

# Leading MPD from the Middle

Jeremy J. Henderson | TEACHING NOTES

## Opening Illustration:

There is something about driving a *stick shift* that really is *incomparable*. It's a sense of total control of the driving experience that an automatic simply doesn't deliver. In December 2018, I was in the process of purchasing my 2019 Toyota Tacoma. I was talking about my ideal options, and thinking realistically about not just what I wanted, but what was within budget. You can guess what I asked for—the ideal truck with a *manual transmission*. What the salesperson said to me, I'll never forget: "What you are asking for is a unicorn—It simply doesn't exist."

For some of us, we are chasing a reality that *simply does not exist*. Like the control that a stick shift offers to the driving experience, we're looking for that kind of TOTAL control in the area of ministry or organizational leadership. If only you and I had the autonomy to make all the decisions, unquestioned and unchecked, then all of our missionaries and staff members would be fully funded in a year, our ministries would be "in the black", and our relative Boards would be patting us on the back. ***Isn't that what leadership in the FIRST CHAIR is like?***

Clay Scroggins in *How to Lead When You're Not in Charge* says this:

*"... be aware that you will never find that magical place where you can lead without any constraints. There isn't a healthy church or organization that exists for leaders who think they don't need an authority over them. The dream of an unrestricted frontier where you can lead exactly how you want, when you want, and in the direction you want is a pipe dream. It doesn't exist. The more leaders I speak with, the more I realize that no one ever feels fully in charge."*

Scroggins, Clay. *How to Lead When You're Not in Charge* (pp. 71-72). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

In short, this sense of complete autonomy, that feeling of really being in charge, that security that comes from being at the top. ***It's a unicorn; it doesn't exist.***

## Setting the Stage:

I wanted to start here in our time today, because I wanted to lay down the baseline that, really, there is a sense in which none of us “feel” 100% “in charge”. So, what I’d like to share today really may have some relevancy no matter where you find yourself on the organizational chart (but it will especially be important for those who are either coaches or those who are the “Champion” of this area in their ministries.

**QUESTION:** OK. So that we can take a moment to gauge who is “in the room”, let me ask you a question (and you can just raise your hand in response):

- **Who here is “in charge” of this area of your ministry? This is OFFICIALLY your “Domain”.**

INDICATORS:

Decision Maker

Policy Writer

Accountable to Executive Leadership

Hold Others Accountable

ROLES:

Director of Partner Development

Vice President of Partner Development\

MPD Catalyst

*Lead* Internal SRS Bootcamp Facilitator

- **Who here is NOT “in charge” of this area of your ministry, but you influence it. This is UNOFFICIALY your “Domain”**

INDICATORS:

Support Raiser

Influence Decision Makers

Present Ideas (that could turn into policies)

Work with Support Raisers

ROLES:

MPD or Support Raising Coach

*Support* Internal SRS Bootcamp Facilitator

Passionate Staff Member

- **Who else do we have here?**

## The Dilemma:

The middle of a thing is many times “inglorious” ...

- The middle seat on an international flight. You have your air travel ticket and you are boarding the plane, you are looking at the numbers on your ticket and comparing that to the numbers on the adjacent overhead compartments. Then you realize that you have, what, a MIDDLE SEAT! Middle seats are the *worst*.
- The “Middle of Something”. Don’t bother me, kid, can’t you see that I’m in the \_\_\_\_\_ of something.
- Middle child.
- The only exception really in life are eclairs and Oreos—the middle is actually the best part.

**But Middle Leadership really doesn’t have to be this way.** Today, I’d really like to offer some practical suggestions for how to lead this very crucial area of our ministries when you lack the authority to have the “final say”. But, here is the dilemma: you can add tremendous value, but your ideas, plans, and strategies could potentially be “trumped” by executive leadership. This is really a *precarious* place to be, because sometimes you may wonder things like:

### “Wrestling” Questions:

- Can I truly make the difference that I want to make?
- Why are those in authority over me so comfortable with the status quo?
- Will I ultimately be “shot down” after pouring my time, energies, and efforts into this?
- Is it really worth it?

