

Do You Know Your Purpose?

by Margaret J. Marcuson

"...just do your job, then let go." - Tao te Ching

How clear are you on your leadership purpose? An essential part of your job as a leader is defining your purpose for yourself. This includes questions like: why am I here? What do I want my legacy to be? Also think about short-term purpose in your leadership role. For example, if you are new to your role, your immediate purpose is to get well connected with people. This year, some leaders are finding their short-term purpose is helping their organization survive the current economic crisis. Over time, you can develop your thinking about where you would like to head as a leader and how you might like to see that happen.

Your position in the organization affects your purpose. If you are the leader at the top, you have the opportunity (and challenge) of articulating a broad-ranging purpose for the organization. Whether president, pastor, principal or parent, you are in charge. If you are in a subordinate role, you take your purpose in part from whatever powers that be. When you're in the middle, it's just as important to think through your purpose for yourself. Whatever your position, here are questions to ask: Why did you take this job? Why are you staying? What do you want to accomplish?

Clarifying your purpose means you must focus on yourself, at least for a time. Spend some time alone, doing the hard work of thinking through your own direction. Those you lead deserve the benefit of your own thoughtful consideration of your leadership. It's the best gift you can give them.

As you develop clarity, tell people what you are thinking. Think of it as self-definition: "I think" "I believe" "I want to." How clearly can you articulate your own hopes and dreams and direction? Then pay close attention to the feedback you get. Are they confused? Excited? Angry? Intrigued? How do you think about this response? What do you need to say further? Try to clarify, avoiding anxiety and defensiveness as much as possible.

Finally, let go of the outcome. You are issuing an invitation to people to follow. You cannot force them. Their participation is voluntary, and they must choose to follow. The paradox is that the more we can let go, the more likely we are to get a positive outcome. It may not be exactly the picture we have dreamed of. But when we get clear on our purpose, share that purpose with others, and make adjustments along the way, we can move forward toward new possibility.

<http://www.margaretmarcuson.com/>