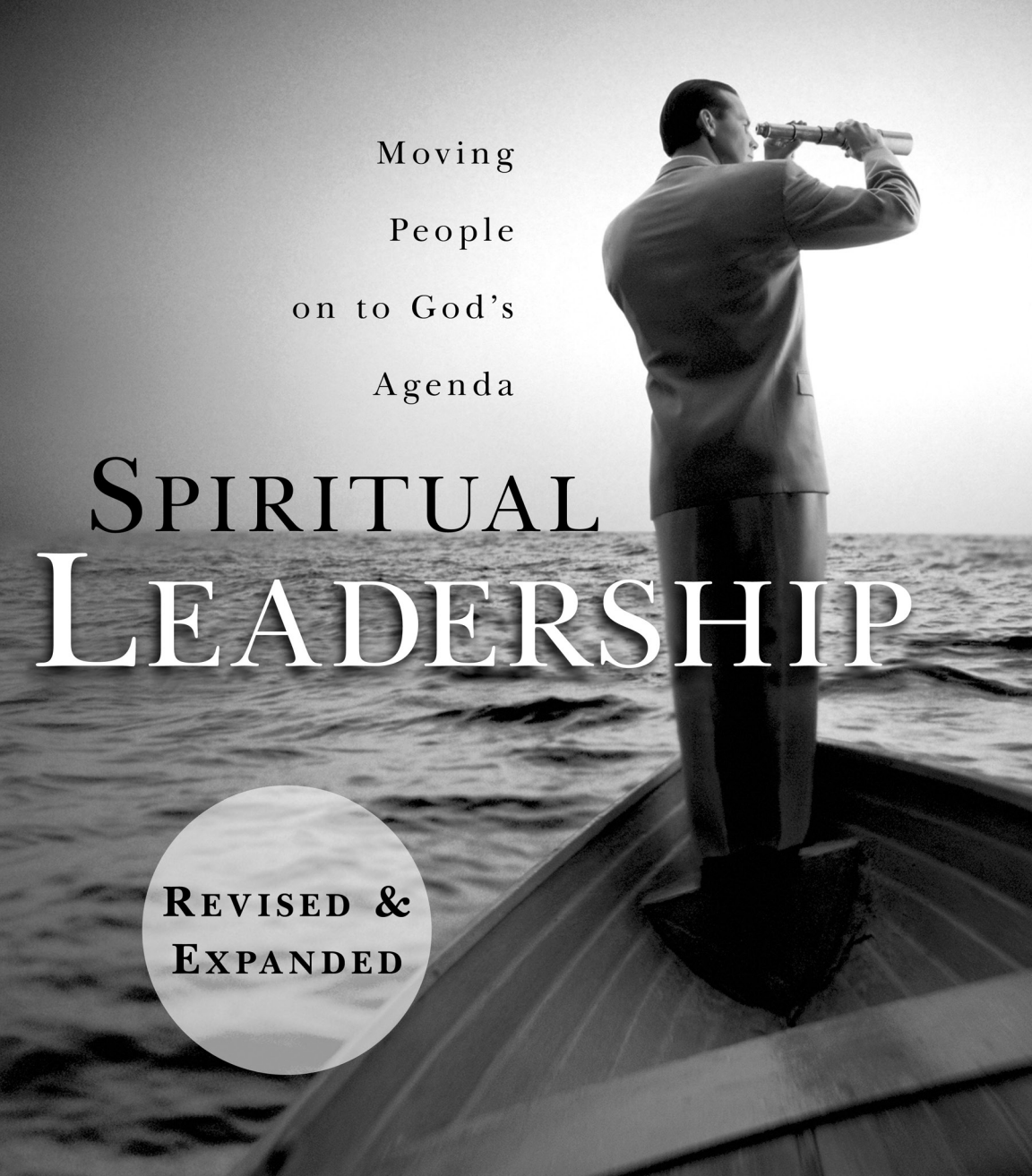


SPIRITUAL
LEADERSHIP



Moving
People
on to God's
Agenda

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

**REVISED &
EXPANDED**

HENRY & RICHARD
BLACKABY

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Acknowledgments

To have released a book on leadership in 2001 seems, on reflection, to have been fortuitous. What followed the events of 9/11 was a decade-long societal debate about the desperate need for robust leadership in government, business, military, home, and church. Everyone had an opinion, and reams of additional books and theories hit bookstore shelves with tsunami-like vigor. We could not have known when we wrote the original version of *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People On to God's Agenda* in 2001 that it would be so widely and enthusiastically received. We have been truly overwhelmed by how God has used it to encourage leaders around the world. We have personally handed the book to world leaders. A group of state senators read the book a chapter a week and discussed it in the state capitol building. Bible colleges as widespread as in the USA, South Africa, and the Philippines have used it as a textbook. Pastors have approached us at conferences and shown us their dog-eared copies. Christian CEOs have used it as a guide to know how to lead their Fortune 500 companies to honor God. Parenting organizations as well as Christian school faculties have studied the book. We have been privileged to teach its truths on six continents. Since many new theories and books on leadership have emerged since this volume was first released, we were asked to update and expand it to address many of the issues and theories that have dominated leadership thinking in recent years.