Additionally, there are some pretty stark realities that Middle Leadership must face\*:

### Internal & External Challenges:

- You are feeling pressures pretty much from all around—and *it’s a real thing*.
- You could be following a truly ineffective leader.
- Your role within the organization is *diverse*—too many proverbial “hats”.
- You have to take one of the “supporting roles” instead of the starring role (and sometimes, we may feel like an “extra”).
- You are required to be the champion of a vision that you didn’t have.
- You feel “used” by executive leadership.
- You are intimidated by the task of leading beyond your area of oversight.

[Section II of *The 360 Degree Leader* covers the Challenges that Middle Leaders face.]

## WHAT DOES GOD THINK ABOUT THIS?

There are two main spiritual gifts lists in Scripture, and you likely are very familiar with these in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and in Romans 12:4-8 (Ephesians 4:11 is really the “offices” of the Church, not spiritual gifts).

*“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. **Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; **the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.**”*** - Romans 12:4-8 ESV

Προϊστημι (proisteemi)

**προϊστημι:** in intr. tenses, *I take up a position (stand) in front: I take the lead, I rule;* hence, c. gen. *I lead, supervise, manage; also I practise, exercise a calling or profession.*<sup>1</sup>

-A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament by Alexander Souter

*“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, **administrating**, and various kinds of tongues.”* -1 Corinthians 12:28 ESV



**κυβέρνησις** (lit. *steering, piloting*), *governing, government*, supposed to refer to such duty as was, later at least, performed by any presbyter or by that presbyter who was ἐπίσκοπος.<sup>3</sup>

This 2<sup>nd</sup> Greek word (kuberneesis) only appears one time in the Bible, but it clearly corresponds to proisteemi in Romans 12:8 (and refers to the same spiritual gift). Here’s how [TyndaleFaith](#) defines this gift:

**ADMINISTRATION: The ability to help steer the church, or a ministry, toward the successful completion of God-given goals, with skills in planning, organization, and supervision.**

This gift is a *major* one, so very necessary to see God-given goals fulfilled and the Kingdom advanced in *real time*. If you’re here in this room, you probably have this gift in your “spiritual gift mix”. If that’s you, I would just like to echo Romans 12:8: “... **the one who leads, with**

<sup>1</sup> Souter, A. (1917). *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (p. 216). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (1 Co 12:27–28). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>3</sup> Souter, A. (1917). *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (p. 141). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

zeal.” In other words, with “*eagerness, carefulness, and diligence*” PLGNT. **Do you see yourself as God sees you in this area?**

## Key Principles for MPD Middle Leadership:

This is really a great segue into some Key Principles.

1. **LEAD.** It is very likely, and very common, that you will express the spiritual gift of something before you have the “office” of something (in the Church, an organization, or ministry). If you’ve been given this gift—**USE IT.** You’ve been given it for a purpose. Don’t “stuff your gift” in misguided false humility; don’t make the excuse that your boss won’t “let you lead.”
  - **LEAD Yourself.** About 20 years ago, I launched a program at Providence Christian School that’s still going on today. It is a Chapel Leadership Team made up of students who have to apply to make it in, and who get mentored, trained, and equipped to lead their peers. Before we helped them understand how to lead others, we ALWAYS started with drilling home the concept of *self-leadership*. It’s absolutely true that sometimes the most difficult person to lead can be ourselves. You ALWAYS have someone to lead—start with leading yourself well. To quote Dr. Henry Cloud (author of *Boundaries*) you are “ridiculously in charge” of you, including:
    - How you manage yourself within time (not “time management”).
    - How you respond to crises that will surely come up.
    - How you talk about leaders above you, below you, and beside you.
    - How you express your attitude about MPD.

