

The Leader In Leadership: Balancing Personal, Family and Ministry Life

Dr John Ng

A. INTRODUCTION

“Jason Kidd searches his soul and finds he needs more than basketball to sustain him.” This was in the recent cover story of *USA Today*’s Sports Section¹.

Jason Kidd is a professional basketball player in the USA. He is the dynamic force behind the Phoenix Suns, an US National Basketball Association best point guard, an Olympic gold medallist, the husband of a gorgeous TV reporter and a multi-millionaire with a luxurious home in Paradise Valley, with neighbors like former Vice-President Dan Quayle, rocker Alice Cooper and novelist Clive Cussler.

However, he was recently found guilty of striking his wife, Journana. He was fined US\$200 (is that all? or should it be US\$2,000) and ordered to undergo six months of anger management counseling. After much counseling and personal reflection, the couple is very different now – physically, intellectually, emotionally – from what they’ve ever been.

Jason is making effort to rebuild his marriage, redefine himself and reclaim his peace of mind. On reflection, he said, “I wanted more out of life...not just to be a basketball player. I always knew I felt comfortable playing basketball because I’d done it so much. I got absorbed in it and it became my self-identity. People used the words ‘basketball player’ before using my given name. Am I not a human being first?”

Gary Mack, a sports psychologist and Jason’s counselor, remarked, “The (spousal abuse) incident jolted Jason into reality. In that crisis, they have redefined the meaning of what they value. Athletes don’t know what they don’t know. What is being a husband? A father? A

¹ Leber, J. *USA Today*, December 13, 2001

friend? If they take time out to learn and grow, they'll find that they have a lot more choices than shooting a basketball.”

This story summarizes most succinctly the dilemma many Christian leaders face. Sometimes, we can be so absorbed in our ministry that we forget that there is more to life than ministry. In this essay, I would like to address this issue of maintaining a balance in personal, family, and ministry life.

B. ISSUES IN BALANCING

What are the issues in balancing life and ministry? What pressures do leaders face today? What should we be concerned about in balancing our personal life, family and ministry?

1. Increased Expectations, Role-multiplicity and Pressure to Perform

Demands on the leader are very exacting today. In a recent conference on leadership, we asked a question: “What makes a great leader?” The following list appeared:

- The leader must be wise
- The leader must love people
- The leader must be effective change agents
- The leader must manage people
- The leader is a visionary
- The leader must have good interpersonal skills
- The leader must be an effective coach
- The leader must be a good husband
- The leader must have good family

As Christian writer Philip Yancey writes: “We push our pastors to function as psychotherapists, orators, priests, and chief executive officers. Meanwhile we place on them a unique burden of isolation and loneliness.”² Not only are they expected to perform a multiplicity of roles, the pressure to succeed is also incredibly great, especially when members compare them to pastors of mega-successful churches. We

² Yancey, P. *Replenishing the Inner Pastor*. Christianity Today.Com, May 21, 2001.

expect them to do everything well. And we want success to come quickly.

Indeed, being a ministry leader is certainly one of the most difficult vocations today.

2. Emotional Health, Burn-out, and Depression

A young church leader confided in me: “After two years in ministry, I am already feeling burnt-out!” Because of the pressures and expectations, the ministry takes its toll on leaders. They work extremely hard, pushing themselves to please both members and their church boards. Very often, we forget that the leader is also human. It is not surprising that many run out of steam very quickly.

Henri Nouwen remarks, “Being friendly to everybody, he very often has no friends for himself...The paradox is that he who has been taught to love everyone, in reality finds himself without any friends; that he who trained himself in mental prayer often is not able to be alone with himself. Having opened himself to every outsider, there is no room left for the insider.”³ How true!

Marshall Goldsmith⁴ observes that “Successful people tend to be extremely busy and face the danger of over-commitment...Without externally imposed discipline, he has a tendency to promise more than even the most dedicated staff could deliver. Unchecked, this dedication could lead to staff burn out, high turnover, and ultimately less capability to help those in need.” Inevitably, the leader suffers from physical exhaustion, emotional burnout, and depression.

