

Q&A with Clay Scroggins
How to Lead When You're Not in Charge:
Leveraging Influence When You Lack Authority
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Q: What lie about leadership did you believe early in your work life?

A: When I was growing up, I felt most alive in positions of leadership. Unfortunately, it was just so natural to believe that I had to have a title to feel like a leader. Whether it was running for student government or being named captain of a sports team, I felt like the title gave me the opportunity to lead. The more I have learned about leadership, the more I realize that it is actually the other way around. The title comes after leadership has been proven.

Life teaches us that the authority to lead and the opportunity to lead are a package deal. We think they go hand-in-hand like cranberry sauce and turkey. When we're given the authority to lead—a title, a uniform, a corner office—then and only then will we have the opportunity to lead. But that's just not true.

Q: What have you learned about leadership while working under your boss, Andy Stanley?

A: From my perspective, Andy has spent a lot of his life intentionally seeking to create a leadership culture where decisions are pushed down to the lowest level possible. He wants to ensure the people who are responsible for executing a decision have the authority to make the decision. If North Point gravitates toward one end of the spectrum, it's toward freedom to lead out instead of having a culture of high control. At North Point, if you have a desire to push forward, ideas for adding value, and a sense of purpose, but fail to lead out because you aren't in charge, you can only blame yourself.

I still remember the moment my excuses for not leading well were exposed. I realized I had been focused on blaming others instead of actually leading. My exposure was more of an internal conviction of my need to change. But it was still a game-changer, drastically changing the way I think about leadership. I learned that leaders don't sit back and point fingers. Leaders lead *with* the authority of leadership—or *without* it. If you're a leader, you will lead when you are needed.

Q: Are you suggesting authority isn't part of the leadership equation?

A: Absolutely not, but authority isn't the starting block for leadership.

At one point during his ministry, Jesus warned his followers to not confuse a position of authority or power with a call to lead. Because they were in danger of getting this wrong, he made an abrupt distinction between how he wanted them to lead and the way things typically operated in the world. "Not so with you!" he says. What is the "not so" of leadership that Jesus referred to here? It's the type of leader who seeks authority for his or her personal gain. Jesus taught them that the best leaders, the ones who are aligned with him, will lead as servants, aware of their responsibility as they answer to a higher call.

Even when we have authority and official positions of leadership, inspiring leaders do not need to leverage their authority. "Not so with you" leaders learn that there are ways to cultivate influence and build trust. Jesus tells us that this is the way to lead—by example and for the right reasons.

Q: What role does ambition play in a leader's life?

A: To me, this gets to the heart of the *why* of leadership—the engine that motivates your leadership train. Leaders are driven by something inside of them and it does no good to not know what that is. Too often, there is a distortion inside of leaders when they're faced with dealing with the ambition to lead but without the authority to lead. This distortion limits our influence and causes a host of issues that will follow us wherever our professional life takes us.

The distortion I see for many young leaders revolves around this one word: *ambition*. I call it a distortion for a reason. I believe God has placed a desire for more, a desire to see things change, to make things better, and to lead inside of us, but it gets easily twisted. And when the ambition inside us is distorted, it affects every aspect of our leadership, and something meant for good can be co-opted by a selfish motive or a narrow focus that is of no benefit to anyone but you. We either sit on our hands in passivity or we feel like we need to go out on our own to let our ambition loose. However, I believe there's a third way.

Q: What does it mean to “lead yourself” first?

A: You are in charge of you. You are in charge of your emotions, your thoughts, and your decisions. It's the law of personal responsibility, because everyone is responsible for leading something, even if that something is just you. When you're not in charge, the most common temptation you'll face is to abdicate responsibility. “If they had wanted me to take responsibility, they would have put me in charge. And since I'm not in charge of all, I'm in charge of nothing.” But this is dangerous. This attitude is not evidence of a lack of leadership; it's a sign of *bad* leadership. Remember, all of us are leaders. You have leadership in you, and if you find yourself abdicating responsibility because you're not in charge, step one is to recognize it. Step two is to fix it. When you're not in charge, you can still take charge of you.

Q: Do you see “leading yourself” as a prerequisite for leading others?

A: Great leaders know how to lead when they're in charge because they've been leading long before they were ever given that authority. That's the big idea I hope people will take away from this book. I hope loads of people will see that it's possible to lead from where they are right now. I hope they know they don't have to wait for that future position they've been dreaming about in order to begin leading.

Leadership starts right now, wherever you are. You have everything you need to lead. You have the examples of those around you. You have the example of Jesus. You interact with people you can serve every day. Leadership is not about waiting to lead until people call you a leader. It's about doing everything you can to lead from right where you are.

One of the best things you can do today is to begin asking yourself questions about how and why you want to lead when you're in charge. Then, start leading with those answers in mind. Anyone can daydream about what they will do once they're in charge. But it takes a unique person, a real leader, to imagine this reality and then put it into action before they have that position of authority.

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