In *The 360 Degree Leader*, John Maxwell talks about the importance of owning our own attitudes:

“The leader’s Attitude is like a thermostat for the place she works. If her attitude is good, the atmosphere is pleasant, and the environment is easy to work in. But if her attitude is bad, the temperature is insufferable.”

— John C. Maxwell, *The 360 Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization*

**WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?** In the area of MPD, this may look like you setting the example like Lisa from Bootcamp. As you recall, there was the comical, exaggerated comparison between Lenny and Lisa. Lenny was very charismatic, a friend to everyone, and heavily involved in ministering to others.

Lisa was a little more reserved, and equally passionate about ministering to others behind the scenes. In this example, Lenny made ZERO time per week on a regular basis for MPD. As a result, his fictitious supporters waned over time. Lisa, on the other hand, set aside time each and every week for MPD—because she realized how important it was to care for her partners and continue to expand her own support team. Lisa dedicated REGULAR TIME, HAD A PLAN, SET GOALS, IMPLEMENTED her strategy.

RHETORICAL QUESTION: Would others in your organization say that you are an example of regular, weekly, MPD focus? ***If not, start there.*** [SHOW example of Lisa’s Communication Plan.]

- **LEAD Your Peers and Your Supervisors (Lead Up, and Lead Across).**

This really is the essence of 360 degree leadership, and this idea of leading MORE than just “down” was the “aha-moment” for so many of us when this concept was introduced. We often think that leading is only top-down, and this is a fallacy. In this area of leadership, you are ridiculously in charge of ...

- How you labor to “lighten the load” of your superiors.
- How you invest in your own performance improvement.
- How you invest in relationship with others, “completing” instead of “competing” with your peers.
- How you intentionally add value to others around you.
- How you respectfully “push back”, and intelligently “back off”.

Patrick Lencioni, author of *The Ideal Team Player*, and *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* talks about the value of offering a dissenting opinion:

“The fact is, employees cannot make breakthroughs if they can't openly and honestly disagree with their peers and their leader. Indeed, great leaders don't just permit conflict; they actively try to elicit it from reluctant employees as well.” -Patrick Lencioni

**WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?** In the area of MPD, this may look like you essentially calling a “flag on the play” in regards to your organization or team not performing well in this area. The wellbeing of the families who comprise the organization, as well as of the organization itself are *intrinsically linked* to the vitality of the MPD Culture overall. You may have observed some key indicators of anemic MPD Culture, like:

- Policies that support the financial health of support raisers are non-existent, not clearly stated, or not enforced.

- Resources that are designated to advance this area of ministry are not allocated.
- Biblical paradigms of support raising (asking individuals) are not globally adopted.
- Ministry Partnership Development is an area of organizational ministry that is not championed.

Now, I am *not* suggesting that you build a well-crafted presentation to a meeting and blindside your leadership, humiliating them in front of those they lead. However, I am suggesting that this is definitely an opportunity to respectfully, graciously, but with ZEAL (as the Romans 12:8 talked about before) “lead up”. Because executive leadership may be one-step removed from the realities that exist in your corporate culture, they *desperately need your* input on what others are experiencing. For the sake of the Kingdom (whether they realize it or not, whether they really even welcome it or not) the clear voice of your unique perspective as Middle Leadership really is quite possibly the most important voice for the future of the ministry.

RHETORICAL QUESTION: Would others in your organization look at you as a clear voice for a healthy MPD Culture? ***If not, start there.***

**2. EXECUTE.** At our last SRLC (“Mobilize More”), I shared something in a workshop that we called our “Fully-Funded Deployment Plan” (really more of an overarching strategy than a plan):

**GTN Fully-Funded Deployment Plan: “CULTURE” Proposed Action Steps:**

1. Making “*normative*” regular discussions on financial health of our missionaries and staff. This includes changing conversations to include “special gift” instead of “one-time gift”, and including dialogue with spouses in the conversations about financial matters.
2. Speaking with “one voice” as GTN Leadership regarding attitudes towards MPD.
3. “Downloading” this crucial element of missionary health to into our veteran field teams as well as national missionaries who are being raised up.
4. Conducting the SRS Audit/Financial Health Survey—we have this tool currently at our disposal.
5. Addressing and eliminating “poor talk” in both a public setting and in our private communications (and especially social media).
6. Requiring GTN key leaders to attend either an in-house or a public SRS Bootcamp (Executive Team/Regional Directors, etc.)
7. Requiring Board Members of GTN to receive Support Raising training.
8. Putting an increased demand on the level of funding prior to being activated in one’s assignment.

