

Effective Second-Chair Leadership in Ministry

Kevin Hampton

June 28, 2017

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Definition of a Second Chair Leader</i>	1
<i>Mutual Respect</i>	2
<i>Autonomy and Authority</i>	4
<i>Position within the Ministry</i>	6
<i>Feedback and Feed-Up</i>	7
<i>Knowing Your Place</i>	8
<i>Effective Leadership Teams</i>	10
<i>Conclusion</i>	12

Introduction

If you are not the lead dog, your view never changes. This saying has been around for a long time and seems to indicate that the only one with a decent view is the one out front, and all the other dogs are just looking at the rear-end of the dog in front of them. This saying seems to ring true, given the example, but it fails in so many ways to accurately describe the importance of a second-chair leader, or even the importance of the second tier leadership team. Effective leadership has many tiers, and a second-in-command is as much of a calling as a senior leadership position.

Many times the second-in-command is using that position as a stepping stone to his own “first-chair” position, but many second-in-command personalities are a perfect fit for that one position, and do not desire to ever progress past it. Being the man-behind-the-man is exactly where they want to be and they thrive in that position. While second-tier leadership is important over all disciplines, this paper will specifically deal with it in the context of leading in the second-chair in ministry.

Definition of a Second Chair Leader

A second-chair leader or a “second-in-command” is a leader or group of leaders who report directly to the Senior Pastor. Of singular importance is to begin with the understanding that every leader, no matter the position, is in second-chair to another authority.¹ Politicians are beholding to their constituents, Chief Executive Officers are beholding to their shareholders, and pastors, no matter the position, are second-in-command to the Trinity. So then, understanding

¹ Maggie Farrell, “Leading from the Middle,” *Journal of Library Administration*, November 2014, 691.

the importance of second-chair leadership is incumbent across all leadership positions, because all leaders are there.

However, while it can be proven that every leader is in some way serving as a second-chair leader, there are very real issues that must be dealt with as a second-in-command pastor reporting to a Senior Pastor in a church. A second-chair leader must understand his role, his position, and understand that God put him in this position for a reason, to utilize his specific spiritual gifting to further God's Kingdom and to accomplish His vision for the church.

Mutual Respect

The Senior Pastor and the second-in-command must share respect for each other and their decisions. This respect must be earned over time, but is imperative if the relationship is to be effective. If the Senior Pastor has to spend his time doing his duties, as well as overseeing every duty of his second-in-command, he might as well not have one and do everything himself. Theodore Roosevelt wrote, "The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint to keep from meddling with them while they do it."² When there is trust and respect for the second-in-command, the Senior Pastor is free to focus on his main duties, and the second-in-command can focus on the tasks delegated to him by the Senior Pastor. In this scenario, each leader is free to focus on their individual tasks and they both become a more effective leadership team.

The second-in-command must also have respect for the Senior Pastor. As a subordinate leader, the second-chair leader must also be aware that the Senior Pastor is focused on the good of the church and is being led by the Holy Spirit in his vision and decisions. This does not mean

² "Leadership Quotes by Colin Powell, Theodore Roosevelt, Ben Franklin.," <http://govleaders.org>, accessed June 24, 2017, <http://govleaders.org/quotes-leaders.htm>.

that the second-in-command and the Senior Pastor cannot disagree on certain things; it just means that the relationship between the two must be based on respect and the understanding that the Senior Pastor's position gives him authority over all aspects of the ministry. During the sway of the changing winds of the ministry, each leader knows the other is doing their best to be sensitive to the urging of the Holy Spirit.

