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Using Power and Authority Wisely



The use of power in leadership is often the defining test of character.



"Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."

—Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)



"He who has great power should use it lightly."
—Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 b.c.-a.d. 65)

"Power will intoxicate the best hearts, as wine the strongest heads. No man is wise enough, nor good enough to be trusted with unlimited power."

—Charles Caleb Colton (1780-1832)

"The lust for power is not rooted in strength
but in weakness.

—Erich Fromm (1900-1980)

Power and Influence

Power: The ability to control one's environment, to involve others in creating desired outcomes, or to resist the influence of others. Often dependent on 'position'.

Influence: The impact of a person's life and actions on the attitudes and actions of others. Can be independent of position and more effective than use of power.

Sources of power

- Personal characteristics
- Granted by others (elected/appointed)

In Seventh-day Adventist culture, power is given or entrusted by a group to an individual. Thus it can also be removed by the group.

Sources of power —cont'd

- Personal characteristics
- Granted by others (elected/appointed)
- Ownership
- Providing resources
- Capitalizing on opportunity (taking initiative)
- Knowledge—managing critical problems
- Proximity to others with power

Five bases of power:

1. **Coercion:** The ability to compel compliance or punish noncompliance
2. **Structural:** Power inherent in a position or granted by election/appointment to office.
3. **Reward:** The ability to incentivize action by offering some desired outcome to the actor(s).
4. **Expert:** A superior level of skill and knowledge in a particular situation.
5. **Referent:** When a follower's loyalty, respect, friendship, admiration, affection, or desire to gain approval influence the follower's behavior.

The use of power:

Most preferred



Least preferred

- Reason
- Coalition
- Friendship
- Assertiveness
- Higher Authority

Politics

Behaviors and activities to acquire/develop power and resources in order to effect specific results when there is uncertainty or disagreement regarding choices.

Power and politics

Power is what you use when your influence runs out.

Politics persists because open conflict is too dangerous

The most powerful political tool is the truth

"Power is much more easily manifested in
destroying than in creating."

—William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

"Leadership is not so much the exercise of power itself as the empowerment of others."

—Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders, The Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 80

Therefore a leader's thinking needs to focus on "giving power to" people rather than "having power over" people.

"In the heart of Christ, where reigned perfect harmony with God, there was perfect peace. He was never elated by applause, nor dejected by censure or disappointment. Amid the greatest opposition and the most cruel treatment, He was still of good courage."

—E G White, *Desire of Ages*, p.330

"The way to become great and noble is to be like Jesus, pure, holy, and undefiled."

—Ellen White, *Christian Leadership*, p. 48

"So long as he remains consecrated, the man whom God has endowed with discernment and ability will not manifest an eagerness for high position, neither will he seek to rule or control...instead of striving for the supremacy, he who is a true leader will pray for an understanding heart, to discern between good and evil."

—Ellen White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 31

"God never designed that one man's mind and judgment should be a controlling power. He never designed that one man should rule and plan and devise without the careful and prayerful consideration of the whole body, in order that all may move in a sound, thorough, harmonious manner."

—Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, 3:16, 17

"Men whom the Lord calls to important positions in His work are to cultivate a humble dependence upon Him. They are not to seek to embrace too much authority; for God has not called them to a work of ruling, but to plan and counsel with their fellow laborers."

—Ellen White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 9:270

"Sometimes a man who has been placed in responsibility as a leader gains the idea that he is in a position of supreme authority, and that all his brethren, before making advance moves, must first come to him for permission to do that which they feel should be done. Such a man is in a dangerous position. (cont'd)

"He has lost sight of the work of a true leader among God's people. Instead of acting as a wise counselor, he assumes the prerogatives of an exacting ruler. (cont'd)

"God is dishonored by every such display of authority and self-exaltation. No man standing in his own strength is ever to be mind and judgment for another man whom the Lord is using in His work. No one is to lay down man-made rules and regulations to govern arbitrarily his fellow laborers who have a living experience in the truth."

—Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 491, 492

"Those who accept a position of responsibility in the cause of God should always remember that with the call to this work God has also called them to walk circumspectly before Him and before their fellow men. Instead of considering it their duty to order and dictate and command, they should realize that they are to be learners themselves."

—Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:282

"...this does not authorize any one man to undertake the work of ordering his brethren arbitrarily to do as he thinks advisable, irrespective of their own personal convictions of duty. Nor are God's chosen laborers to feel that at every step they must wait to ask some officer in authority whether they may do this or that."

Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 491

"No confederacy should be formed with unbelievers, neither should you call together a certain chosen number who think as you do, and who will say Amen to all that you propose, while others are excluded, who you think will not be in harmony. I was shown that there was great danger of doing this."