- Clearly communicate how GTN “defines” being “fully-funded” to both our inbound and veteran missionaries, as well as communicating ongoing *expectations* in this area.
- Raise the value of MPD as a *lifestyle* with our entire team (“lifestyle, not a season”).

One thing that I have come to realize is that he or she who comes up with the plan (especially when it brings clarity to that which is vague or undefined) is viewed as the *leader*. Furthermore, it is often that individual who inadvertently becomes in charge of *executing* said plan.

Honestly, and sadly, this one area is really where most of us drop the ball. We may have all the best intentions, and maybe even well-thought-out plans. But, if we don’t deliver, if we fail to follow through, we unfortunately render all of our work stillborn. Sometimes, we want to simply come up with the “perfect plan”, but I think that General George Patton’s words really speak to this hesitation:

“A good plan, violently executed now is better than a perfect plan tomorrow.”  
-George Patton

**EXECUTION NON-NEGOTIABLES:** Whatever your specific strategy for improving the health of your MPD Culture in your organization, you will need to bring some things to the table to make sure that the plan is realized:

1. **Streamline Your FOCUS:** Determine what 20% of your actions to raise the bar of MPD in the organization really do produce the 80% of effectiveness. These will be your 1 or 2 top goals (Wildly Important Goals). Rigorously focus on those 1 or 2 goals in a given time frame (quarterly, monthly, weekly, daily).

**NOTE:** We did this at Go To Nations as the President issued our “Top 5 Organizational Goals” which were based on overcoming bottlenecks that we had identified. As executive leaders, we then had to determine which ones of these goals that we were going to “own” (or which fell in our area of oversight). In Executive Report that we issued, we had to tie this back in to the specific one of the “Top 5 Organizational Goals” that we were addressing.

2. **Determine Your Lead MEASURES:** Sometimes, we just don’t know what we’re supposed to measure. We can look at spreadsheets with financial data, but this is all *history* (in other words, we can have feelings about the data, but it won’t change the data). Maybe we need to be measuring something different. These are called “LEAD Measures”.

**KEY QUESTION:** *What are the [organizational] behaviors that, if we will just perform them consistently, will make it highly likely that we will accomplish our goals?*



**Lag measures** are *past* data (average percentage funded for missionary staff *monthly*.)

**Lead measures** are sets of short-term data that are *predictive* of long-term lag measures and are **influenceable** (for MPD Coaching, how many phone calls are being made for appointments weekly.)

[Adapted from [https://www.imcomacademy.com/ima/?page\\_id=4153](https://www.imcomacademy.com/ima/?page_id=4153)]

**ACTIVITY:** “Whiteboard” what some of these “lead measures” would be organizationally for MPD vitality.

3. **Install a Rhythm of ACCOUNTABILITY:** It is likely that everyone in the room knows the value of weekly MPD Coaching in helping missionaries and staff reach their support raising goals. There’s something to that weekly process of taking the veritable pulse of your progress that is truly motivating. Think about this also in terms of the MPD Coaching Process. In a coaching meeting (if it is a cohort), the percentage progress of each person might be brought forward publicly. This is really a form of a “scoreboard”, and each member knows that this is going to be shared with the group.

**REFERENCE:** These “Execution Non-Negotiables” have been adapted from *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* by Steven R. Covey and Chris McChesney (2012).

