

4 Essential Character Traits of Smart Leaders

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It's no secret; being a leader is stressful. I don't know about you, but when I'm under stress I really need to watch what I say and do, because that's when I tend to say and do the wrong things! So, I thought we should spend a few minutes to learn from the advice Solomon passed on to his son.

Solomon's Advice

The Bible describes Solomon as the wisest man on earth (1 Kings 4:30). Reading through the book of Proverbs, we see Solomon spent quite a bit of time preparing his son for the mantle of leadership. In one particular lesson, I imagine Solomon began by putting his hands on his son's shoulders, looking him straight in the eye and saying....

"My son pay attention to what I say, listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body" Proverbs 4:20-22).

Having secured his son's undivided attention, Solomon continued the lesson saying,

"...Guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil" (Proverbs 4:23-27).

Within these verses are four-character traits important for all leaders because they address what we see and do!

1. Guard Your Heart

Solomon begins by telling his son first and foremost, to guard his heart. Why is guarding the heart so important? Because Solomon explains, it is the wellspring of life. In Hebrew culture, the heart is considered the center of one's knowledge, emotions, and values. Our actions flow out of our heart. If our heart is pure, our actions will be pure. So, it is important to keep the heart pure.

Jesus echoed the importance of a pure heart saying,

"The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45)

So, the first essential character trait is a pure heart!

2. Watch What You Say

The second thing Solomon tells his son is to watch his mouth. Specifically, Solomon said to avoid perverse and corrupt talk. Perverse speech is speech that is considered obstinate, unacceptable, or unreasonable. Corrupt speech is speech that is dishonest, unscrupulous, or unprincipled.

The apostle Paul echoes this instruction in his letter to the Ephesians.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29).

Note that Paul expands the instruction exhorting them to only speak in ways that build others up so that it is of benefit to the hearer! So, the second essential character trait is a pure mouth!

3. Watch What You See

The third piece of advice Solomon gives his son is to watch what he sees. Look straight ahead, says Solomon, and fix your gaze directly in front of you. In other words, don't allow yourself to be tempted by pleasant distractions that cause you to turn away from God. Avoid the temptation of sin that lies on the left and the right. Rather, keep your focus on the path straight ahead that leads to Jesus.

The author of Hebrews echoes this advice saying,

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author, and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

So, the third essential character trait is to keep our eyes focused straight ahead on Jesus.

4. Watch What You Do

The final piece of advice Solomon gives his son in this lesson is to watch what he does. Solomon tells his son to be careful about the path he is on, not swerving to the left or right, but walking in such a way as to avoid evil. Another translation says to “ponder your path.” In other words, think about what you are doing and where you are going. Think about your conduct.

Jesus offered similar advice as He taught the disciples.

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden...In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14, 16)

So, the fourth essential character trait is to watch how we behave and what we do!

There we have it, four essential character traits for every smart leader. What we say and do, how we behave and react as leaders, is a testimony to our faith. As we emerge from the restrictions of this pandemic, let us heed the advice of Solomon as we guard our hearts. Let us also be especially conscious of what we say, see, and do in the coming weeks and months!

Let us be the light that shines before men!