—Ellen White, *Life Sketches*, p. 321

"The Lord will not accept the work of any man that is not done in tenderness and love and kindness. He has not set us as rulers, to lord it over His heritage. Let others be moved by Christ, just as we desire to be moved by Him."

—Ellen White, *The Upward Look*, p. 267

"Men of principle need not the restriction of locks and keys; they do not need to be watched and guarded. They will deal truly and honorably at all times--alone, with no eye upon them, as well as in public. They will not bring a stain upon their souls for any amount of gain or selfish advantage. They scorn a mean act."

—Ellen White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 410

"Now do not think that these men who do follow out your ideas are the only ones that can be trusted. You have sometimes thought that because they do your will to the letter, they were the only ones in whom you could place dependence. (cont'd)

"If anyone exercised his own judgment, and differed with you, you have disconnected from him as one that could not be trusted. Take your hands off the work, and do not hold it fast in your grasp. You are not the only man whom God will use. Give the Lord room to use the talents He has entrusted to men, in order that the cause may grow. Give the Lord a chance to use men's minds."

—Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 304

"How my heart aches to see presidents of Conferences taking the burden of selecting those whom they think they can mold to work with them in the field. They take those who will not differ from them but will act like mere machines. No president has any right to do this. Leave others to plan, and if they fail in some things do not take it as an evidence that they are unfitted to be thinkers."

—Ellen White, *Christian Leadership*, p. 53

"Those who are not put on the ground know nothing about the necessities of the situation, and if they cannot say anything to help those who are on the ground, let them not hinder, but show their wisdom by the eloquence of silence, and attend to the work that is close at hand."

—Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 201

The mind of Jesus

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross."

—Philippians 2:5-8, NRSV

Prayer of Solomon

"Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

—1 Kings 3:9 (NRSV)

Jeroboam's abuse of power

"...my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!"

—King Jeroboam, 1 Kings 12:14 (NRSV)

Jesus—the power of influence

Jesus “rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded.”

—John 13:4-5

Jesus—the power of service

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

—Matthew 20:26-26 (NRSV)

Jesus—the power of service

“You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

—Jesus, Mark 10:42-45 (NRSV)

"Servant Leadership"

A popular term but what does it mean?

How can a leader have authority and simultaneously function as a servant?

Understanding servant leadership requires an understanding of the motivations underlying the exercise of power and authority.

The human tendency is to exercise power and authority, at least to some degree, in the interest of self—the desire to be first, to climb the ladder of success, to put down others, to be regarded as powerful, to reap prestige and praise.

Christ-like leadership is exercising power and authority for the good of others. Christian leaders do not abandon the use of authority but exert their power under the constraint of sacrificially living for the good of others.

Discussion

- How can a leader, without the power of position, influence others?
- How can a leader minimize the role of 'politics' in organizational life?
- How does my culture affect, positively or negatively, the practice of leadership in the church?
- How does a Christian perspective of power, leadership and authority challenge or confront my culture's views and practices of authority?
- What changes are needed? How will they happen?

Authority

A hand holding a baton, positioned over a music stand with sheet music. The background is dark with some blurred lights, suggesting a concert hall or church setting.

in the Seventh-day
Adventist Church

Objectives:

1. To know Biblical principles that inform the design of authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church
2. To understand the distribution of authority in Seventh-day Adventist Church structure.
3. To demonstrate respect in my leadership for the authority structure and patterns in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Organizations need authority

In order to function at all every organization requires a system of authority. The dominant models for organizational authority may be seen in government (spectrum of autocratic to democratic); business (sole proprietor to share holder, CEO); and military (top down authority).

The Church is different from other organizations (government, army, business) in many respects. It has a different system of authority, a different purpose for existence. It is a voluntary organization and functions on a not-for-profit basis.

Institution or Movement?

The Church has always had to wrestle with its self-perception as an institution or a movement. This self-perception has implications for how authority is used in the organization.

Institution or Movement? —cont'd

Institutions tend to define, protect, and preserve their role. Thus a greater emphasis on centralized authority.

Movements are always dynamic and run the risk of dissipation and loss of focus. Too much decentralized authority leads to loss of identity.

Centralization/decentralization:

In SDA Church development the purpose of centralization was more for coordination than for control.

The purpose of decentralization was more for responsiveness to local situations than for independence.

Organizations, including the Church, will always experience tension on this topic.

Use of Authority vs. Power

"Because leadership is necessarily an exercise of authority, it easily shifts into an exercise of power. But the minute it does that, it begins to inflict damage on both the leader and the led."

—Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, Introduction to 2 Corinthians

There is no question but that there should be authority in the Church—but who should have it? And how does authority operate in a faith-based community that considers Jesus as its head?

Church authority and discipline:

- Keys of heaven given...whatever you bind (Matt 16:19, 18:18, John 20:23)
- "...delivered decisions of apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey" (Acts 16:4)
- "...hand this man over to Satan" (1 Cor 5:5)
- Advice to discipline members (1 Tim 1:20)
- Deal with divisive persons (Titus 3:10)

Church authority and discipline

- Demonstrate unity (John 15 and 17, Ephesians 4)
- Engage in worldwide mission (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:7-8, Acts 10-11)
- Acknowledge differences and to have a process for their resolution (Acts 6, 15, Galatians 3:26-29, Philippians 2)
- Live as a transformed and transforming community in the world (Ephesians 2-4)

Biblical principles on authority:

1. Exodus 18:24-28: Authority should be distributed
2. Judges 9:1-4: Authority should be arranged so as to protect the organization from abuse
3. 2 Samuel 23:2-3: Authority must be exercised in the "fear of God" (see also 1 Kings 3:9—prayer of Solomon)
4. Proverbs 11:14, Matthew 18:15-18: Ultimate authority resides in a group rather than an individual

Authority in the SDA Church:

In the early 1870's General Conference President George Butler authored a pamphlet entitled *Leadership* (1873) built upon the premise of "authority centralized in one person" He presented it at camp meetings and preaching appointments to rave reviews by hearers who were acculturated to the "Great Man" model of governance.

Authority...SDA Church: —cont'd

The essence of this tract communicated that "one person was in charge and other leaders were subordinate to that person." All were to acquiesce to the decision of one man.

Authority...SDA Church: —cont'd

The 1873 General Conference Session affirmed by majority vote that the position proposed by Butler reflected the view of the General Conference on leadership.

Butler did not argue that he, the GC President, should have this authority. Instead he advocated this for James White who had such a foundational role in the development of SDA structure.

Authority...SDA Church: —cont'd

But neither James nor Ellen White were in favor of such an arrangement. Ellen White informed Butler:

Authority...SDA Church: —cont'd

"When this power which God has placed in the church is accredited to one man, and he is invested with the authority to be judgment for other minds, then the true Bible order is changed..."

Authority...SDA Church: —cont'd

Satan's efforts upon such a man's mind will be most subtle and sometimes overpowering, because through this mind he thinks he can affect many others.

Authority...SDA Church: —cont'd

Your position on leadership is correct, if you give to the highest organized authority in the church what you have given to one man. God never designed that His work should bear the stamp of one man's mind and one man's judgment.

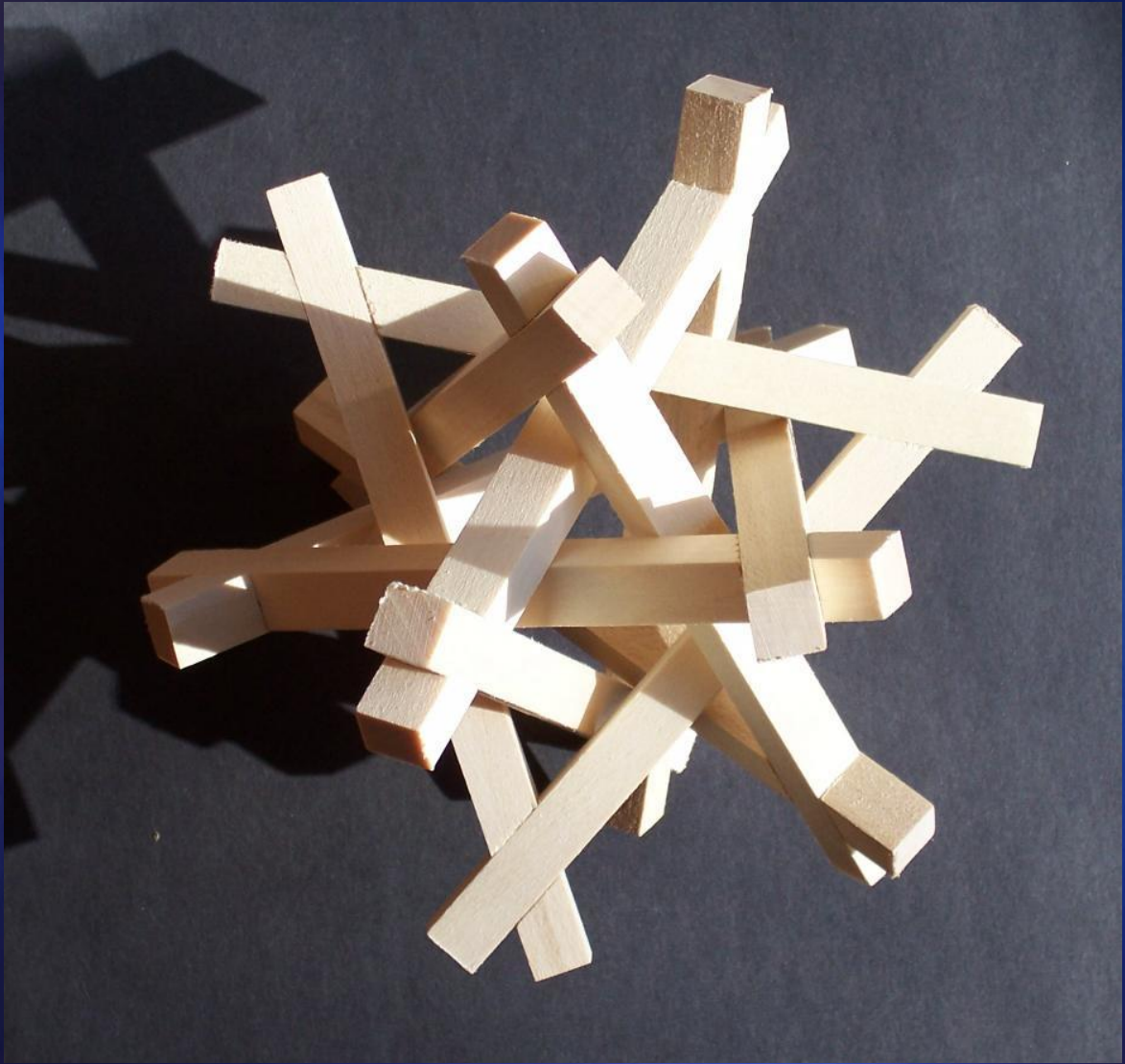
—E. G. White communication to G I Butler, *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol 3.
p. 493

