

Leadership: Disentangling Actions and Outcomes

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November 12, 2020

Various Examples

-cutting the budget, firing senior staff person, setting a strategic direction, purchasing/selling land

Fundamental Problem

Human logic of justice, actions, and outcomes:

- Good actions will be immediately followed by good outcomes.
- Bad actions will be immediately followed by bad outcomes.

Spiritual implications of human logic:

- If I serve God (+), there will be good outcomes in my life immediately (+).
- If I do not serve God (-), there will not be good outcomes in my life immediately (-).

Disorienting nature of life as it is:

- Bad outcomes happen to people who engaged in good actions (Jesus' crucifixion).
- Good outcomes happen to people who engaged in bad actions. (Psalm 73).

Colloquial 'Christian' translation:

- If I am faithful, I will appear to myself/others as successful...quickly.
- If I appear successful to myself/others...quickly...I must be faithful.

Proper Framing

1. Positive outcomes for doing the hard thing may not show up for many years.

Whoever rebukes a person will in the end gain favor rather than one who has a flattering tongue. (Proverbs 28:23)

2. Faithfulness and success need to submit to God's ultimate judgement.

This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. ²Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. ³I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. ⁴My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God. (I Corinthians 4)

3. Hope provides us with a back to the future theology that puts today in perspective.

Hope reminds us that the way things are (and all the extrapolations from that), is precarious and in jeopardy. Hope reminds us not to absolutize the present, not to take it too seriously, not to treat it too honorably, because it will not last." (Brueggemann, Walter. Hope Within History. 80)

For Discussion and Reflection

1. Can you think of a time when you made a leadership decision, but struggled because the immediate outcome of that decision was not positive?
2. When you look at the three points under Proper Framing, which one do you need to remember more frequently and with more conviction?