A very prominent ministry leader came to me one day feeling listless and lifeless. He was the leader of one of the most vibrant ministries in Singapore. He had been honored several times by our government leaders for his work. Usually a very jovial, outgoing and boisterous person, that day, he felt totally dejected. He moaned, “I don’t know what has happened to me. I have never felt like this before. I am so depressed. I wake up one morning and feel no motivation to do anything. I have been helping others but now I can’t help myself.” I

³ Ibid., Yancey, P.

⁴ Goldsmith, M. *The Challenge of Success*. Leadership Development Conference Program Resource Guide. 2001.

was saddened by his depressive disposition and wondered how he got to that stage without realizing it sooner.

We need a regular emotional checkup lest we become disqualified in the race. The Wakefield⁵ Questionnaire is a good place to start to ensure that we are not victims of depression:

- Feeling miserable and sad
- Feeling frightened and panicky for no apparent reason
- Have weeping spells, or feeling like it
- Feeling anxious when I go out of the house on my own
- Feeling restless and can't keep still
- Getting off to sleep easily without sleeping pills
- Feeling anxious over everything
- Losing interest in things
- Feeling tired for no reason
- Feeling more irritable than usual
- Waking early and sleeping badly for the rest of the night

3. Increased Divorce Rate and Antecedent Children Problems at Home

Perhaps, the most devastating effect of an imbalance life is its negative impact on the family. The breakdown of the family has become a very serious problem in Singapore. This trend was highlighted recently in The Law Gazette⁶, published by the Family Court.

Between 1996-2000, the number of divorce petitions filed at the Family Court of Singapore has been increasing by 8% each year⁷. In 2000, there were 5,160 divorces granted.⁸ It was estimated that another 5,000 individuals and couples might be contemplating ending their marriages each year.⁹ These are what we call “marriages at risk”.

⁵ The Wakefield Questionnaire, Journey of Hearts A Healing Place in Cyberspace. Sept 28, 1998.

⁶ Addressing the Criminogenic Effects of Divorce, Law Gazette, 2001.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Key Indicators on Marriages and Divorces, 1995-2000. Singapore Department of Statistics, 2001.

⁹ Ibid., Addressing the Criminogenic Effects of Divorce.

Among the religious groups in Singapore, Christians ranks one of the highest in the divorce rate¹⁰.

Also, it was found that about half of the divorce couples have 1.6 dependent children¹¹. In all, about 11,600 people are affected by divorce each year in Singapore.¹² The effects on juveniles are even more tragic. Studies¹³ have also shown that children from divorce families are likely to:

- Fare worse in education
- Have higher truancy rate
- Have greater tendency to drop out of school

For girls, they are likely to have higher teenage pregnancies with serious repercussions such as single parenting, lowered education prospects and lower socio-economic status. There is also a higher probability of them being involved in criminal activities. In Singapore, studies undertaken by the Ministry of Community Development and the Subordinate Courts¹⁴ bore this out:

- 54 % of male juvenile offenders come from divorce families
- 37% of female juvenile offenders come from divorce families

Indeed, this poses one of the greatest challenges to leaders and pastors. We need to guard jealously the sanctity of marriage and family and help maintain a balanced life. Unfortunately, sometimes, Christian leaders are themselves victims of the breakdown in the family. This is partly a consequence of not balancing personal, family, and ministry life.

C. PERSPECTIVES IN BALANCING

Before we discuss practical ways in maintaining balance, some perspectives need to be considered.

¹⁰ Statistics on Marriages & Divorces, Singapore Department of Statistics, 2001.

¹¹ Addressing the Criminogenic Effects of Divorce, Law Gazette, 2001.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

1. Balancing involves ongoing struggle

Balancing family, ministry and personal life is an ongoing struggle. There is no quick solution to this struggle. In fact, it is because we love both our family and ministry deeply that we face this tension. If we love only ministry and not family or vice versa, we will not encounter this struggle. The struggle is the surest sign that there is life in both.