We are keenly aware that we did not write this book alone. God has placed along our path many amazing people who have enriched us, added texture to our lives, and infused joy to our journey.

At the top of our list, as always, are our wives. Henry and Marilynn reached a milestone this year—their fiftieth anniversary. Richard and Lisa have been married twenty-seven years. Being married to us has not been easy! We tend to work too hard and too long. Our travels keep us away from home for frequent and extended periods of time. Nevertheless, God knew what kind of lifelong companions we needed to add flavor and laughter to our lives and ministry. They have stood faithfully beside us when life proved difficult. Lisa has always done an outstanding job editing whatever we have written. No words are adequate to express our love for our soul mates.

We are also grateful for the many leaders God has placed around us over the years. We were both blessed to grow up in homes where we could sincerely affirm that our father was the greatest man of God we knew. Thankfully time has not altered those opinions. As teenagers we were blessed with leaders who loved us and taught us how to walk closely with God. In university and seminary God introduced amazing friends into our journey. As we launched out in ministry, denominational leaders, fellow pastors, and godly laypeople encouraged us to keep growing. At every stage of our lives, we could name friends, colleagues, and leaders who challenged us to strive for higher levels in our personal growth and leadership.

Throughout the course of our ministries, we have been privileged to meet some of the finest government, business, home, and church leaders in the world. They have added rich new dimensions to our perspectives and understanding of leadership. Over the last decade we have been blessed to work with Mac McQuiston at the CEO Forum who invited us to invest in the lives of some of the finest Christian CEOs in corporate America.

We are also grateful to those who carefully read through this revised manuscript and offered invaluable suggestions. These include Tom Blackaby, Rick Fisher, Hermann Brandt, Brett Pyle, and Bill Bliss. These men have also contributed much to the Spiritual Leadership Network operated by

Blackaby Ministries International www.blackaby.org which helps church, business, and home leaders move those they lead on to God's agenda.

This book was not written in a few months but over a lifetime. The space needed to list the people to whom we are indebted would double the length of this volume. We have been most fortunate to have journeyed with such outstanding people thus far in our lives. We will be forever indebted to the countless "ordinary" people who shared their extraordinary experiences and insights with us through conversations in conference centers, churches, hotel lobbies, airplanes, and living rooms around the world. We hope these truths impact your life and inspire you to rise to new levels of leadership, just as they have done with us.

Henry and Richard Blackaby
Blackaby Ministries International

Preface

Richard's daughter Carrie (nineteen) has never seen herself as a leader. As the baby of her family and the only girl, she has bravely endured two older, tormenting brothers her entire life. She claims her only aspirations are to purchase designer clothes and to look beautiful (which she does!). Ask her if she sees herself as a "leader" and she rolls her pretty eyes. Then when she turned sixteen, she had a wild, crazy, spontaneous inspiration. She invited three friends over to her house one Friday and announced that she was going to dye a strip of her hair . . . pink.

The other three girls were soon on the phone asking permission from their mothers to follow suit. Richard's home was transformed into a beauty salon. Word spread throughout the church youth group. Additional friends came by the house on Saturday, hair dye in hand. On Sunday morning Carrie sat in church beside *seven* other girls, all of whom were now sporting the latest fashion trend. Carrie is a leader. She just doesn't realize it yet.

Do you view yourself as a leader? Odds are if you picked up this book, you suspect you have the potential to lead others. However, this book is intended not only for those who fit the traditional leader profile but also for "ordinary" people who believe their world needs to change but who are not exactly sure what, if any, role they should play in that transformation. Perhaps

your children's behavior concerns you or you feel your family is somehow "off course." Maybe you are burdened over the present condition of your neighborhood, city, or nation.

You may strongly sense that your church or denomination is adrift from its original mission and needs to make major adjustments. It could be that the company for which you work is grossly underperforming. Leadership is about people who choose to make a difference. It often is not flamboyant, and it usually doesn't involve spellbinding speeches or dramatic actions. If you make the place where you live, work, study, and worship better, then you are a leader. And, if ever this world needed leaders, it is now.

