one to pour out passion, energy and enthusiasm in his or her endeavors. If you are passionately committed, then you will experience success regardless of the outcome. Commitment is persistence with purpose.

When we commit to a certain purpose or course of action, we are also committing to a personal set of values, principles, or beliefs, and simultaneously, to behavior that adheres to them. In that sense, we commit to ourselves. We determine how we wish to act as a leader, understanding that effective leaders possess a strong sense of personal integrity and confidence in the chosen path. We in turn commit to people, and to the institutions, organizations, and enterprises we lead.

The character of true commitment is demonstrated in life’s storms. Wavering commitment is usually seen as no commitment at all. Granted, it isn’t easy to deny self for the benefit of others, but commitment sustains. Genuine commitment stands the test of time and the storms that life brings. It gives us the motivation to be responsible and care for those we lead, unselfishly giving them our best and empowering them to grow and develop into their best. It enables us to create an environment in which people can accomplish things that otherwise they would not accomplish. With determination and persistence, we can finish our course and achieve our purpose.

### **Learn to bend and yield to adversity**

When the pressure is on, those who are not fully committed look for ways to jump ship. They look for ways to escape the circumstances they are in and be relieved of the pressure they are feeling. However, that is not an effective solution. Instead, learn to bend into the winds of adversity.

Adversity may be painful, and no one likes to suffer, but it helps to welcome challenges as opportunities to be stretched. Realize that you will encounter obstacles on the way to reaching your dreams and goals. Don’t be unduly discouraged by these obstacles. Look at them squarely and determine to find a way

over them, under them, around them, or through them. And if you can't, create a new path. Responding positively and creatively to adversity builds character and provides a rich education in life.

**Learn to be selective about those truly important things, letting go of the things that drag you down.**

Life is short and too often we fill it with meaningless activities. If we are not careful, our lives can become the proverbial tail wagging the dog and not the other way around. With one life to live, it benefits us to choose to live it well, fully investing ourselves in our divine purpose. That means being selective about what and who we allow to dominate our time and energy.

Life is full of urgent but unimportant things, i.e. a ringing phone. Urgent things demand our attention, but they may or not be important. Unimportant urgent things often rob us of many hours of productivity and effective living. When we are committed, we are more likely to focus on important things that contribute to our mission, values and high priority goals. Important things that are not urgent require us to be proactive, taking initiative and assuming responsibility, to seize opportunities.

**Be clear about where your security rests – on what or on whom?**

Life is in constant flux. Circumstances change. People come and go. Storms rage. But commitment keeps us going when the going gets rough. Individuals vary in their sense of personal security and they may base their commitment on it. Some place particular importance on position, reputation, or financial stability. As a Christian, my commitment in life is first of all to the One who gave His life for me and is committed to me for eternity. Secondly, I am committed to those who He has called me to serve, beginning with my family.

Although it also helps to focus on the people we love, care about, and serve, the reality is that we are all imperfect beings. We often fail one another. Inspiration, motivation, and commitment must come from within if they are to stand the test of time.

As a young Christian I was admonished, "Don't doubt in darkness what God gives you in the light." Those words of wisdom serve me well. When all is going well and we're enjoying the blessings of our efforts, we may feel secure. But when it seems all hell is breaking loose around us and nothing is going right, we must remember where our security lies. If we know we are obediently walking in our revealed purpose, doing the best we can with what we have to work with, and unselfishly leading and serving despite adversity, we can rest in our faith. It helps when we know what's worth dying for.

Commitment acts as an internal compass to keep us aligned with our purpose and true to those things most important to us – our most cherished relationships, values, passions, motivations, and the sources of satisfaction in our lives. Commitment starts in the heart. Michael Jordan states, "Heart is what separates the good from the great."

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