2. Balancing involves practicing the fundamentals

Many of my suggestions are nothing new. The difference is in the practice. Jesus tells the parable of two men who build two houses on two foundations. The difference is in the foundation. One builds his house on the rock, the other on the sand. The one who builds his house on the sand is the one who hears the word and forgets it. The one who builds his house on the rock is the one who hears the word and acts on it. We ought to be doers, not hearers.

Ask any great athlete. The difference between a great athlete and an average performer is in the consistency of execution. Athletes spend many hours practicing. They keep working on their routines. To be competent involves constant practice. If these athletes are prepared to make that kind of sacrifice for sport, how much more disciples of Christ in devoting themselves to a far greater cause – the cause of Christ.

Another feature of a great athlete is his constant and unequivocal focus on the fundamentals. Michael Jordan, widely regarded as the world's greatest basketball player, emphasizes the need to keep working on the fundamentals,¹⁵ “The minute you get away from the fundamentals, the bottom can fall out. Fundamentals are the building blocks or principles that make everything work. I don't care what you're doing or what you're trying to accomplish; you can't skip the fundamentals if you want to be the best. You can get away with it through the early stages. But it's going to catch up with you eventually.” For us as leaders, the fundamental is obedience and living out Biblical principles. It is the doing that will make the difference.

¹⁵ Jordan, M. *I can't accept not trying*, San Francisco:Harper Collins Publisher, 1994.

Michael Jordan is right, “You have to monitor your fundamentals constantly because the only thing that changes will be your attention to them. The fundamentals will never change.”¹⁶ We need to watch whether we have changed in our practice of the fundamentals. Sometimes, as leaders, we think that the fundamentals don’t apply to us. It is to our peril when we think we are above God’s truth and that fundamentals don’t apply to us.

3. Balance involves being open to feedback

Being open to feedback is critical to long-term survival in ministry. Many of us think we are open to feedback but in truth we might not be. In fact, there seems to be a negative correlation between success and openness to feedback. The more we perceive ourselves to be successful, the less we are open to change.

In an ongoing research,¹⁷ Marshall Goldsmith, one of the world’s most effective executive coaches, has found some characteristics about successful people.

- **Successful people consistently overrate their performance relative to their professional peers.**

When asked how professionals rated themselves relative to their professional peers, 80% - 85% of all successful professionals rate themselves among the “top 20%” of their peer group. Over half rated themselves as among the “top 10%.” Could this be also true in an achievement-oriented society like Singapore, where success is highly valued? Perhaps, we need to conduct the study here as well.

- **Successful people often confuse correlation with causation**

Marshall Goldsmith writes, “One of the most mistaken assumptions of successful people is: ‘I am successful. I behave this way. Therefore I must be successful *because* I behave this way.’

¹⁶ Ibid, Jordan, M.

¹⁷ Ibid., Goldsmith, M.

Successful people tend to believe that they are successful because of themselves.

1. They feel that they have done many things right or think that they do many things right. In his own experience, Marshall Goldsmith also found that successful people have four underlying beliefs: I choose to succeed
2. I can succeed
3. I will succeed
4. I have succeeded

There is a tendency to overrate their success, attributing it to themselves and their achievements. Successful people are delusional. The truth is that they are successful in spite of some behavior that needs to change. Jack Trout, one of the most famous names in the world of marketing, sums it up well: ¹⁸, “You don’t find success inside yourself. You find success outside yourself.” For us, there must be a constant recognition that our success or effectiveness in ministry is due to the grace of God and people who have helped us. Even Trout acknowledges that success is because of the ‘other-person’ in our lives, a boss, friend, peer or family member.