A weak, declining organization teeters on the brink of disbandment; then a new leader arrives and everything changes. The leader doesn't do all the work, but peoples' performance and morale improves. A collective sense of relief and hope now pervades the atmosphere. Developments that eluded previous administrators for years are accomplished in weeks with a new leader at the helm.

How can the same collection of people languish under one leader and flourish under another? The very people who were previously the most disillusioned now generate the most results. The difference has little to do with the problems, limitations, or personnel. It has everything to do with good leadership. The fact is, whether they are chairing a church committee, leading a corporation, or rearing their children, some men and women are successful no matter what challenge they undertake while others suffer chronic failure and wallow in mediocrity.

Over the years we have repeatedly observed this phenomenon. The contrast between weak and strong leaders has always intrigued us. We are convinced that most organizations have potential for growth and success. The key is leadership. That's why we have invested years in developing and encouraging leaders. We spend a great deal of time with emerging leaders at the front end of their careers—men and women who wonder if they "have what it takes" to be leaders. We also counsel people from various walks of life who struggle with feelings of failure and regret because they have not realized their hopes and dreams. We also talk with troubled executives who have achieved

notable worldly success but worry their lives are making little difference in their families or God's kingdom. It is sadly ironic how many clerics have gained ecclesiastical renown while their own children soundly rejected their faith.

Despite voluminous rhetoric on the subject, the world is disoriented to what constitutes successful leadership. The Bible, however, has much to say about the subject. We have examined the Scriptures and studied the lives of effective leaders, both current and historical, to identify clear biblical principles that lead to effective leadership. As we have shared these truths around the world, we've seen men and women return to their leadership roles with renewed vigor and vision. Why? Because as in every other aspect of life, when people seek and follow God's ways, they experience profound results.

Bookstore shelves overflow with leadership tomes, and we have read scores of them. We will review helpful leadership insights found in both secular and Christian writings. We'll also consider successful leaders from various walks of life including business, military, government, and church leaders who demonstrate healthy leadership. Nevertheless, we believe crucial leadership truths are being overlooked. Moreover we are concerned that many Christian leaders are reading secular books and accepting their teachings uncritically.

Much secular leadership theory is based on presuppositions that may appear sound yet promote ideas contrary to the Scriptures. Secular and spiritual leaders may use similar methods, but spiritual leadership includes dimensions absent from secular leadership. Spiritual leaders who merely use secular methods may experience some degree of worldly success, but they will not fulfill their calling as spiritual leaders.

We wrote this book for spiritual leaders whether they lead Christian or secular organizations. Since this book was first published in 2001, hundreds of men and women have approached us with their stories. They were discouraged and prepared to resign their leadership positions, yet they retained a heartfelt desire for God to use their lives to make a positive difference in their organizations. As we helped them examine the Scriptures, leaders from all over the world have found encouragement and direction for their lives and organizations. The reason? They discovered God's agenda.

The guidelines we present are for *all* Christians whom God has called to be spiritual leaders. Holding a leadership position in a Christian organization does not make you a spiritual leader. Nor does working a secular occupation preclude you from being a spiritual leader at your workplace. *Spiritual leadership is not an occupation: it is a calling.* Christian businesspeople—physicians, educators, politicians, and parents—should be spiritual leaders. No matter what their occupations, more and more men and women are taking their calling as spiritual leaders seriously, and they are dramatically impacting the world and extending God’s kingdom. We will share some of their stories with you.

According to the Bible, God is not necessarily looking for leaders, at least not in the sense we might think. He is looking for servants (Isa. 59:16; Ezek. 22:30).

When God finds people willing to serve as he leads them, the possibilities are limitless. People everywhere are looking for someone to lead them into God’s purposes, God’s way. People will follow spiritual leaders who know how to lead them according to God’s agenda.

Since the original publication of this book in 2001, we have been asked to revise and update it. Over the last decade we’ve observed God moving dramatically among leaders, especially pastors, CEOs, military chaplains, school administrators, prayer leaders, and men’s and family ministries. We have traveled to numerous countries and met with a wide array of world leaders. In these pages we’ll share much of what we have learned. Every chapter has been significantly reworked; numerous new illustrations have been included, and a significant number of modern leadership issues are addressed. Two important new chapters have been added. If you benefited from the original volume, we pray you will receive additional encouragement and insight from this revised and expanded volume.

