



PRINCIPLES FROM THE WORLD'S BEST LEADERS

Applying lofty leadership lessons to Christian camping ministry

Leaders shape us, sometimes without us even knowing it.
If I were to ask you for a list of the greatest leaders
you've benefited from, who comes to mind?

Photo courtesy of SpringHill Camps (2018)



Over the course of my life, I've had the privilege of working with and watching many people I consider exceptional leaders. Not all have had massive influence, but all of them made a significant impact on me. ▶

I've written and spoken many times about one of them — Horst Schulze, the founding COO of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. I've talked about the way he leads with excellence and respect for those he serves with. Horst has participated in several CCCA events and has provided training that has helped us focus on world-class hospitality. If you were at the CCCA national conference in Phoenix in 2015, you may remember when he said all the principles of legendary Ritz-Carlton customer service can be summed up in two words: "Be nice." The simplicity of this statement is something I'll come back to.

Horst is an example of a leader who knows that leadership worth modeling requires daily attention. What you repeat with consistency will become a habit in yourself and your team. He's outlined the attitudes and behaviors that bring that philosophy to life, but notably, he also has required his team to teach and re-teach these principles to one another during what he called "the daily lineup." Repetition builds a kind of muscle memory that helps leaders ensure brand consistency in how we serve each other and our guests.

Alan Mulally is another leader who is recognized for his unique perspective. He's arguably one of the best leaders of our time. When he was president/CEO of Ford Motor Company, *Fortune* magazine ranked him No. 3 on the World's Greatest Leaders list, following the Pope at No. 1 and German Chancellor Angela Merkel at No. 2.

I had the privilege of watching Mulally from a close vantage point early in my career when he was general manager of the Boeing 777 division. He would occasionally write a note on the top of the *777 News Bulletin*, of which I was the editor, and leave it on my desk. His notes always contained an airplane with a smiley face next to his signature. Alan says all he knows about leadership he can fit on one slide. In April 2018, he spoke to a group of leaders from CCCA member camps at the Ascend conference in Arizona. In his hour-long talk, he used just one slide containing all his leadership principles. At the end, he said, "That's all I know."

Often leaders feel that their messages have to be complex, unique, perhaps even earth-shattering, to really be powerful and impactful. But if it's going to be adopted by those we lead, the message has to be simple, memorable — even livable. When I met with Mulally before his engagement with CCCA members, I told him that I appreciated the simplicity of his principles, which made following them seem so easy. He replied, "It has to be simple or it just seems too difficult to accomplish. If you can break it down to language a child can understand, certainly, it must be achievable by professionals."

Here are a few of Mulally's principles that I think could be important for Christian camps.

Most simply and yet so often overlooked: *There's one plan and everyone knows the plan.*

For generations, the Boeing Company had been run according to the "Theory X" management style. Some characterize it with the adage: "When I want your opinion, I'll give it to you." In other words, "I'm the leader here, I don't need your input. You're here to do what I say." I wonder how many reading this would say, "Yep, that's pretty much how it is at my camp."

In the grand culture shift that happened on the 777 program, Mulally championed the concept of everyone knowing the big picture and understanding where they fit into it. One can imagine a football team — whether 10-year-olds in a flag football league or champions of the sport's professional league — falling into confusion on the field if there's no unified understanding of the plan. Imagine the coach during a timeout saying to the team, "OK, everybody go out and just do what you do best. ..." but not calling a play for them to run. The hope of a unified, successful effort would be lost. Isn't it just common sense to think that our teams will do better if we all know where we're going and what we're trying to accomplish?

Mulally created a sense of real transparency, in which every employee had access to the top leaders of the division at All-Team Meetings. "No question is off the table," he would say during question-and-answer sessions with thousands of employees at a time. And he meant it.

Do you have a strategic plan that is affirmed by your board of directors? Has your team seen it? Are you thinking about changing processes, adding a service, hiring a new team member or group of team members? Let everyone in on it; allow them to see "behind the curtain" of leadership into the decision-making process. You may be amazed at how morale increases when people feel like they are part of the process rather than just a cog in the wheel.

If you don't serve in a position that helps to create the plan that provides the roadmap to success, what if you asked your leader to share it with you? You could point to the fact that having additional context for your work would help you understand how you can serve better. ►

There's one plan and everyone knows the plan. —Alan Mulally



Photo courtesy of Mount Hermon (2021)

Have fun — enjoy the journey and each other.



Photo courtesy of Camp Phillip (2021)

Another Mulally principle: Have fun — enjoy the journey and each other.

Mulally and Schulze both promote the practice of valuing team members. At the Ritz-Carlton, Schulze coined the phrase, “ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen” as a way to describe his staff. He wanted his team members to know they were important and valued, and worthy of the label “ladies and gentlemen” so they could have confidence in serving their guests at the highest levels. Mulally adds to this principle the idea of having fun: “... but never at someone else’s expense,” he said. “You can never make someone the subject of jokes or ridicule, or even ‘good-natured’ put-downs. That runs the risk of hurting or alienating team members and damaging the trust and confidence required for all team members to contribute.”

I’ve seen a lot of teasing, kidding and “friendly” put-downs in Christian camping. I confess it makes me cringe a little. And I always think something like, “I hope that doesn’t leave a mark.” As the youngest of three boys, I received a lot of put-downs as I was growing up, and they left several wounds that I’m sure my brothers didn’t intend. I think we would be well served in our teams at camp to commit to using more care in the way we use joking to communicate. If Mulally’s teaching is correct, you could be impacting teammates more than you know, and actually inhibiting the growth and health of your team with your fun-intended barbs. This may seem like a small thing to highlight here, but I would ask: Why would the third-greatest leader in the world include it in his key principles of leadership if he didn’t think it was a high-impact issue?

Not all of the leaders I’ve admired made an impact on a global scale, but their impact on my life was profound. At the top of that list is Martha Canright. I’m pretty sure you’ve never heard of her because she never authored a book, never held a leadership position, never spoke in front of crowds. In fact, she never made it past eighth grade. And her greatest influence on my leadership wouldn’t fully sprout and grow until decades after I observed her in action.

Martha was my grandmother. Most who knew her would describe her as simple, humble, loving and committed to her God. She prayed for me, taught me Scripture, and made me feel loved and special long before I entered into a relationship with God myself.

She led by example, entering into times of morning and evening worship with her family, inviting everyone in, in a way that implied you would, of course, participate. I recall her always getting down on aging knees to pray as a physical sign of her submission to God.

But she taught me by example what it meant to be meek and mild and self-sacrificing, and by doing so, she revealed her great strength. I watched as she responded with love and forgiveness when she was mistreated and disrespected by others. I saw her yield her rights in an effort to display the love of Jesus. I witnessed her declining to push back, to strike back, to “set the record straight” because she believed the greatest impact she would have was to love and serve another with the kindness of Christ.

What can we learn from the woman I called “Gram?” Perhaps it’s that sometimes setting aside our own rights can be the greatest way to follow Christ’s example. She lived Philippians 2:3, which says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourself.”

If you hold a position of any authority, how can you demonstrate to those around you that you value them? That you consider them your equal, even though the website may show that yours is the elevated title? Would you pause to ponder that question? I think the answer is so personal to you that I won’t even presume to give you specific advice here.

One other thing I’ll say about my grandma: She invested in people. Yes, she cared for the elderly in her church, even when she herself was elderly. But I’m talking about the personal commitment to be present when she was with someone. I remember her playing games with us frequently, taking walks and admiring — no, *adoring* — creation out loud, holding me and caring for me when I was hurt, either physically or emotionally. I always felt like I was the most important person in her world when we were together. Is there an application we can apply to our teammates, or even our families, from her example? Do the people in our presence feel important, valued, heard and cared for? How can you impart that feeling to them?

I’ll close by sharing what I think is the most important characteristic of a leader today: humility. I believe it’s most important because humility keeps us grounded, prevents us from getting too easily offended, thinking of ourselves as extremely important, and can help us not become a giant pain in the neck. ►

If we remain humble, we can see more clearly our need for growth and improvement.

The late president of Young Life, Denny Rydberg, once told me, “The higher one puts themselves up on a pedestal, the more others want to knock them down.” That’s a pragmatic application of humility — don’t invite others to take a shot at you by acting like you think you’re “all that.”

I’ve seen this lived out by a friend who had a very high-profile moral failure. Witnessed by an audience of millions, this boldly outspoken, passionate follower of Jesus had a moral meltdown. He risked losing everything: family, career opportunities, ministry impact. But this one thing he did: He owned it. He humbled himself and said, “Yes, I am that guy.” He acknowledged his need for forgiveness and accepted it, from God and those closest to him. Then he moved on in humility.

If we remain humble, we can see more clearly our need for growth and improvement. We will hold our job, maybe even our lives, loosely — as though they are on loan from God, to be filled and lived by us until He is done with us, until He moves us on or takes us home. I think it’s hard to get arrogant or act entitled or feel more important than others when we stay aware that we’re only in it as long as God decides we should be here. If we stay humble, it’s easier not to take ourselves too seriously, to admit our mistakes and to listen to others who may have far better ideas than our own. And our whole team will be the beneficiaries. ■



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