- **Successful people tend to discount the opinions of those who do not live up to their definition of success and they tend not to accept feedback from them.**

Marshall states: ‘Over-rating their own performance (relative to their peers) can lead to a decrease in their desire to change...The challenge is to help successful people realize that less successful people can still have valid opinions.’

One Fortune 100 CEO observes: “Success can lead to arrogance. When we are arrogant, we quit listening. When we quit listening, we stop changing. In today’s rapidly moving world, if we quit changing, we will ultimately fail.”

¹⁸ Trout, J., *The Power of Simplicity*, McGraw-Hill, 1999.

The point is that most leaders find it difficult to accept feedback, especially negative feedback. When we are not open to feedback, we build up a large blind spot – most people know our weaknesses except ourselves.

Let's not kid ourselves. Make learning an important lifestyle practice.

D. SIX PRACTICAL TIPS

1. Focus on God

In one of his most compelling manuscripts on leadership¹⁹, “*Does Leadership Have a Future?*” Max DePree asks perceptively: “Who do we intend to be?” He argues that what we intend to do, what we actually do, will always be a consequence of who we intend to be. How true! I pondered long and hard on this. For the Christian leader, the answer to this question must surely be to be more like God.

Very often, we forget that the primary focus of life, ministry and work is God. If that is true, then our relationship with God is primary. In life, that reality must be paramount. For in it and from it, our personal, family, and work find their reality. Let's not put the cart before the horse.

Another implication of this truth is: if we want to sustain our ministry and balance, we need to grow deeper in our relationship with God. Allow me to share this story related by Philip Yancey²⁰:

“Calcutta is a place of poverty, death and irremediable human problems. Mother Theresa trained the nuns to serve the poorest of the poor by picking half-dead bodies from the streets of Calcutta. We stand in awe at the sisters' commitment and effectiveness. Something about these nuns impresses me even more: their serenity. If I tackled such a daunting project, I would likely be scurrying about, faxing press releases to donors, begging for more resources, gulping

¹⁹ De Pree, M, *Does leadership have a future?* De Pree Leadership Center, 2000.

²⁰ Ibid., Yancey, P.

tranquilizers, grasping at ways to cope with my mounting desperation.

Not these nuns. Their serenity traces back to what takes place before their day's work. At four o'clock in the morning, long before the sun, the sisters rise, awakened by a bell and the call, 'Let us bless the Lord.' 'Thanks be to God,' they reply. Dressed in spotless white saris, they file into the chapel, where they sit on the floor, Indian-style, and pray and sing together. Before meeting their first 'client', they immerse themselves in worship and in the love of God."

Mother Theresa instituted a rule for her sisters to take Thursdays off for prayer and rest. She would explain: "The work will always be there but if we do not rest and pray, we will not have the presence to do our work!" These sisters are not working to complete a caseload for a social service agency. They are working for God. They begin their day with Him; they end their day with Him and everything in between they present as an offering to God. God alone determines their worth and measures their success.

It seems that for them the more intensive their involvement, the deeper they need to grow in God. This is how they maintain balance in life. As Christian leaders, we need to find our worth in God, not in our work, ministry or family. God must be our primary focus.

2. Embrace a Kingdom Perspective to Life and Ministry

Having a Kingdom mindset is recognizing God's Kingly rule in the world, allowing Him to rule in our hearts, espousing His Kingly values and practicing Kingdom lifestyle. The challenge is for the Christian leader to be a "24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week, 52-weeks-a-year and for all life" Christian. When we embrace this holistic perspective, how we live our lives in family, work and ministry matters.

God wants to make the difference in all areas of our lives. It means being a responsible and God-centered parent is as important, if not more important, than success in ministry. Being a person of integrity with strong moral and ethical conduct in the work place matters too. A disciplined and healthy personal life is also part of the leader's

prerogative. The way we manage and motivate staff and volunteers for ministry must also reflect Kingdom values.

