



Lewis Center  
for Church Leadership

# Leading Ideas

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## Authenticity in Leadership

by Rudy Rasmus

When I walk into a church, I can tell almost immediately if the leader is authentic, transparent, and warm. If so, the entire congregation exudes these qualities. It is almost palpable. People greet me warmly, and there is a vibrant sense of life in the air. If, though, the leader values safety over spontaneity, I sense that people don't really know what's expected of them. They follow the prescribed rituals of church, but they seem empty, stiff, and lifeless.

Most pastors and other leaders who are stiff and distant are not that way because they are evil people. In the vast majority of cases, they are good-hearted people who really want to please God, but they are following the only ministry model they have ever seen: wearing masks and playing roles. But the mask of the completely competent, always in control, never-bothered leader hides the real, flesh-and-blood person who, no matter how spiritually mature he or she may be, struggles with the pain, complexity, and fears of being human. The mask tells people, "I'm okay. Don't mess with me. You may need me, but I don't need you." The mask has the look of authority and power—and distance.

A person who has the courage to take off the mask becomes a real person taking real risks in relationships. Trust is more important than control; warmth is a higher priority than excellence. This leader still wants to do things well, but competence is a means to the end of pleasing God and touching hearts, not a way to prove one's worth. The authentic leader is willing to share some struggles and hurts, and people feel connected to that leader.

David was the king of Israel, and he could have easily hidden his hopes, hurt, and fears. But he did not. His poems depict clearly and permanently his highest hopes and deepest depressions, his intense fears and his greatest praise for God. David hung it all out for us to see! And Paul, the first and foremost missionary of our faith, admitted, "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do." (Rom 7:15 NKJV) These leaders—two of the strongest, most effective leaders the world has ever known—were honest about their struggles.

If you are a pastor, I sincerely believe that God is calling you to take off any mask you might be wearing to protect yourself, and be an authentic leader. God is asking you to do what I do quite often: go to God with an honest heart and pray, "Lord Jesus, show me if I'm wearing a mask, and help me be more authentic, transparent, and warm."

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