As you read this book, we pray you will accept the challenge to be that man or woman God is seeking. We hope you will experience the incredible joy and satisfaction of knowing God is using your life as his instrument to build his kingdom and to change your world.

Chapter One

The Leader's Challenge

Mike sat in stunned silence alone in the boardroom. He had appointments to keep, but now they seemed irrelevant. He remained frozen in his chair, trying to process the painful events of the previous hour. Mike was CEO of a sporting goods company. He was a young man—in his early thirties—bright, creative, and, he thought, good at his job. Moreover, he was a committed Christian with a strong work ethic. He'd always considered his faith to be an asset to his career. But the morning's executive team meeting shattered that assumption. What began as a routine weekly meeting escalated into an acrimonious dispute, revealing a pervasive undercurrent of resentment toward him—more specifically toward his Christian beliefs. A clear line was drawn, with his executive team demanding he keep his faith out of his business decisions.

First, the vice president for human resources announced a revision to the company benefits to include medical coverage for therapeutic abortions. He

urged Mike to herald the new policy as a public relations tool. Then Barbara from marketing announced a new advertising campaign, one using women in provocative sexual poses to advertise a men's product. Mike felt he had no choice but to veto both recommendations.

That's when the floodgates opened and his colleagues' hostility spewed forth. "What right did he have to impose his conservative religious beliefs on the company and its staff who did not share his personal values? His stance on the abortion policy was archaic, chauvinistic, and discriminating. This was the company's opportunity to show it was progressive and sensitive to its employees' needs. The sex angle on the television ad was certain to be more effective than the "family friendly" campaign Mike advocated. His staff seemed united on one thing—Mike's agenda for the company did not match theirs.

Mike was bewildered. His leadership team was talented and experienced. Yet most of them were not Christians, and he knew some of them were even disdainful of the Christian faith. Mike knew how important a unified team was to company success. If an insurrection of his executive leaders ensued, his board of directors would most likely assume Mike was unfit for the CEO role. His job was in jeopardy. He had to act quickly. Was there anything he could do? He worried about legal issues if he stood by his convictions. It had never been easy taking a stand for his faith at work, but he'd always tried to honor God at his job. Now it no longer seemed possible. Maybe he should face the reality that his job and his faith could not coexist in a secular environment and resign.

Pastor Edwards could barely withhold his tears. He could still hear the deacons' footsteps echo down the hallway as they marched from his office. The group had arrived unexpectedly and demanded an audience. Their spokesperson, the chairman of the deacons, began the charge. "Many" people were upset over his leadership style, and it appeared "things" had deteriorated to the point that it was best for everyone involved if he immediately resigned from the church.

A second member of the self-appointed tribunal read off a lengthy litany of concerns. Two years ago when Edwards enthusiastically accepted the call to serve as pastor of the medium-sized congregation, he was aware that the church had some problems. After all, every church has issues. He was young and his faith was strong. He sincerely believed that prayer, biblical preaching, and loving ministry to his congregants would revive the ailing church. But the problems worsened. Land mines were exploding everywhere he stepped. Several families requested more modern music in the services and he had obliged. In doing so he inadvertently alienated other families who were now withholding their tithes as well as their service until the music was changed back to their preferred style. One of the deacons was rumored to be in an adulterous relationship. When Edwards had approached him privately about the subject, the offended deacon had appealed to his friends and polarized the entire deacon body. The alarmed deacons accused Edwards of witch hunting. No one denied there was substance to the rumor, but they argued that this man had great influence in the community. They pointed out the sad truth that the church could ill afford another public scandal. When Edwards proposed hiring a part-time youth pastor, a battle erupted. Various interest groups in the church clamored for expanded ministry—for seniors, for choir members, for college students, for the divorced, and for children. Even his preaching had come under fire—too long, not enough humor, too much humor, too academic, too shallow . . . Edwards had grown weary under the stress, but he remained strong in his belief that, if he persevered, the problems would eventually sort themselves out. That was before this visit. Their words deeply wounded him: “As representatives of this church, we feel obliged to tell you that the best thing you can do for our church is to resign immediately. If you do so, we can give you a decent severance and let you keep your health insurance while you circulate your résumé to other churches. There may be a church out there who appreciates your style of leadership . . .” The pastor slumped into his chair with his face in his hands. What more could he have done? He had worked to the point of exhaustion for this congregation. He had sacrificed time with his wife and children, spending most evenings at church

meetings, counseling people in distress, or visiting potential members. He knew where the church should be heading, but he simply could not get the people to support his efforts. He felt like a total failure and wondered if he had been misguided to enter the ministry in the first place.