SDA Church polity

~~Congregational~~ ← → ~~Hierarchical~~

Interlocking and interdependent





Summary on Church Authority:

1. Authority is rooted in God.

SDA Concept of Organization

GC Working Policy D 05

"...The fruitage of that concept is a representative and constituency-based system. Its authority is rooted in God and distributed to the whole people of God. It recognizes the committee system. It provides for shared administration (president, secretary, treasurer) rather than a presidential system.

Summary on Church Authority:

1. Authority is rooted in God.
2. Authority is distributed—no place has final authority in everything.

Distributed authority examples:

1. Local church: decisions on membership; election of church officers
2. Local conference executive committee: employment of pastors
3. Local conference constituency: admission of churches as members of conference; bylaws amendments— provided they are in harmony with model bylaws in *GC Working Policy*

Distributed authority examples:

4. Union conference: approval of ministerial ordination, operating policy for local missions
5. General Conference Executive Committee: decisions on *GC Working Policy*
6. General Conference in Session: Fundamental Beliefs, *GC Constitution and Bylaws*, Church Manual

Summary on Church Authority:

1. Authority is rooted in God.
2. Authority is distributed—no place has final authority in everything.
3. Highest human authority in the Church is in a group not in a person.

Highest authority in SDA Church

The General Conference represents the collective and worldwide expression of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Church organizations around the world recognize the General Conference in Session as the voice of the Church. The General Conference Session, and the General Conference Executive Committee between Sessions, is the highest ecclesiastical authority in the administration of the Church.

"Local churches, local conferences/missions/fields, union conferences/missions, unions of churches, and institutions are, by vote of the appropriate constituency, and by actions of properly authorized executive committees, a part of the worldwide organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Whereas each has accepted the privilege and responsibility of representing the Church in its part of the world, each is therefore required to operate and minister in harmony with the teachings and policies of the Church, and the actions of the world Church in Session.

While individual units of the Church are given freedom to function in ways appropriate to their role and culture, no part of the worldwide organization of the Church has a unilateral right to secede."

—GC Working Policy B 10 25

GC Working Policy

...“the accumulated policies adopted by General Conference Sessions and Annual Councils of the General Conference Executive Committee. It is, therefore, the authoritative voice of the Church in all matters pertaining to the mission and to the administration of the work of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in all parts of the world.” (GCWP B 15 05)

Summary on Church Authority:

1. Authority is rooted in God.
2. Authority is distributed—no place has final authority in everything.
3. Highest human authority in the Church is in a group not in a person.
4. Every leader is accountable to someone else or to a group.

Officer authority

Every church officer is ultimately accountable to a group (church business meeting for local church officers, executive committee for conference officers, et.).

No individual officer then has ultimate authority in the church organization.

Summary on Church Authority:

1. Authority is rooted in God.
2. Authority is distributed—no place has final authority in everything.
3. Highest human authority in the Church is in a group not in a person.
4. Every leader is accountable to someone else or to a group.
5. Authority is entrusted, not inherent in an individual.

Leaders who misuse their authority can be removed from office.

Discussion time

