

Bringing out the Best in Others

Due to their superior knowledge and experience, many leaders function spontaneously as a police. They think they have a responsibility to monitor others, finding faults and preventing laziness. Their duty is to prevent mistakes and failure. Unfortunately many believers bring this mentality into the church. As a church leader, you must be aware that your duty is not to find faults. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Your duty is to bring out the best in others and build them up. You should be an expert in discovering the neglected strength in others, and to stir up their talents by all means.

A leader who loves people would believe in the good incentives and motivations of those following him, and he will reap good fruit in those he leads. On the contrary, a police-style leader would be rejected by his followers because he focusses on finding faults. His followers would become self-defensive, and their potentials cannot be realized.

Respecting others is one of the spirits of cell churches. We should respect and honour others as children of God, masterpiece of the Lord, and our most important resources. People are God's resources in reaching the world.

The ministry of Jesus is to transform ordinary people into magnificent persons. All his disciples were ordinary fellows, but he dedicated himself in transforming these ordinary folks into great contributors to the world. You, as a fellow worker of the Lord, has a part in this ministry, and therefore we have to affirm the strength of others.

“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.” (1 Cor. 1:26-28)

The above verses not only summon us to encourage the ordinary folks, but to give them strong respect, because God will use them to do great works. We should give them the opportunity to “step forth” and respond to the callings of God.

Noticing the Strength of Others – Be a good Observer of Potentials

We are living in a negative and pessimistic society and are meeting negative and pessimistic persons everyday. You can notice this by just watching the news. This is especially true to the Chinese. When kids are going to school, the mother would say, “Watch out! Don't be knocked down by cars.” When kids are going hiking, the mother would say, “Watch out! Don't fall down the slope.” When kids are going to the playground, the mother would say, “Watch out! Don't climb too high, or you may fall down.” We always receive negative thoughts and information while we grow up, and this has a cumulative effect in making us to have a low self-esteem. Parents, teachers, friends, and significant persons often doubts our ability, outlook and intelligence. As a result, we receive a distorted and false self-image.

A wise cell group leader would praise and affirm those he leads, especially in those areas where they need progress. We should pay much attention in discovering the potentials and strengths of others, and not just focussing on their weaknesses and shortcomings. You will be able to realize their potentials and strength if you search for them intentionally. Everybody must have some potentials. Once you discover them, spread them out. Too often people would just hide them when they observe the strength of others.

It has been said, “When you treat someone according to his performance, he would not improve. But if you regard him as the most suitable one for the task, he will evolve into the best and the most suitable one .”

Jesus has set for us a good example. See how he dealt with Peter. Before Peter denies him three times, Jesus knew very well that Peter would disappoint him. But Jesus paid attention not to his failure, but to his good aspect. He saw what Peter could achieve and had faith in him.

How you see a person determines how you deal with that person. This is a simple truth. Another simple truth is that when you look for the good things in a person, you will find them. When you see the good things in a person, you will treat him better, and he will in turn do better. Therefore it is very important to be a good observer of the good things in others, seeing what that person can become, and not what he is now.

A famous research performed by the Harvard University in an elementary school in San Francisco supports the above ideas.

A group of elementary students took an aptitude test. At the beginning of the school year, the teacher just lightly mentioned the names of five to six students, saying that they had outstanding performances in the aptitude test, and had the potential to have great progress.

The teacher did not know that the result was made-up. The several potential students capable of great progress were just arbitrarily chosen, having nothing to do with the aptitude test. At the end of the school year, all students took another aptitude test. Those several students whom the teachers believed to have good performance all got much better results than the others, and their marks improved by 15 to 27, which was really a significant progress. The teacher described these several students as happier, more inquisitive, and more pleasant, and have better chance of success in the future. These changes happened only because of the changes in the attitude of the teacher towards those students. He had higher expectations in the students, and the students thus also had higher expectations in themselves. This new expectation was transmitted between the teacher and the students, and this help the students to improve.

How you see a person determines how you deal with him. How you deal with him determines what kind of persons he will become. This is a truth.

Many years ago, in a lunatic asylum at Boston suburb, a little girl named Anne was locked in a cellar. This asylum was already quite an enlightened one at that time, yet those whom the doctor diagnosed as hopeless would be locked up in the cellar. They thought Anne was beyond help, and she was thus a living dead in a dungeon without light and hope.

But at that time, a retiring old nurse, who believed that all God created was with hope, brought lunch down to the cellar everyday and ate outside Anne's cage, bringing love and hope into the life of little Anne.

In many aspects little Anne behaved really like a beast. Sometimes she would violently attack those who entered into her cage. Other times she would ignore them as if they were transparent. When the old nurse visited her, little Anne paid no attention to her. One day, when the nurse placed a piece of cake outside Anne's cage, Anne showed no response. But on the next day when the nurse visited her again, the cake was already gone. From then on, the nurse brought cake to visit little Anne every Thursday. In just a short time, the doctor observed improvements in Anne, and they decided to move little Anne out of the cellar. Finally this “hopeless” case was able to be released. But little Anne did not want to leave. This place to her was too meaningful and she decided to stay and took care of other

patients. As the old nurse saw the “possibility” in Anne and lead her onto her new life, Anne also believed she could help others find a way out.

Some years later, when Queen Victoria of England pinned a badge of highest honour to foreigners onto the lapel of Helen Keller, and asked her, “Though being blind and deaf, how would you explain your great achievements?”, Helen Keller immediately replied unhesitatingly, “No one would have known the name of Helen Keller if there was not Anne Sullivan (little Anne).”

We have to remember this important principle. If we treat people with a negative attitude, always reflecting to them their weaknesses, they will perform even worse. But if we hold a positive attitude and reflect to them their strengths, you are reminding them that they are good, and they will perform better. “For he is like one who is inwardly calculating.” (Prov. 23:7)

Most people that we meet are mixed with good and bad, having strengths and weaknesses. We can decide to build up their strength, or only focus on their weakness.

When we see a person from the positive aspect, that person's potential can be developed. It has been said that one rare and precious talent is the talent to discern a person's ability. Numerous examples can be cited to demonstrate the remarkable things that can be achieved when an ordinary person waits patiently for the development of a capable leader.

There are many examples of this in the Bible too. Jesus has chosen Maria of Bethany as an exemplar of church (Matt. 26:6-13). And Zacchaeus, whom no one had noticed. And Paul raised up a timid young Timothy.

Look for hidden talents and potentials everywhere and all the time.

Recognizing and Affirming the Strengths that you see

Sincere praise is the most effective method of teaching and motivating. Thus the art of praise is a skill that a good cell group leader must obtain. The greatest blessing you can give to others is not your wealth, but the key to open up their own treasure so that they may know it.

People usually would not be able to get anything from their leaders except when they foul things up. This kind of relationship is actually a serious mistake of leaders.

In our daily lives, we often use affirmation and reward to train our children and pets. But when it comes to the training of adults, we will forget about it. This is also the needs of adults.

When my wife and I taught our daughter to walk, we would not make her stand and order her, “Walk!” When she fell down, we would not just beat her and scold, “I told you to walk!” No! You would help your daughter stand and hold her up when she falls. When she stands for the first time in life, you would shout excitedly, “She can stand! She can stand!” You will hug her and kiss her. You will be thrilled when she can stand longer and tries her first step.

Why do we not train adults in the same way? Why supervisors of adults always find faults? Why would we not be happy when they do things right?

Apostle Paul has given us a good example. In nine out of the thirteen epistles he wrote, he says he give thanks to God for their sake. He writes words of praise and appreciation. He would tell them how much he misses them, because they are his joy.

Today, many people deep down in their hearts need to be praised, appreciated and affirmed as valuable, having potentials and being capable of making contributions. When we are affirming others, we are conveying an important message, which is that you are precious and special in God's eyes, and in our eyes. This is the way to building up others.

Everybody needs to be affirmed, even those who are successful, competent and popular. Cell group leaders have to affirm and praise their group members and other leaders always.

How to Affirm Others

1. Affirm your relationship

Affirmation. The first thing that should be affirmed is your relationship with others, that you have die-hard dedication to them. Nowadays, relationship has become fragile. So leaders have to understand the importance of relationship.

2. Praise their good things

The way to affirm is to remember what has been achieved and give them praise. Paul was doing this when he affirmed Epaphroditus: *“So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honour such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.”* (Phil. 2:29-30) Some says that we should not praise others, lest he become proud. This is unbiblical. The Bible orders us to build one another up. “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour.” (Rom. 12:10) Affirming others is to let them notice the work of God in them.

Here are some hints in making praises:

A. Praise in the public

Public meetings are good platforms in giving praises. We do not want to praise ourselves publicly, but I have not met anyone who does not want to be praised before others.

B. Praise every single achievement

The lives of most people are dry and boring. But we can make their existence more interesting and motivating, if we can give them encouragements by seizing every opportunity to praise and celebrate.

C. Praise in words

Express your sentiment in words, especially in the format of a letter. If you are a significant other to somebody, your letter of appreciation can have a tremendous effect.

D. Praise in actions

Show your appreciation with a gift or a card. This gift of appreciation does not need to be very expensive.

E. Praise concretely

Empty padding on the back and saying, “Well done” usually does not have much impact. It would be more effective if the praise comes with concrete contents. You are also appreciating a particular action of that person, encouraging him to reproduce again that good quality of work.

F. Do not just praise the result

Sometimes we emphasize too much on the fruit instead of affirming the process. This may have unhealthy impacts. We should instead affirm both the fruit and the process of work.

G. Let others know that you love them as well as their achievements

People need to know that they are valued, cherished and loved, but not just tools to satisfy our expectations, or servants in obeying to our orders. They need to know that we will still love them even if they fail and disappoint us.

3. Affirm their improvements

Wise leaders would notice all obvious changes. It would be disappointing if one has endeavoured to attempt something without being noticed by leaders. They always assume that we still have bad habits which we have tried our best to overcome.

Leaders need to observe these changes and appreciate these improvements. Such praises would be a great motivation for them to keep improving.

As Jesus named Simon “Peter the Rock” and builds his church on him, you should also do it likewise and affirm your leaders and cell members by prospecting on their potentials with the eyes of God. Jesus was doing this when he tells Peter to “feed his lamb”, depicting to him what he could achieve in the future, and not trapping him with his previous failures and mistakes.

Concluding Words

Affirming others and affirming ourselves are the essential elements in building up and helping others to grow, and this is one of the strengths of cell churches. This is an important tool in building up others and helping them to succeed, which are important duties of a cell group leader. Therefore you should become an expert in giving praise.

Every one has the potential to succeed. Even though some may look like a loser, but do not let their appearance deceive you!