

MAKE IT **COUNT**

A 10-week study for leadership teams by *Influence* magazine



Mastering the Soft Skills of Leadership

By **STEPHEN BLANDINO**

DISCUSSION GUIDE

MAKE IT COUNT

A 10-Week Study
For Leadership
Teams

What Is Make It Count?

Make It Count is a leadership development resource for use individually or with staff, volunteers, or board members.

Each installment is also available online as a downloadable PDF, along with interactive pages for group member use. The underlined words and phrases in the following text correspond to fill-in-the-blank sections on team member pages. Access these free resources at influencemagazine.com/Downloads.

These lessons are written by **STEPHEN BLANDINO**, lead pastor of 7 City Church in Fort Worth, Texas, and the author of several books.



Mastering the Soft Skills of Leadership

By **STEPHEN BLANDINO**

Leadership is a combination of hard and soft skills. Hard skills focus on the specific tasks of leadership, such as finances, strategic planning, project management, and sermon preparation. These technical skills help you fulfill responsibilities that are unique to the role.



But leadership also encompasses soft skills. The soft skills of leadership focus on people, teams, and the qualities that build enduring influence. Soft skills are transferrable from one job to the next and are essential regardless of the context.

This edition of *Make it Count* explores 10 soft skills of leadership and considers ways to master each. Lessons include the following:

1. Emotional Intelligence. The ability to manage your own emotions as well as those of others is essential to leadership. In fact, some experts consider it the

most important leadership skill. Emotional intelligence requires self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

2. **Empathy.** Empathetic people understand and sense what others are feeling. Empathy requires humility, connection, listening, gentleness and kindness.
 3. **Active Listening.** The most effective leaders practice active listening. Active listeners form connections by using their ears, eyes, heart and body language.
 4. **Interpersonal Communication.** Effective interpersonal communicators pay attention to what's said, how it's said, and unspoken cues embedded in the interaction. This requires authenticity, respect and engagement.
 5. **Adaptability and Flexibility.** Rigid ministry leaders often fail to make room for the new work of the Spirit. Leaders must be firm about what matters but flexible in how it's delivered. This requires continual openness to change and new opportunities.
 6. **Collaborative Teamwork.** Leaders are responsible not only for building teams, but also helping them work collaboratively toward the fulfillment of a vision. Collaborative team members value one another, utilize everyone's gifts, and contribute to a spirit of unity.
 7. **Problem Solving.** Leaders will always have problems to solve and tensions to resolve. This calls for engaging a problem-solving team, defining the problem, and finding creative solutions.
 8. **Conflict Resolution.** Conflict arises when there's a gap between expectations and reality. Resolution involves careful timing, positive communication, and a willingness to listen.
 9. **Continuous Learning.** Pastor Gerald Brooks once said, "Every level of growth calls for new levels of change." Effective leaders have a posture of growth that enables them to adapt to the various seasons of ministry.
 10. **Resilience.** Leadership is hard, which is why resilience is critical. Leaders can bounce back from setbacks when they develop a healthy perspective, growth mindset, and supportive community of friends.
- While reading and reflecting on these lessons, take steps to develop soft skills of leadership personally and as a team.

1 | MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Emotional Intelligence

Assess

How would you define emotional intelligence?

Insights and Ideas

What's the most important leadership skill? Some might suggest vision casting, while others would point to strategic planning, time management, or team building.

While each of these is important, one skill that often rises to the top in leadership discussions is emotional intelligence.

Author, psychologist, and emotional intelligence expert Daniel Goleman wrote this about the importance of emotional intelligence: "Without it, a person can have the best training in the world, an incisive, analytical mind, and an endless supply of smart ideas, but ... still won't make a great leader."

For years, emotional intelligence was largely ignored. Today, it is widely recognized as a master skill for success. What exactly is emotional intelligence? Goleman defines it as "the ability to identify, assess and control one's own emotions, the emotion of others and that of groups."

Developing emotional intelligence requires leaders to pay attention to four areas.

