

Six Marks of Lay Leadership:

Mark Number 6

“The Leader Handles Opposition” (Nehemiah 4-6)

1. Opposition is not the same as Constructive Suggestions

The title of chapter 4 in *From Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't* is “Confront The Brutal Facts.” Jim Collins contrasts two older grocery stores which responded differently the brutal facts. The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company or A&P, was at one point ranked second only to General Motors in the 1950s. Kroger was one half the size of A&P.

By the 1960s, the two stores were neck and neck. But for the next 25 years, Kroger out sold A&P. What made the difference?

A&P had the perfect model for the first half of the 20th century with the two world wars and frugality which resulted. People wanted simple grocery stores with low prices. By the 1960s with a new affluence, what the American consumer desired had changed. Now they no wanted a simple utilitarian store but a Superstore. “They wanted nicer stores, bigger stores, more choices in stores. They wanted fresh-baked bread, flowers, health foods, cold medicines, fresh produce, forty-five different types of cereal, and ten types of milk. They wanted offbeat items, like five different types of expensive sprouts and various concoctions of protein powder and Chinese healing herbs. Oh, and they wanted to be able to do their banking and get their annual flu shots while shopping.”

A&P refused to face the brutal facts. The CEO, Ralph Burger, would not adapt to the new consumer. He reasoned “You can’t argue with a hundred years of success.”

Kroger faced the same brutal facts of a changing market and made the choice to change the old-model grocery store which meant changing 100% of their stores. By 1999, Kroger was the number one grocery store in America and A&P had one half of its stores old 1950 model.

One company faced the brutal facts and the other did not (Jim Collins. *Good to Great*. Pages 65-69).

Proverbs 9:8 says, “Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate you, rebuke a wise man and he will love you.” When we as individuals or leaders of ministries are confronted the brutal facts of sin or even doing ministry differently in order to minister more effectively, we must act on the brutal facts.

2. Opposition is Inevitable

Nehemiah faced opposition from without in chapter 4 from Sanballat. In chapter 5, Nehemiah faced opposition from within from selfish believers. In chapter 6, Nehemiah faced opposition again from without. What is the point? Opposition is inevitable if you are trying to accomplish anything significant. Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of God's city and faced opposition. In the book of Acts, believers were building the church and faced opposition.

Charles H. Spurgeon, who knew much about opposition said, "The devil never beats a dead horse." Spurgeon was the most loved pastor in London at one time and at the same time the most hated.

3. Opposition Requires Humility

"No leader is exempt from criticism, and his humility will nowhere be seen more clearly than in the manner in which he accepts and reacts to it" (J. Oswald Sanders. *Spiritual Leadership*. page 110). A leader needs the hide of a rhinoceros and the tender heart of a mother. Paul rebuked Peter in Galatians 2, and apparently Peter responded properly. Whenever Peter referred to Paul afterwards, it was always positive.

4. Opposition Comes because of Change (4:1)

Swindoll wrote in *Hand Me Another Brick*, "The heart of the habitual critic resists change. To him change is a threat" (page 72). All change is not good but change is necessary for growth and is the result of growth.

Imagine a father of a 15 year old, sitting his son down for a talk. "I know you probably have one more growth spurt left. I don't mind you growing just don't change. When you change it is expensive. I can't afford more shoes and new clothes. Grow, that is fine. Just don't change."

By as early as Acts 6, the growing early church had to change its organization and add deacons to help meet the growing need of visitation of widows.

5. Opposition sometimes expressed in Ridicule (4:1-6)

Ridicule is the no brainer response. When the opponents cannot defeat us with reason, they turn to ridicule. Shakespeare called ridicule "paper bullets of the brain." These bullets are very harmful.

A. The Ridicule (4:1-3)

The workers are ridiculed in 4:1-2 and the work is ridiculed in 4:3 by Sanballat and Tobiah.

When you are criticized here is a principal I once heard, “Consider the source.” It sounds like Nehemiah had also heard that bit of wisdom. He does even give them the dignity of a response. Sanballat and Tobiah had already criticized Nehemiah in 2:19, 20. So he is not surprised to hear from them again.

B. The Response (4:4-6)

The response was not retaliation against the opponent. The response was an imprecatory prayer to God perhaps based on Genesis 12:2 where God promised, “I bless them that bless you and curse them that curse you.” Nehemiah turned his enemies over to God. The next response was a return to the work of rebuilding the walls in 4:6. Nehemiah was not a quitter. He did not constantly run from his problems. If you run from one problem when you get to the next place, person, or set of circumstances, what will you face? Problems.

One job applicant commented on his application, ‘Please don’t misconstrue my 14 jobs as ‘job hopping.’ I have never quit a job’” (Henry Blackaby. *Spiritual Leadership*. Page 108).

6. Opposition can intensify to Threats (4:7-9)

A. The Threats (4:7-8)

The opposition intensified from ridicule to threats (4:7-8). While prayer helps us face our problems, prayer does not always end our problems. The opposition increased in numbers and danger.

B. The Response (4:9)

Nehemiah faced intensified criticism with intensified prayer (4:9a). The first response must always be prayer. In addition to prayer, guards were placed on the walls (4:9b). Prayer is usually never the only response. We pray and work (4:6). We also pray and watch or do what is a common sense response.

What do you do to protect your home from home invasion? Pray! Lock your doors! Install an alarm system! Pack some heat!

What do you do when you are out of a job? Pray! Create a resume. Fill out applications. Pound the pavement.

What do you do when you are opposed? Jesus said, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

Samuel Brengle was noted for his genuine holiness. He was a commissioner in The Salvation Army around 1900. On one occasion, he was injured when a drunk threw a brick at him. He was

unable to preach for 18 months because of the injury. On another occasion, a biting, censorious attack was made on his spiritual life. His answer was: 'I thank you for your criticism of my life. It set me to self-examination and heart-searching and prayer, which always leads me into a deeper sense of my utter dependence on Jesus for holiness of heart, and into sweeter fellowship with Him' (J. Oswald Sanders. *Spiritual Leadership*, page 110).