Leadership: The Challenge

Leadership. Everyone experiences it, or the lack of it, daily. The media bombards us with news of new terrorist threats, economic crises, political compromise, and moral failures. Church attendance is declining and Christian values are being publicly ridiculed. Would-be leaders vehemently criticize current office-holders while assuring the public that if given the chance, *they* could resolve the ominous issues that threaten it. Being a leader in such an environment is a daunting task. Bookstores boast rows of books on leadership, but there is still no consensus on exactly what it is. Those expected to follow grow impatient with leaders who fail to resolve their problems and increasingly frustrated as their organizations continue to flounder. Struggling leaders agonize, knowing that others resent them and blame them for their organizations' impotence and decline. Countless discouraged leaders would quit their jobs today, but they need the income and they fear the same problems would engulf them in their new jobs. In an online survey conducted by *USA Today*, people were asked: "If you won the lottery, would you quit your job?" 45.4 percent responded "Definitely." 18.9 percent answered "Probably." Only 10.9 percent said "Definitely not."¹ Clearly most people are working solely for the income and not out of a sense of calling. Many people today would concede that leading is no fun. Christian leaders carry the additional burden that they are not only failing their people but God. They feel guilty because they lack the faith to move their organization forward, yet they are afraid to move on lest they are no more successful in their new venture. Is there any hope for leaders who are not experiencing fulfillment or reaching the potential God intends for them? If anything can revolutionize today's Christian leaders, it is when they understand God's design for those he calls to lead.

During the American Revolutionary era, John Adams complained, “We have not men fit for the times.”² On December 23, 1776, the iconoclastic writer, Thomas Paine wrote: “These are the times that try men’s souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it NOW, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman . . . yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.”³ Certainly the twenty-first century holds unprecedented opportunities for leaders to make a dramatic difference in their world. However, the challenges leaders are facing have never been more complex or hazardous. James Canton in his book, *The Extreme Future*, suggests the top five factors that will define the “extreme” future: speed, complexity, risk, change and surprise.⁴ While the future holds untold numbers of opportunities and obstacles, we believe society is experiencing three current issues that will have profound implications for those attempting to lead organizations into the future.

Technology

The Western world has been on a never-ending quest to enhance its quality of life. Scientific breakthroughs used to be infrequent, but now they occur regularly. The rapidity of technological advance is likewise accelerating the speed of change in every arena of life. It is becoming much more difficult for people to incorporate the latest technological advances into their lifestyle and business. We have not even accommodated the latest technological innovation before a newer, more sophisticated hybrid is announced. If you have been using a cell phone for the last decade, try to remember your first one. A decade-old cell phone is downright prehistoric!

What does the dizzying rate of technological advance mean for today’s leaders? First, they must be comfortable with change. When Richard was a seminary president, he was informed that seminaries were changing so rapidly that every five years these institutions were morphing into something new. If leaders were not constantly reinventing themselves, they would soon

be obsolete. To make matters worse, seminaries were notorious for their traditionally *slow* rate of change!

Business leaders know that fierce competition and shareholders hungry for immediate profits in a global market make rapid adaptation necessary. Phil Rosenzweig in his book *The Halo Effect* suggests that companies that are largely technology driven find it almost impossible to stay at the top of their market due to clones, intense competition, and changing technology.⁵ Business leaders can't afford to fall asleep at the wheel or they will wake up in a junkyard.

Digitalization is rapidly speeding up most aspects of our lives and creating impatient consumers with demanding expectations. Sophisticated technology has made communication both a blessing and a curse. Electronic messages provide instant access to leaders anywhere in the world. In times past people sent messages to leaders and then waited for days or even weeks for a reply. People accepted delayed responses as a matter of course.

Past leaders could take time to ponder their decisions and consult with advisors before responding. The dynamics of communication have drastically changed. The moment someone sends an electronic message, they know that within seconds they could (and therefore should) receive a reply.

A church youth minister we know messaged six of his youth fifteen minutes into their first class period when all cell phones are verboten. He received a reply from all six in less than two minutes. Busy leaders can return from a lunch appointment to discover dozens of messages awaiting them, all expecting an immediate reply. In any airport you see harried executives deplaning and consulting their cell phones to discover that while they traveled the first leg of their business trip, their in-box was filling up with urgent messages, most of them demanding a reply before they board their next flight. Cell phones can be tremendously helpful to leaders as they maintain close contact with their people, but beleaguered executives and pastors are discovering that those devices designed to make their work less burdensome follow them everywhere, even on their vacations.

Past leaders had certain times in their day when they were inaccessible. During such times they could reflect on their situation and make decisions