1. Self-awareness: recognizing moods and emotional states and how they impact others. Without self-awareness, you're incapable of making changes because you don't even know a change is needed.
2. Self-management: controlling emotions, adapting to change, and acting according to personal values. Self-management puts you behind the steering wheel of your emotions, ensuring a more pleasant encounter for those who interact with you.
3. Social awareness: staying attuned to the emotions of others while demonstrating empathy and care. Paying attention to emotional cues from others provides insight for responding in a healthy way.
4. Relationship management: navigating emotions successfully, handling conflict effectively, and cultivating healthy interactions. The ability to manage the emotional dynamics of relationships reveals a leader's maturity and people skills.

The spiritual side of emotional intelligence closely resembles the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22–23 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

The fruit of the Spirit shapes every part of our lives, including interactions with others. As we grow in Christlike character, we will also grow in emotional intelligence. Not only will our personal relationships benefit, but our leadership will flourish at an entirely new level.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What relationship do you see between the fruit of the Spirit and emotional intelligence?
2. Who is the most emotionally intelligent person you know, and what have you noticed about his or her interpersonal relationships?
3. Which of the four areas of emotional intelligence above is your greatest strength, and which is your biggest challenge?

Apply

Take an emotional intelligence assessment to help quantify your current proficiency. Then discuss as a team areas of strength and weakness. Finally, put together a plan to improve in your areas of weakness. The good news is you can grow in emotional intelligence.

1 | MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Emotional Intelligence

“Without [emotional intelligence], a person can have the best training in the world, an incisive, analytical mind, and an endless supply of smart ideas, but ... still won’t make a great leader.” — Daniel Goleman

Emotional intelligence: “The ability to identify, assess and control one’s own _____, the emotion of _____ and that of _____.”

Four aspects of emotional intelligence:

1. _____: recognizing moods and emotional states and how they impact others.
2. _____: controlling emotions, adapting to change, and acting according to personal values.
3. _____: staying attuned to the emotions of others while demonstrating empathy and care.
4. _____: navigating emotions successfully, handling conflict effectively, and cultivating healthy interactions.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22–23).

Apply

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2 | MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Empathy

Team Review

What is your plan for growing in emotional intelligence?

Assess

What does empathetic leadership look like to you?

Insights and Ideas

An empathetic person has the ability to understand, sense, and even vicariously experience what others are feeling.

Empathy is more than just a feeling. It has a capacity for caring that drives action. As author Mark Miller observed, “Empathy is a skill powered by energy. No energy, no empathy.”

What behaviors mark an empathetic leader? Scripture provides some practical clues.

1. **Humility.** The apostle Paul said, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). Empathetic leaders put others first.
2. **Emotional connection.** Romans 12:15 says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” An empathetic leader connects with people by celebrating their wins and feeling their losses.
3. **Listening.** James 1:19 says, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

James began his instruction by telling church members to “take note.” He understood that listening can be difficult. Even leaders struggle with this skill. But listening is a gateway to empathetic leadership.

4. **Gentleness.** My wife is a counselor, and she sometimes talks about the importance of a “gentle start-up.” The idea is approaching conversations and managing responses with gentleness rather than harshness.

As Proverbs 15:1 says, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Gentleness can make a profound difference for leaders who are highly driven.

5. **Kindness and compassion.** Ephesians 4:32 begins with these words: “Be kind and compassionate to one another.” Empathetic leaders exhibit behavior that shows genuine respect, dignity, and thoughtfulness toward others.

Notice the order of these five empathetic behaviors. We start with humility. Without it, we’ll never value people.

Then we make an emotional connection. People feel connected to us when they’re known and noticed. This connection deepens when we actively listen to people.

When it’s time to respond, a gentle start-up makes the difference and protects the connection.

Finally, showing kindness and compassion reveals our empathy in practical measures.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How do the five behaviors of empathy make a positive difference in leadership?
2. Which of these behaviors comes easiest for you?
3. In which area do you most need to grow?

Apply

Think of a recent time when you could have been a more empathetic leader. Which of the five behaviors was missing in your interaction? What would it look like to express that behavior in future interactions? Start each morning this week by making empathy a matter of prayer. Keep that goal and prayer in focus as you interact with others.

2 | MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Empathy

An empathetic person has the ability to understand, sense, and even vicariously experience what others are feeling.

“Empathy is a skill powered by energy. No energy, no empathy.” — Mark Miller

Empathetic behaviors:

1. _____.
“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).
2. *Emotional* _____.
“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15).
3. _____.
“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19).
4. _____.
“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).
5. _____ *and* _____.
“Be kind and compassionate to one another” (Ephesians 4:32).

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Apply

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3 | MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Active Listening

Team Review

How have you shown empathy in your interactions with others over the past week?

Assess

What leader in your life demonstrates effective listening skills, and how does that kind of listening affect your relationship?

Insights and Ideas

There are different types of listeners. Some people are cafeteria-style listeners. They treat listening like a cafeteria line where they choose *this* but ignore *that*.

Others are informational listeners. They tune in to learn or acquire facts and knowledge.

Then there are critical listeners. They listen to form judgments and make critiques.

However, the most effective listeners are active listeners. James Hunter, author of *The Servant*, observes, “Active listening is attempting to see things as the speaker sees them and attempting to feel things as the speaker feels them.”

Proverbs 18:13 warns, “To answer before listening — that is folly and shame.” To become an active listener, focus on *being interested* more than *being interesting*. This happens as you put into practice four dimensions of listening.

1. *Listen with your ears.* Leaders who practice active listening pay careful attention to what’s being said. They don’t listen to respond, but to understand.
2. *Listen with your eyes.* Listening leaders focus their attention on the person speaking. They understand that eye contact improves focus and gives them the ability to connect with others.
3. *Listen with your heart.* Active listening isn’t simply a matter of words. It’s closely linked to feelings. It involves empathy, compassion, and genuine care for others. Active listening makes it possible to connect with another person’s heart.
4. *Listen with your body language.* Active listeners look interested. They lean in to what others are saying. Their body language communicates value for the other person.

Billy Graham once said, “A suffering person does not need a lecture; he needs a listener.” To improve your leadership, develop the soft skill of active listening. It will make all the difference when it comes to connecting with people.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Why is it sometimes hard for leaders to listen?
2. How does being *interested* matter more in leadership than being *interesting*?
3. Which of the four expressions of active listening would help you improve your listening?

Apply

Ask a trusted leader to rate you on a scale from 1 to 10 in the four expressions of active listening. Don’t get defensive. Instead, pay attention, take notes, and then ask how you could improve. Openness to feedback is critical for growth. This process will also help you practice active listening.

3

MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Active Listening

“Active listening is attempting to see things as the speaker sees them and attempting to feel things as the speaker feels them.” — James Hunter

“To answer before listening — that is folly and shame” (Proverbs 18:13).

Four dimensions of listening:

1. *Listen with your* _____.

Leaders who practice active listening pay careful attention to what’s being said.

2. *Listen with your* _____.

Listening leaders focus their attention on the person speaking.

3. *Listen with your* _____.

Active listening makes it possible to connect with another person’s heart.

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Apply

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4 | MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Interpersonal Communication

Team Review

What did you learn through feedback about your listening skills?

Assess

What do you think are the greatest keys to effective interpersonal communication?

Insights and Ideas

Every interaction with others requires interpersonal skills. Without these skills, you risk damaging the relationship and limiting its depth and potential.

Author John Kotter observed, “Communication comes in both words and deeds. The latter is generally the most powerful form.” Effective interpersonal communication pays attention to what’s said, how it’s said, and the unspoken cues embedded in the interaction.

Each lesson we’ve covered up until now contributes to interpersonal communication. Emotional intelligence, empathy, and active listening are game changers in how we connect with people. In addition, these six practices will make a world of difference.

1. **Authenticity: Be real.** You cannot build healthy connections on a false veneer of hypocrisy. Fakes and facades don’t build enduring trust or firm foundations for long-term relationships. You must start with authenticity.
2. **Dignity: Be respectful.** People want to be treated with respect. Remember that God’s image is stamped on every person with whom you interact (Genesis 1:26–27). Devaluing people is an affront to the image of God.
Treating people with dignity gives you moral authority. Devaluing others kicks the legs out from under your interpersonal communication.
3. **Presence: Be engaged.** Effective interpersonal communication requires being fully present. When you’re distracted or disengaged, you send a message to the other person that he or she doesn’t matter. Be present.
4. **Dialogue: Be balanced.** Make space for two-way communication. Resist the urge to talk over others. Above all, work hard to be *interested* instead of *interesting*.
Don’t show off or dominate the conversation. Instead, show interest in what the other person has to say by asking questions and listening intently.
5. **Clarity: Be concise.** Blood pressure increases when clarity decreases. You are responsible for communicating clearly and concisely. If your words create confusion, uncertainty, or an endless cycle of rambling, you’re doing more harm than good to the relationship.
6. **Grace: Be kind.** Colossians 4:6 says, “Let your conversation be always full of grace.” I often remind leaders to speak the truth in the tone of grace. Being harsh only undermines communication efforts.

These six practices will bolster your interpersonal communication and help you become more relationally engaged.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What does a good conversationalist do?
2. How have you seen the six qualities above make a difference in effective interpersonal communication?
3. Which communication attribute would you most like to improve?

Apply

On a scale from 1 to 10, grade yourself in each of the six attributes. Then identify the lowest score and ask someone who is strong in that area how you can improve. Use that feedback to create a plan for strengthening your interpersonal communication.

4 | MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Interpersonal Communication

“Communication comes in both words and deeds. The latter is generally the most powerful form.” — John Kotter

Effective interpersonal communication pays attention to what’s said, how it’s said, and the unspoken cues embedded in the interaction.

Six practices of interpersonal communication:

1. _____: *Be real.*

You cannot build healthy connections on a false veneer of hypocrisy.

2. _____: *Be respectful.*

People want to be treated with respect. Remember that God’s image is stamped on every person with whom you interact (Genesis 1:26–27).

3. _____: *Be engaged.*

Effective interpersonal communication requires being fully present. When you’re distracted or disengaged, you send a message to the other person that he or she doesn’t matter.

4. _____: *Be balanced.*

Make space for two-way communication. Resist the urge to talk over others. Above all, work hard to be *interested* instead of *interesting*.

5. _____: *Be concise.*

Blood pressure increases when clarity decreases. You are responsible for communicating clearly and concisely.

6. _____: *Be kind.*

“Let your conversation be always full of grace” (Colossians 4:6).

Apply

On a scale from 1 to 10, grade yourself in each of the six attributes. Then identify the lowest score and ask someone who is strong in that area how you can improve. Use that feedback to create a plan for strengthening your interpersonal communication.

5 | MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Adaptability and Flexibility

Team Review

What steps have you taken to improve your interpersonal communication skills?

Assess

Would you consider yourself more rigid or flexible? Why?

Insights and Ideas

Structure is valuable to leadership. For example, we need structure when we're creating systems for assimilation, discipleship and services. Job descriptions and organizational charts call for structure.

However, structure should ultimately serve people. When structures become handcuffs, we may miss out on what God desires to do next.

While structure is important, we must also be adaptable and flexible. Jesus said, "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved" (Matthew 9:16–17).

Rigid forms of ministry often fail to make room for new works of the Spirit. That's why adaptability and flexibility are crucial for ministry leaders. You can cultivate flexibility in four ways.

1. *Be firm with vision but flexible with vehicles.* Your vision is an anchor point in the church. If you're constantly switching from one vision to another, people will get organizational whiplash. Be firm with your vision but flexible with the vehicles for fulfilling it.
2. *Be a lifelong learner.* Lifelong learning keeps you open to new ideas and better methods for doing ministry. Read good books, find great mentors, and engage in powerful learning experiences. The goal isn't just acquiring knowledge, but applying it to leadership.
3. *Create space for new ideas.* We usually feel most comfortable with our own ideas. That's OK as long as those ideas are working. But when the shelf life runs out on our ideas, it's time for an upgrade.

Whether they come from team members, other leaders, conferences, books, or coaches, consider some fresh ideas.

4. *Be flexible with changes and opportunities.* I like my schedule, but life doesn't always go as planned. Leaders must learn when and how to roll with changes and embrace opportunities.

Sometimes you need to set boundaries to keep interruptions and changes from getting out of hand. Other times you should be flexible enough to meet a need or leverage an opportunity.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What energizes or unsettles you when it comes to being flexible and adaptable?
2. How can flexible people and rigid people successfully work together?
3. Which of the four points above most challenges you? Why?

Apply

Discuss as a team how to establish boundaries around what matters most while remaining flexible and adaptable enough to try new things. Be open with one another about your personal tendencies toward flexibility, and discuss how to leverage your strengths to maximize ministry impact.

5

MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Adaptability and Flexibility

“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved” (Matthew 9:16–17).

Rigid forms of ministry often fail to make room for new works of the Spirit.

Four ways to become more adaptable and flexible:

1. *Be firm with _____ but flexible with _____.*

If you're constantly switching from one vision to another, people will get organizational whiplash.

2. *Be a lifelong _____.*

The goal isn't just acquiring knowledge, but applying it to leadership.

3. *Create _____ for new ideas.*

Whether they come from team members, other leaders, conferences, books, or coaches, consider some fresh ideas.

4. *Be flexible with _____ and _____.*

Leaders must learn when and how to roll with changes and embrace opportunities.

Apply

Discuss as a team how to establish boundaries around what matters most while remaining flexible and adaptable enough to try new things. Be open with one another about your personal tendencies toward flexibility, and discuss how to leverage your strengths to maximize ministry impact.

6 MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Collaborative Teamwork

Team Review

What progress has your team made toward being firm with what matters but flexible and adaptable to new ideas?

Assess

How can a team effectively collaborate?

Insights and Ideas

In his first letter to the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul said, “If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body” (1 Corinthians 12:17–20).

Team building is a soft skill of leadership, but a team must also work collaboratively toward a vision. Paul’s words about the body offer applicable principles for building collaborative teams.

1. *Collaborative team members acknowledge each person’s value.* Paul said, “God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be” (verse 18). The Body is God’s design, and each member is a valuable part of it.

To build collaborative teams, each team member must value the others. God made each person in His image and placed every member of the Body where He desires.

2. *Collaborative team members utilize everyone’s gifts.* Each team member has a specific role to play, and that role should utilize his or her gifts. A body would be incomplete if every part were an eye, an ear, or a nose. It takes all the parts working together for the body of Christ to function as it should.

The same is true with teams. You don’t need a team of people with the same gifts. Your ministry needs a variety of gifts — leadership, service, encouragement, teaching, giving, showing mercy — to maximize impact and fully realize its redemptive potential (Romans 12:6–7).

3. *Collaborative team members contribute to unity.* Paul said, “As it is, there are many parts, but one body” (verse 20).

On a team, there are multiple members, but one vision. As long as team members contribute their gifts toward the fulfillment of a unifying vision, the sky is the limit. But if members use their gifts to chase diversions, it will be difficult for the team to accomplish anything of significance.

The points above require action. When team members practice these principles, collaboration grows.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How can your team members more intentionally show value for one another?
2. What are the gifts of each team member, and how can your ministry leverage these for the greatest good?
3. What is your team’s unifying vision, and what threatens to distract members from that vision?

Apply

Identify the area in which your team most needs to grow: valuing one another, utilizing everyone’s gifts, or working in unity. Then develop a plan for improving, checking in on progress during weekly or monthly meetings.

6

MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Collaborative Teamwork

“If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body” (1 Corinthians 12:17–20).

Qualities of collaborative teams:

1. *Collaborative team members acknowledge each person’s* _____.

God made each person in His image and placed each member of the Body where He desires.

2. *Collaborative team members utilize everyone’s* _____.

A body would be incomplete if every part were an eye, an ear, or a nose. It takes all the parts working together for the body of Christ to function as it should.

3. *Collaborative team members contribute to* _____.

If members use their gifts to chase diversions, it will be difficult for the team to accomplish anything of significance.

Apply

Identify the area in which your team most needs to grow: valuing one another, utilizing everyone’s gifts, or working in unity. Then develop a plan for improving, checking in on progress during weekly or monthly meetings.

7 | MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Problem Solving

Team Review

What steps has your team taken to work more collaboratively toward a unifying vision?

Assess

How does your team solve problems?

Insights and Ideas

Problems are part of the leadership landscape. Nehemiah faced challenges when rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. The apostles worked through complex issues that threatened unity in the Early Church, such as disputes over which Jewish customs Gentile converts should follow.

Leaders must learn to navigate and solve problems. Author and pastor Rob Ketterling said, “We can make one of two errors when a problem suddenly surfaces: we become paralyzed, or we act impulsively. Neither of those is effective leadership.”

Instead, we need a strategy for working through problems effectively. Start with the following seven steps.

1. *Engage a problem-solving team.* Some problems are too big to solve alone. You need a team of creative thinkers who can view the issue with a solution mindset.
2. *Define the problem.* Before solving a problem, you must clearly define it. While this step may seem obvious, many leaders try to manage symptoms rather than dealing with the actual problem. Ask hard questions to clarify the real issue.
3. *Research creative solutions.* After determining what the problem is, consider options for addressing it. This may require conversations within the congregation, among staff members, or with outside leaders. If it’s a major issue, you might even need to hire a coach or consultant.
4. *Calculate the impact.* There’s no such thing as a problem-free solution. Taking steps to resolve one issue invariably creates new wrinkles. The solution may require investments of time and money. Or it may involve fielding complaints from congregants who are resistant to change. Carefully evaluate proposed solutions to ensure the positive impacts far outweigh the potential costs.
5. *Consider the details.* Develop the necessary plans, budgets, and processes for implementation. Filling in gaps as you go will only lead to frustration.
6. *Create a communication strategy.* Talk about the solution with stakeholders. If it’s a major initiative, communicate through the various layers of the church, including department heads, staff members, board members, key leaders, volunteers, and congregants.
7. *Implement the solution.* Once the solution is communicated, take the plan you’ve developed and begin implementing it. In addition, make the implementation process a team effort.

These seven steps are critical to the problem-solving process. They will help you gain clarity, come up with solutions, create buy-in, and master implementation.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What examples from Scripture offer practical problem-solving wisdom?
2. Which strategy above has been your weak spot in problem solving?
3. What additional steps would you recommend in the problem-solving process?

Apply

Consider a recent problem your team had to solve. How did you use the steps above to implement a solution? Were any steps missing? What would you do differently in retrospect, and how can you apply those lessons to a problem you’re dealing with now?

7 | MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Problem Solving

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“We can make one of two errors when a problem suddenly surfaces: we become paralyzed, or we act impulsively. Neither of those is effective leadership.” — Rob Ketterling

Seven steps to problem solving:

1. *Engage a problem-solving* _____.
Some problems are too big to solve alone.
2. _____ *the problem.*
Many leaders try to manage symptoms rather than dealing with the actual problem.
3. *Research creative* _____.
After determining what the problem is, consider options for addressing it.
4. _____ *the impact.*
There’s no such thing as a problem-free solution. Taking steps to resolve one issue invariably creates new wrinkles.
5. *Consider the* _____.
Develop the necessary plans, budgets, and processes for implementation.
6. *Create a* _____ *strategy.*
Talk about the solution with appropriate stakeholders.
7. _____ *the solution.*
Once the solution is communicated, take the plan you’ve developed and begin implementing it.

Apply

Consider a recent problem your team had to solve. How did you use the steps above to implement a solution? Were any steps missing? What would you do differently in retrospect, and how can you apply those lessons to a problem you’re dealing with now?

8

MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Conflict Resolution**Team Review**

How have you implemented the problem-solving steps from the last lesson?

Assess

What's one of the biggest leadership conflicts you've had to deal with, and how did you resolve it?

Insights and Ideas

Your ability to navigate conflict reveals a great deal about your maturity as a leader. Every leader encounters conflict. But without a sensible strategy for navigating it, conflict can quickly create bigger issues and even undermine trust.

Conflict usually arises when there's a gap between expectations and reality. In those moments, differences turn into disagreements.

How do you find a path forward in the midst of conflict? Four foundational ingredients will help you successfully navigate conflicts and come to a place of resolution.

1. **Facts.** Ephesians 4:15 tells us to speak the truth. Beating around the bush will only lead to bigger issues.

Truth telling isn't always easy, especially when someone is defensive, argumentative, or emotionally fragile. But when we fail to focus on facts, we can get sucked into an emotional war. In the end, we may never get to the root issue of the conflict.

2. **Tone.** Ephesians 4:15 continues, "Speaking the truth in love." Truth in the wrong tone can do more harm than good. I often tell leaders, "Speak the truth in the tone of grace."

Proverbs 15:1 captures it well: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

3. **Listening.** Stephen Covey said, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." This is only possible when you listen carefully and intently. Listening demonstrates respect, creates understanding, and cultivates common ground.

Proverbs 18:13 says, "To answer before listening — that is folly and shame."

4. **Timing.** Conflict is often emotional, which is why timing is critical. Before addressing an issue, you may need to allow time for everyone to cool down.

Proverbs 29:11 says, "Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end."

Leaders must get their emotions under control before they can calm others.

Ephesians 4:29 is another helpful passage to keep in view when mediating conflicts: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

Your approach to conflict resolution should ultimately create dialogue that builds and benefits relationships as you move toward resolution.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What's the hardest part of conflict resolution for you?
2. Think of a time when you got conflict resolution wrong. What did you do to hurt the resolution process?
3. Think of a time when you got conflict resolution right. What did you do differently to contribute to a positive outcome?

Apply

Think of a conflict you are dealing with now. Process this conflict through the four points above. With these things in mind, put together a plan for moving toward a resolution.

8

MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Conflict Resolution

Your ability to navigate conflict reveals a great deal about your maturity as a leader.

Conflict usually arises when there's a gap between expectations and reality.

Four ingredients for navigating conflict resolution:

1. _____.

Ephesians 4:15 tells us to speak the truth. Beating around the bush will only lead to bigger issues.

2. _____.

Ephesians 4:15 continues, "Speaking the truth in love." Speak the truth in the tone of grace.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

3. _____.

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood." — Stephen Covey

To answer before listening — that is folly and shame" (Proverbs 18:13).

4. _____.

"Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end" (Proverbs 29:11).

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29).

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Apply

Think of a conflict you are dealing with now. Process this conflict through the four points above. With these things in mind, put together a plan for moving toward a resolution.

9

MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Continuous Learning

Team Review

What have you done to move toward successful resolution in a conflict you're facing?

Assess

What does it mean to have a lifelong learning posture?

Insights and Ideas

Leadership experts James Kouzes and Barry Posner wrote, "Whether it's a performer on stage, an athlete on the court, or a leader in an organization, people assume effortless performance develops without effort."

If only it were that easy.

What some leaders make look easy came about only through enormous investments in professional growth. Without continuous learning, you'll never reach your full potential or make your greatest ministry impact.

But growth doesn't end with learning. Your education needs application. As author and pastor Gerald Brooks says, "Every level of growth calls for new levels of change." Therefore, leaders must learn *and* put that knowledge into practice.

In his second letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul wrote, "When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments" (2 Timothy 4:13).

Paul was an avid learner. He could have requested many things from Timothy, but his scrolls and parchments were among the items Paul most wanted.

How important is growth to you? Read each of the following statements, and give yourself a score on a scale from 1 to 5 (with 5 representing strong agreement).

1. I have a written personal growth plan to guide my development.
2. I have a mentor or coach with whom I regularly meet.
3. I have a regular discipline of reading books to grow as a leader.
4. I listen regularly to podcasts that help me grow in my specific ministry responsibilities.
5. I attend conferences annually.
6. I spend time with ministry leaders who stretch my thinking.
7. I learn from leaders outside my ministry field or discipline.
8. I welcome constructive feedback from my pastor or supervisor.
9. I have a system for recording what I'm learning so I can easily access it in the future.
10. I share what I'm learning with my team.

Tally your score. If your score is high, pay extra attention to Points 9 and 10. In addition, reflect on whether you need to begin learning from some new sources.

If your score is low, pick two areas to improve. Additionally, find a growth partner you can meet with regularly to share what you're learning.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Why do we tend to assume "effortless performance develops without effort"?
2. In what ways might growth require change?
3. What was your final score from the 10 statements above? What can you do to improve your score?

Apply

Reflect again on the 10 statements above. Pick two areas to begin improving. Revisit the list in 30 days to determine your next steps.

9

MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Continuous Learning

“Whether it’s a performer on stage, an athlete on the court, or a leader in an organization, people assume effortless performance develops without effort.” — James Kouzes and Barry Posner

“Every level of growth calls for new levels of change.” — Gerald Brooks

“When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13).

Growth assessment:

1. I have a written personal growth _____ to guide my development.
2. I have a _____ or _____ with whom I regularly meet.
3. I have a regular discipline of _____ books to grow as a leader.
4. I listen regularly to _____ that help me grow in my specific ministry responsibilities.
5. I attend _____ annually.
6. I spend time with ministry _____ who stretch my thinking.
7. I learn from leaders _____ my ministry field or discipline.
8. I welcome constructive _____ from my pastor or supervisor.
9. I have a _____ for recording what I’m learning so I can easily access it in the future.
10. I share what I’m learning with my _____.

Tally your score. If your score is high, pay extra attention to Points 9 and 10. In addition, reflect on whether you need to begin learning from some new sources.

If your score is low, pick two areas to improve. Additionally, find a growth partner you can meet with regularly to share what you’re learning.

Apply

Reflect again on the 10 statements above. Pick two areas to begin improving. Revisit the list in 30 days to determine your next steps.

10 | MASTERING THE SOFT SKILLS OF LEADERSHIP

Resilience

Team Review

What intentional steps have you taken during the past week to learn and grow as a leader?

Assess

On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the best), how well are you at bouncing back after setbacks?

Insights and Ideas

Leadership is hard, which is why resilience is crucial to the journey. Without it, you risk debilitating discouragement and overwhelming defeat.

The apostle Paul provides a great example of resilience. In 2 Corinthians 11:25–28, Paul shares a litany of struggles and hardships he encountered during his ministry journeys. He was beaten with rods and shipwrecked three times. He was pelted with stones, and in danger from rivers, bandits, Jews, and Gentiles. Paul faced danger in the city and country, at sea, and from false believers. He went without sleep, food, and water, and he faced the elements without adequate clothing. Amid all these pressures, Paul also carried a deep concern for all the churches.

Paul had plenty of problems that could have become permanent setbacks to his ministry. Many times, he could have called it quits. But Paul was resilient.

What does it take to cultivate that kind of resilience? It starts with three essentials.

1. A *healthy perspective*. How you view hardship affects how you'll respond to it. Paul's perspective allowed him not only to acknowledge the Lord's grace as sufficient, but also to say, "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).
2. A *growth mindset*. Author and pastor Craig Groeschel once said, "Peaks are nice, but you don't see many farms on mountaintops. Why? Because things grow better in valleys. Your time in the valley may not be pleasant, but it's in the valleys of life that you grow closer to God and stronger in your faith."

This is true if you possess a growth mindset. It will help you draw lessons from the well-worn paths of pain and suffering.

3. A *supportive community*. Life is too hard to navigate alone. We need friends who don't care about our titles. We need people who will laugh, cry and pray with us.

Community reminds us we are not alone and gives us courage to hold on through the storm.

We all want to be resilient leaders, but experiencing hardship is the only way to develop resilience. When you walk through difficulties, take with you the three essentials above.

Reflect and Discuss

1. When did you grow in resilience, and what did you learn in the process?
2. How did having the right perspective, mindset, or community help you get through a tough time?
3. Which of these do you need to become more intentional about developing?

Apply

When we quit in the middle of our pain, we don't just quit the pain. We also give up the victory on the other side of that pain. Prayerfully think through the three ingredients above, and then identify ways to strengthen each one in your life.

Resilience

In 2 Corinthians 11:25–28, Paul shares a litany of struggles and hardships he encountered during his ministry journeys. He was beaten with rods and shipwrecked three times. He was pelted with stones, and in danger from rivers, bandits, Jews, and Gentiles. Paul faced danger in the city and country, at sea, and from false believers. He went without sleep, food, and water, and he faced the elements without adequate clothing. Amid all these pressures, Paul also carried a deep concern for all the churches.

Three keys to resilience:

1. *A healthy* _____.

How you view hardship affects how you'll respond to it.

“That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

2. *A growth* _____.

“Peaks are nice, but you don’t see many farms on mountaintops. Why? Because things grow better in valleys. Your time in the valley may not be pleasant, but it’s in the valleys of life that you grow closer to God and stronger in your faith.” — Craig Groeschel

3. *A supportive* _____.

Life is too hard to navigate alone. We need friends who don’t care about our titles. We need people who will laugh, cry and pray with us.

Apply

When we quit in the middle of our pain, we don’t just quit the pain. We also give up the victory on the other side of that pain. Prayerfully think through the three ingredients above, and then identify ways to strengthen each one in your life.