This respect quotient is exemplified by the relationship detailed in Genesis, and shows the leadership relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh.³ Joseph, through the Holy Spirit, explained a dream to Pharaoh that had leadership consequences. After hearing the recount of the Pharaoh's dreams about cows and corn, Joseph translated the dream that Egypt was staring down the barrel of 7 years of bountiful harvest, followed by 7 years of famine. However, not only did Joseph translate Pharaoh's dream and its meaning, he also gave Pharaoh a plan to follow to make it through the 7 years of famine. This showed Pharaoh the leadership qualities that Joseph had. Joseph was humble, but also was God's man with access to wisdom beyond his years and education. Pharaoh then established Joseph as his second-in-command in all areas of the country. Joseph then enacted his plan to save Egypt and the surrounding countries from the famine that was only 7 years away. It is in this text that the reader sees the leadership qualities of mutual respect between leaders. Pharaoh respected Joseph for his wisdom, discernment, seeming supernatural command of dream interpretation, and his ability to develop a methodology on-the-fly to stave off a potentially cataclysmic famine. In contrast, Joseph respected Pharaoh because of his position and power, but also because Pharaoh acted properly by moving Joseph from the prison to the position of power. Joseph operated within this scope of leadership for the remainder of his life, having the respect of his Pharaoh and respecting him as well.

³ Genesis 41-47 (NASB)

Also exemplified in this text is when the senior leader respects the decisions and methodologies of his subordinate, he can withdraw to focus on other items of importance and allow his second-in-command to operate within his vision and with the best interests of the organization in mind. This does not happen except when the senior leader and the second-in-command have mutual respect for each other.

Autonomy and Authority

To be an effective second-in-command, you must have authority and autonomy. A second-in-command that is hamstrung by red tape can find himself burning out and ineffective, because members of the organization sees him as impotent. In these scenarios, people can go around the second-in-command and directly to the Senior Pastor, thereby rendering the second-in-command moot. Without authority, your words and directions are nothing more than suggestions.⁴ Also, without autonomy, the effectiveness of a second-in-command is lessened because the bulk of his time is spent gaining approval for every decision and operational change that is made. In an effective leadership relationship between the Senior Pastor and the second-in-command, authority is given and supported publicly.

Few examples of the power of a second-in-command with authority are as stark as the leadership relationship between the Emperor and Darth Vader in Star Wars – Return of the Jedi. As shown throughout the Star Wars movies, while Darth Vader was the main antagonist, he operated at the will of the supreme leader, the Emperor. Nothing that the character did was outside of the vision the Emperor had. In this example, even though the character Darth Vader was not the senior leader, he still wielded power, authority, and could operate autonomously

⁴ Larry G. Linne, *Make the Noise Go Away: The Power of an Effective Second-in-command* (Place of publication not identified: iUniverse Inc., 2011), 24.

given the overarching goals of the Galactic Empire. Perhaps one of the greatest film villains of all time was also constrained by his position as a second-in-command, however it was in this position that he flourished and that made him an effective member of the leadership team. The force, magic, and swordsmanship aside, the people in the organization knew that Darth Vader had the full authority of the Emperor. Underlings, coupled with a desire for promotion and a fear of harsh consequences, had motivation to excel and grow within the Empire, but always with the understanding that Darth Vader was the muscle behind and the implementation force to the Emperor's vision. However, he had the authority and autonomy to act as he saw fit to carry out that vision.⁵

All second-in-command leaders are not subservient to a senior leader bent on galactic domination, but many leadership principles can be gleaned from this example. The Senior Pastor has a tremendous burden on their shoulders. They not only deliver the weekly sermon, counsel countless people through seemingly no-win issues, visit the sick and elderly, and manage the ministry team, they also cast the vision they believe the Holy Spirit has laid on their heart for the church. With all these demands for their time and their intellect, the second-in-command can become a valuable part of the ministry team by taking certain issues off the Senior Pastor's shoulders. Personnel issues, benevolence, and communication projects like the weekly bulletin or quarterly can be completely removed from the Senior Pastor's "To Do" list with little to no input or oversight from the Senior Pastor. The second-in-command can also be the repeating voice for the Senior Pastor's vision to the congregation as well as making the Senior Pastor aware of issues that may ultimately land directly on his desk.⁶

⁵ *Star Wars - Return of the Jedi*, directed by Richard Marquand (Lucasfilm Ltd., 1983).

⁶ Farrell, "Leading from the Middle", 697.

Position within the Ministry

Pastors should be called by God for both their entry to the ministry as well as what position He calls them to. Some are called to be missionaries, some are called to the high calling of preaching or to be a Senior Pastor, but some are called to be the “guy-behind-the-guy” or the “outside of the spotlight” leader. They are not called to be a Senior Pastor; they are called to be a second-in-command. While some second-in-command pastors see the position as a stepping stone to a subsequent Senior Pastor position, some are called to that second-chair and they flourish in the position that God placed them.

This second position leader must understand that they have the unique role of being led, and also leading. No better of an example can be than Jesus’ life. While he was on earth and in human embodiment, He not only led a group of disciples and apostles, but he also was led by the Holy Spirit. After his first miracle at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-12) and following His Baptism (Matthew 3:13-17), Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted.⁷ When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, He included the request to be protected from being led into temptation. (Matthew 6:13) Throughout His ministry, the Biblical text records Jesus leading His followers all the while being led by His Heavenly Father. Even up to the night prior to the cross, Jesus was putting himself in a subservient position to the Father’s will. Jesus’ life showed that to lead, one must also be leadable.⁸ In order to be a good second-in-command, one must be a good follower.⁹ While the spotlight of leadership can go to a leader’s head, a second-in-command must be willing to have humility in the second-chair. A second-in-command must filter his

⁷ Matthew 4:1 (NASB)

⁸ Jim Van Yperen, *Making Peace: A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, ©2002), 191.

⁹ Todd Nielsen, “Leading, When You Are Not The Leader,” www.toddnielsen.com, accessed May 17, 2017, <http://www.toddnielsen.com/leadership-in-teams/leading-when-you-are-not-the-leader/>.

actions through the lens of how those actions look, and would they exemplify behaviors that a leader would want emulated through those under his direct authority.¹⁰

In modern research, additional data has shown that not enough focus is given to the second-in-command position. Wellins and Weaver point out that while large volumes of training is available for those leaders at the top, scant few is available to the second-in-command leaders.¹¹ They identify C-Level leaders as the executive level leadership positions, and those second-chair leaders are in the SEE-Level leadership positions. It is so named because it is these leaders who actually see the problems or opportunities and react to them.¹² Their research of corporate entities showed that the majority of these SEE-Level leaders have more influence over the ROI (Return on Investment) and actually have a greater effect on the success of the company than the executive level leaders. Their findings point to the need for better leader development within this cadre of leaders.¹³

Feedback and Feed-Up

As a second-in-command, you must give feedback to people under your ministry, but also you must learn how to give feedback (or feed-up) to your Senior Pastor. The challenge is to know what to feed-up, what specifics to include, and what to insulate him from and just handle yourself. This takes time to figure out. At the outset of a leadership relationship, over-communication is the key. If a second-chair leader handles an issue unknown by the Senior Pastor and then it comes up again directly to him, he is blindsided by an issue that he should

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Richard Wellins, "From C-Level To See-Level Leadership," *TD Magazine*, September 2003, 60.

¹² Ibid., 58.

¹³ Ibid.

have known about. To build this knowledge of what to pass on and what to sit on, takes time, trust, and talking. The second-in-command needs to hear from the Senior Pastor the type of information he wants to be involved in, and what does not need his attention. Over time, the second-in-command will intuitively know what the Senior Pastor wants to know, and what he would rather be left off his desk.¹⁴ This is called “Upward communication” and is a vital skill for the leadership relationship to be healthy.

Knowing Your Place

A big issue with young second-in-command leaders entering the ministry is that they do not understand their place. Bluntly, the second-in-command is beholding to the vision and direction of the Senior Pastor. A second-in-command must always keep at the front of their mind that the Senior Pastor is THE primary leader.¹⁵

Regardless of the newest research, the new or better way to do things, the different methodologies of small group or Sunday School, or the more contemporary worship style, the Senior Pastor has the final say and it is up to the second-in-command to take his decision and implement it, regardless if they agree or not. Furthermore, the leadership team must present a united front to the church. The temptation of the second-in-command to gossip or disagree verbally behind closed doors with congregants is detrimental to the health of the leadership team and is a sure-fire way to have a short tenure at that church. Understanding that the Senior Pastor is there because God put him there, and not you, goes a long way to understanding the role and position of the second-in-command. Like the Executive Officer on a Navy warship, the captain

¹⁴ Linne, *Make the Noise Go Away*, 16.

¹⁵ Michael McCullar, “A chosen chair: the call and gifts of second-chair leadership,” *Congregations*, 2009, 14.

makes the decision and the XO is there to interpret and implement the orders, not to second guess the leader. Sometimes the leadership team must agree to disagree¹⁶ but only in private and with the understanding that the orders given will have the full support of the Senior Pastor as well as all second-chair leaders as well.¹⁷

Second-in-command leaders can also fall into what is called “Second-Banana syndrome”.¹⁸ When the work is done and it seems the Senior Pastor is getting (or taking) all the credit, there is a temptation for the second-in-command to get discouraged or even envious. It is important for the second-in-command to know that there can be many reasons for this. First, because of the position the Senior Pastor is in, the credit is due him because he is ultimately responsible for what goes on in the ministry of the church. Bonem states that it is also important for the second-in-command to understand that the Senior Pastor might be ego driven, but it is just as likely that getting the entire spotlight might be because he knows an idea or ministry idea not get traction unless he is seen as the motivation behind it. The Senior Pastor might also be sheltering the second-in-command in case of an unintended consequence.¹⁹

The difference in knowing your place is exemplified as either being a wingman or a backseat driver.²⁰ A backseat driver is an annoyance, giving their opinion when it is not asked, and makes a nuisance of themselves. A wingman silently gives protection to his leader so that the leader can focus on the target. If the leader asks, the wingman is ready for his input, but the

¹⁶ Yperen, *Making Peace*, 170.

¹⁷ Todd Nielsen, “Leading, When You Are Not The Leader,” www.toddnielsen.com, accessed May 17, 2017, <http://www.toddnielsen.com/leadership-in-teams/leading-when-you-are-not-the-leader/>.

¹⁸ McCullar, “A chosen chair, 14.

¹⁹ Mike Bonem, *Thriving in the Second Chair: Ten Practices for Robust Ministry (When You're Not in Charge)* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2016), 112-113.

²⁰ John Maxwell, “LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE PACK,” <http://www.johnmaxwell.com>, March 13, 2013, accessed May 17, 2017, <http://www.johnmaxwell.com/blog/leading-from-the-middle-of-the-pack>.

wingman's job is to protect the leader's six o'clock position. The second-in-command's primary role is to actually help the Senior Pastor succeed.²¹ A good second-in-command takes orders, but also looks where they can assist and help without being asked, all the while pointing the wins to the Senior Pastor. If the spotlight shines on the second-in-command every once in a while, that is fine, but his primary role is to further the vision and strengthen the church through the direction of the Senior Pastor.

John Maxwell is famous for his "Law of the Lid". This states that the organization can never rise above the least effective member of the team. Another way to say this is that the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. What a good second-in-command can do is to help the Senior Pastor lift that lid in the church. If the Senior Pastor is weak in an area, the second-in-command can step up and fill that gap. If a lay leader is weak in a certain area, the second-in-command can advise instruction or education. Bonem states that an effective second-in-command can also be on the look out to protect the Senior Pastor from casting too big of a vision, that might be outside of the church's ability.²² The second-in-command cannot be a "yes man" or a push-over, but at the same time he must encourage the Senior Pastor and support the Senior Pastor's vision and leadership. He must constantly be looking out for the Senior Pastor, while also remaining in his subservient role and enacting the vision and directions of the Senior Pastor.

Effective Leadership Teams

Effectiveness in ministry is a goal that can sometimes be illusive. It takes constant work to live up to a leadership team's potential, and do that within the scope of the ministry. But, it

²¹ Farrell, "Leading from the Middle", 696.

²² Bonem, *Thriving in the Second Chair*, 31.

can be done, and when it is, it is a beautiful thing to witness. This dynamic is exemplified by the relationship between Command Sergeant Major Basil Plumley and General Hal Moore in the book “We Were Soldiers Once-- and Young.”²³ An amazing and effective team, Lt. Col. Moore trusted Sgt. Maj. Plumley to make sure his troops were well trained and ready for a hellish war, while he derived new operational tactics by combat aviation insertion onto the battlefield. When the battle began, each leader trusted the other for operational support and protection. It was a perfect picture of a leader with an effective second-in-command.

A second rule of having an effective team is to ensure that responsibility never exceeds authority.²⁴ If a second-in-command is given the responsibility of a certain task or ministry, the Senior Pastor must give that second-chair pastor all the authority needed to accomplish that task. Few things render a second-in-command impotent more than to work toward a task and not have the authority to be able to effect the change necessary. This is followed closely by the issue of people going around the chain-of-command and directly to the Senior Pastor. The second-in-command must feel comfortable that the Senior Pastor will reinforce the second-in-command’s authority over a certain task, for them to be effective.

Finally, second-in-command leaders must stay individually emotionally healthy. Given the position, peers are few and far between. It may seem that most other pastors who share the same title of second-in-command are only there until they get a few years under their belt and move on to Senior Pastors of their own churches. For those leaders called to leadership in the second-chair, it can feel very lonely. One way to combat this feeling of being on an island is to

²³ Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once-- and Young: Ia Drang, the Battle That Changed the War in Vietnam*, mass market ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004, ©1992).

²⁴ Bonem, *Thriving in the Second Chair*, 46.

keep trying to find true peers to commiserate with.²⁵ The importance of a peer relationship with which to bounce ideas off each other and to share the burden of the position cannot be overstated, it is vital to the health of the individual, and the health of the leadership team. Feelings bottled up have a way of coming out when you least expect them, and in a way that is unhealthy and can be damaging to your ministry.

Conclusion

If the lead dog were the only dog, the sled would not be going anywhere. While the main leader sets the vision and decides the direction for the troop, he would look very silly out there on a parade ground alone. The reality is that the organism can exist and work, for a time, without a leader, but the leader requires the organism to be a leader, otherwise he is alone. Franklin Delano Roosevelt wrote “It is a terrible thing to look over your shoulder when you are trying to lead—and find no one there.”²⁶ For a second-in-command to be effective in ministry there must be a trusting relationship and mutual respect within the second-chair leaders and the Senior Pastor, but most of all there must be a singular focus on the will and urging of the Holy Spirit.

²⁵ Mike Bonem, “Lonely in the second chair?,” *Leadership Journal*, Winter 2016, 71.

²⁶ “Franklin D. Roosevelt On Leadership,” <http://quotationsbook.com>, accessed June 24, 2017, <http://quotationsbook.com/quote/22931/>.

Bibliography

- Bonem, Mike. "Lonely in the second chair?" *Leadership Journal*, Winter 2016.
- Bonem, Mike. *Thriving in the Second Chair: Ten Practices for Robust Ministry (When You're Not in Charge)*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2016.
- Farrell, Maggie. "Leading from the Middle." *Journal of Library Administration*, November 2014.
- <http://govleaders.org>. "Leadership Quotes by Colin Powell, Theodore Roosevelt, Ben Franklin:." Accessed June 24, 2017. <http://govleaders.org/quotes-leaders.htm>.
- <http://quotationsbook.com>. "Franklin D. Roosevelt On Leadership." Accessed June 24, 2017. <http://quotationsbook.com/quote/22931/>.
- Linne, Larry G. *Make the Noise Go Away: The Power of an Effective Second-in-command*. Place of publication not identified: iUniverse Inc., 2011.
- Maxwell, John. "LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE PACK." <http://www.johnmaxwell.com>. March 13, 2013. Accessed May 17, 2017. <http://www.johnmaxwell.com/blog/leading-from-the-middle-of-the-pack>.
- Moore, Harold G., and Joseph L. Galloway. *We Were Soldiers Once-- and Young: Ia Drang, the Battle That Changed the War in Vietnam*. mass market ed. New York: Ballantine Books, 2004, ©1992.
- McCullar, Michael. "A chosen chair: the call and gifts of second-chair leadership." *Congregations*, 2009.
- Neilsen, Todd. "Leading, When You Are Not The Leader." www.toddnielsen.com. Accessed May 17, 2017. <http://www.toddnielsen.com/leadership-in-teams/leading-when-you-are-not-the-leader/>.
- Star Wars - Return of the Jedi*. Directed by Richard Marquand. Lucasfilm Ltd., 1983.
- Van Yperen, Jim. *Making Peace: A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict*. Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, ©2002.
- Wellins, Richard. "From C-Level To See-Level Leadership." *TD Magazine*, September 2003.