RHETORICAL QUESTION: *Would others in your organization say that you are generally effective or generally ineffective in your execution?*

**Follow through. We must not fail in the execution.**

“A strategy, even a great one, doesn’t implement itself.”  
-Jeroen De Flander, author of *Strategy Execution Heroes*

**GROW.** Again, being a “leader in the middle” really means that you have a unique vantage point, a unique perspective. Have you embraced that? It’s a high calling to be a 2<sup>nd</sup> chair leader.

“The Bible is full of strategic leadership partnerships: Moses and Aaron, Mordecai and Esther, Paul and Silas, and even the Trinity. Each one demonstrates individual gifts being conjoined for **maximum ministry effect.**”

-Reggie McNeil, author of *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*

RHETORICAL QUESTION: Could it be that you are specifically and sovereignly placed in your specific position **for you?** For *your* growth, for *your* development into a clearer reflection of the image of God in *you*?

**ILLUSTRATION:** The Incredible Hulk at Cobb Center Mall.

“Too many leaders focus all their energy on moving to the next chair as quickly as possible, and they miss the opportunity to develop their gifts in the current chair.”

-Mike Bonem, *Leading from the Second Chair: Serving Your Church, Fulfilling Your Role, and Realizing Your Dreams*

**GROWTH PRO TIPS:** These really fall into the area of investing in your own leadership.

1. **Find a MENTOR.** Honestly, there are many who really have “mentored” me in my life. For some, there was real face-time with them, where I could ask them questions and could discuss life issues. There were others whose mentorship came through the pages of books that they have authored.
2. **Hire a COACH.** Sometimes we think that having a coach is something that only executive leaders have (or CEO’s have). This is simply not true. Aim to hire a coach that has experience (or one level above) where you are at currently (they’ve walked in your relative shoes and they have likely felt what you feel on a regular basis).
3. **Ask for 360 Leadership FEEDBACK.** This is a great process to walk through, but one that requires *courage*. There are even FREE online tools to help you accomplish this, for instance: [leadership-tools.com](http://leadership-tools.com).

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS:

In the past year, would you say that you have grown in your MPD Leadership effectiveness, been stagnant, or actually regressed?

What’s your posture towards your current position? *Resignation or revitalized?*

## Conclusion:

To recall our spiritual gifts list in Romans 12, here's the relevant verse to this discussion paraphrased in the New Living Translation:

*“If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously.”*  
Romans 12:8 NLT

**Barnabus was a biblical “middle leader” who embodied Paul’s admonition here.** It was awesome to visit Cyprus—the island nation where he was reported to have been stoned to death near the city of Salamis. Barnabus is known as Paul’s “sidekick”, but his supporting role was hugely influential: [The following from: <https://newchurches.com/blogs/lead-like-barnabas/>]

- He was called “Joseph” and was financially generous to history’s first Church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:35)
- He was willing to leave Jerusalem for the sake of making disciples in Antioch (Acts 11:22)
- He was the first to welcome a newly-converted murderer named Saul into Christian community (Acts 9:26), then later recruited Saul to join the work at Antioch (Acts 11:26)
- He was a trusted messenger of the Jerusalem and Antioch Churches (Acts 11:22, 30)
- Maybe most commonly known, Barnabas and Paul traveled the Roman world together, taught Jews and Gentiles together, defended Gentile conversion at the Jerusalem counsel together, and made disciples together (most of the Book of Acts, until the disagreement over the inclusion of John-Mark).

Just by what we know of Barnabus, doesn’t it seem like he had the spiritual gift of “Administration”? In Acts 14, Barnabus was called “Zeus” (Head of the gods) by the Lystrans, while Paul was only “Hermes” (Messenger). This means that Barnabus played no small role in the life of the early Church. Could it be that, without Barnabus, Gentiles would not have been welcomed into the faith? Could it be that the Church of Antioch have never existed?

Missions agencies, Christian organizations, businesses, and churches need more Barnabus-like leaders in their ranks: middle leaders who take their role seriously, who lead courageously, who execute faithfully, and who grow humbly.

## Prayer:

## Questions: