

# Five Habits of High-Capacity Leaders

## Surprising lessons from influential pastors

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I had the privilege of attending a small conference alongside some very successful and influential U.S. pastors. I went expecting a lot of posturing and one-upmanship. Thankfully, I was wrong. To my surprise, some of the best lessons I learned were from the participants themselves.

I felt like an outsider — like a dwarf among giants — but they welcomed me and taught me by their example how to become a better leader and pastor. Here are five things I discovered about high-capacity leaders:

*1. High-capacity leaders value time.* Though I showed up on time to the conference sessions, I felt late. Nearly every attendee was seated and ready for each session to start — five minutes early. In the church and ministry environments I've been familiar with, this never happens. My takeaway was that high-capacity leaders value their time and the time of others. They show up early and ready. They plan ahead rather than hoping the details fall into place.

*2. High-capacity leaders are ready to learn.* Personally, I know I have a lot to learn, so I'm eager to listen, read and take notes when others are teaching. But I didn't expect this from these high-capacity leaders, who, from my perspective, had already arrived. Nevertheless, these pastors sat with tablets or laptops out, nearly on the edge of their seats, ready to listen, take notes and learn from the presenters.

High-capacity leaders are humble enough to realize they will never truly arrive. Great leaders are great students. They come ready to learn how to grow in life and leadership.

As I spoke with various pastors in the room about their note taking, I discovered a pattern. They not only take great notes, but they write down what they'll do with what they've learned. Now, as I'm learning and writing, I list in bold caps each action step I need to take with the information I'm learning. Then I follow through on those steps.

## *High-capacity leaders are humble enough to realize they will never truly arrive.*

*3. High-capacity leaders ask better questions.* These pastors seemed to have an intuitive ability to ask great questions. I learned as much from some of the things they asked as from the answers the presenters gave. The intent of better questions isn't to make the person asking them look smart; it's to draw more value from the speaker.

Better questions are open-ended, not closed, inviting the person responding to lean in to a wealth of experience and offer what he or she would rarely share. Leaders can borrow such questions from others for future use. My personal favorite is, "What are the lessons in life and leadership that cost you the most?"

*4. High-capacity leaders are connectors.* Surprisingly, there was very little conversation around the size of our churches or budgets or any other posturing. These pastors were gracious and made me feel like I belonged.

Everyone in the room seemed like they were one another's best friends — even though many were meeting for the first time. They were quick to ask one another questions and actually listen. They cared, showed empathy and offered support. It was disarming and encouraging, and it created a sense of belonging that, admittedly, can feel lacking in a world of leadership where the motto is often, "It's lonely at the top."

These leaders had an uncanny way of connecting with each other and helping the unconnected belong. I left realizing that great leaders are great networkers. They excel at making connections and helping others do the same.

*5. High-capacity leaders add value.* Several times a pastor I had just met said to me, "Here, you need to meet Pastor X, who can really be a help to you." Then, the pastor introduced me as a friend. Leaders offered me their cell numbers, mentoring and coaching, words of encouragement, and their church resources.

Rather than wanting to get something from me, these pastors added value. Like loving parents investing in their children, these leaders seem to overflow with generosity and goodwill. I genuinely felt they wanted me to win, and that if I won, they would be my most enthusiastic cheerleaders. They were sincerely interested in adding value to the life of someone who may never be able to return the favor.

The examples of these high-capacity leaders surprised me and schooled me. The lessons they taught me continue to shape my growth as a leader.

*This article originally appeared in the July/August 2019 edition of Influence magazine.*

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