Chapter 7

God’s Definition of Success

Servant Leader Judgment

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye (Matthew 7:3–5).

One of the most important leadership dimensions relates to the judgment process. Servant leaders are called upon to make important decisions in such areas as performance management, selection and promotion, discipline, and the cultivation of organizational ethics and morality, among other key areas. By judgment, we are referring to the process of determining the level of individual or group accountability and responsibility for decisions and behavior. As with almost all servant leader principles, these types of decisions entail balancing competing values and principles, and hence they are nuanced, thus requiring the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Servant leaders are responsible for the overall promotion of order, peace, stability, organizational wellbeing, and mission achievement. Therefore, there will be difficult decisions related to human conduct that manifest profound implications for the welfare of organizational members and their families. A good place to begin relates to a biblical view of judgment. What are the key principles?

First, it is important to distinguish judgments regarding behavior from God’s sole role in determining our eternal fate. Only God can judge salvation, hence we have no role in determining a person’s identity other than that we are all children of God in daily need of God’s
forgiveness and grace. As Christians, we can judge actions relative to sin, but not how God views the person or how the actions are judged from a salvation or long-term sanctification standpoint. If we would judge King David’s actions of adultery and murder in human terms (2 Samuel 12), we would have concluded that David would not retain God’s favor and salvation.

Both the Bible and social science research are in agreement regarding key human tendencies in the judgment process (Taggar & Neubert, 2004). In regards to our personal degree of accountability in situations of judgment, the natural human inclination is to assign blame for negative outcomes to others in the form of their lack of ability, motivation, or skill, rather than the influence of external factors beyond the person’s control. The converse is true for positive outcomes, as we have a tendency to take responsibility for success, discounting the influence of other people or external factors. When the judgment process centers on the responsibility levels of others, the “poles” are reversed and we are more likely to assign personal responsibility for negative outcomes to the person’s lack of character or ability and discount mitigating external factors beyond their control. From a biblical standpoint, we need look no further than the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and blamed the serpent and each other for the negative outcomes. We have a tendency to desire mercy and forgiveness for our own sins and failures, while asking for justice and accountability with others.

What are the biblical “Ten Commandment” principles related to the judgment process? They are listed below.

1. Servant leaders understand that the judgment process is another form of God’s love. Judgment is a means for speaking truth to others to promote their best interests and wellbeing. In biblical terms, when God judges, it is a last chance effort to gain the attention of humanity and convince them to repent and change their ways before it is too late.

2. Discipline is the second form of God’s judgmental love. The goal of discipline is to gain the person’s attention, to define the nature and consequences of the deleterious attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors, to clearly explain the rationale and nature for the corrective discipline and the negative consequences for the person and the organization if the issues are not corrected.

3. Judgment in biblical terms entails a respect and love for others. Judgment does not condemn, label, or stereotype others. It differentiates identity from behavior. Jesus judged the behavior and