

# October 20, 2008

## The Deepening Leadership Crisis

David Gergen is a former White House advisor to United States Presidents Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and Clinton. He now directs the Harvard University Center for Public Leadership. He recently wrote a blog article about the deepening leadership crisis we are facing. Here are some of the excerpts from his article...

“Yesterday’s stunning rejection by the House of Representatives of this financial rescue plan represents one of the clearest signs yet of the deepening leadership problems we are facing as a people. The pleas of the President, Congressional leadership, the business community, and the press were all ignored and defied by a majority of members in the House... (One of) the reasons so many voted against the package was that the public has been against it – and in turn, the public has not been persuaded because it has lost trust in our national leadership. And THAT is a serious problem...”

“At Harvard’s Center for Public Leadership ... we have taken public surveys in each of the past three years measuring confidence in our nation’s leadership.. The results haven’t been pretty. In the fall of 2005, some 65% said we have a leadership crisis in our country. By 2006, the number had risen to 69%. And last fall, no less than 77% declared there was a crisis of leadership. 79% said the United States would decline unless we get better leaders.”

“Please note that this survey did not reflect just an unhappiness with President George W. Bush. It was widespread across 12 different institutions and leadership groupings. Only the military and the medical profession were given relatively high marks this past fall. The institutions and groups with the lowest levels of confidence were smack in the middle of the recent financial meltdown. Four of the five lowest rated groups were business, Congress, the executive branch, and the press. No wonder the “leaders” of these institutions had so much trouble persuading the general public about the seriousness of our financial mess. What we see today then is a leadership vacuum.”

According to the survey, when asked “How much confidence do you have in the leadership of the following sectors?” with one = none, two = not much, three = a moderate amount, and four = a great deal, here were the results:

Military	3.15
Medical	3.02
Supreme Court	2.90
Educational	2.84
Nonprofit and Charitable	2.83

Religious	2.80
State Government	2.78
Business	2.75
Local Government	2.70
Congress	2.53
Executive Branch	2.43
Press	2.26

In his book Eyewitness to Power, David Gergen identifies seven characteristics that are needed for the leaders of today's organizations:

An inner mastery,

A central, compelling purpose rooted in moral values,

A capacity to persuade,

Skills in working within the system,

A fast start,

A strong, effective, team, and

A passion that inspires others to keep the flame alive.

As we talk about the paradigm shift going on in the church in the western world, from an attractional and maintenance model to a more missional model, one of the key ingredients is leadership. What does a survey like this tell us about how our religious leadership is being perceived by the culture around us? What does this tell us about the kind of leadership challenges we should expect and how we should respond? There are leadership skills, habits, and capacities that are essential for pastors and religious leaders, that we may have never developed or been told that we needed before.

David Gergen says we have a leadership vacuum today. Do you think that is true of the church? Can you identify some church leaders that you admire and respect?

The Allelon Missional Leadership Network is one group that has helped me think through what church leadership for our times needs to look like. I believe leadership is about:

Creating an environment,

Character and authenticity and courage,

Allowing the vision to emerge from the bottom up, not giving it from the top down,

Creating meaning in the midst of chaos, and

Shaping a new imagination, not tips and techniques.

We have a leadership crisis. We have a leadership vacuum. We are in a time of transition. How will God create a new leadership to move us forward during this time of great uncertainty and great opportunity?