Another important ramification of this Kingdom perspective is learning to practice God's presence in normal everyday life. Many leaders experience the reality of God most palpably at high points of ministry: at church services, Christian conferences and special retreats. The challenge is to find God in the routines of life. Distractions abound in life that constantly seek to edge God out of our lives – busy schedules, unfulfilled obligations, strained relationships, ill-disciplined children, uncompleted housework. Someone once warned: “Beware of a full diary but an empty soul.”

Learning to hear God's voice and living out Kingdom perspectives pose a strong challenge to us. First, it demands that we saturate our minds with His Word so that His Kingdom values and practices become part of our default mode. C.S. Lewis²¹ was surprised to learn that after his conversion, his life consisted mostly in doing the same things he had done before, only in a new spirit. He concluded that to be a practicing Christian “means that every single act and feeling, every experience, whether pleasant or unpleasant, must be referred to God.”

Some people have the mistaken notion that spirituality is a separate department of life, the penthouse of our existence. We need to integrate the spiritual with the secular. Living with God's presence gives meaning to events in life. We need to cultivate everyday spirituality. John Shea²², a contemporary Catholic theologian, reminds us: “The spiritual life is, at root, a matter of seeing. It is all of life seen from a certain perspective...so that the spiritual life is simply life, wherever and whatever, seen from the vantage point of God.” This is the challenge of everyday spirituality – no star bursts, no skies opening, no mountain top experiences. Just today and today and today. Because this is what everyday is made of – today. The experience of Elijah affirms this: “God is not in the whirlwind, the earthquake, the fire but in the gentle breeze.”

²¹ Ibid., Yancey, P.

²² Brussat, F & Brussat, M.A. *Spiritual Literacy*, Simon & Schuster, 1996.

The true mark of Christian leaders is not simply measured by how effective they are in the church but also how they are outside the church - in the family, at the work place, in the community.

3. Find Alignment in the “Can, Want, and Should”

In my work with leaders in the corporate world and in the church, self-awareness and self-management are key components of leadership. Wise leaders are cognizant of their own passions, gifts, strengths as well as their own inadequacies, limitations and weaknesses. They know what they can do and what they cannot.

It requires them to focus and de-select, know what they will do and will not do. Most of all, they need to recognize that they are where they are today because of God’s grace, in spite of their own failures, sins and frailties.

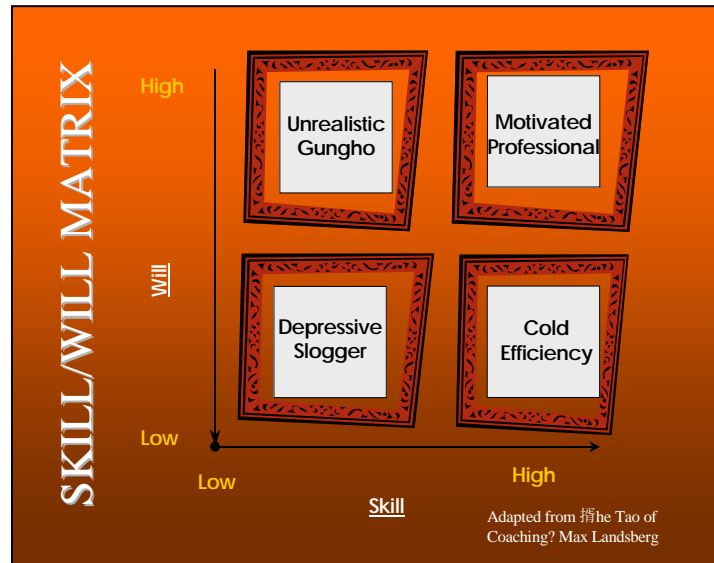
Great leaders go beyond self-awareness to self-management. Some leaders are conscious of themselves, their personalities, idiosyncrasies, motivations and competencies but they cannot manage themselves. They lack self-control, lose their cool, become unusually critical, behave inappropriately, want to do everything and unable to keep their pride in check. It is no wonder that one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control.

Sam Lam, senior management consultant with Towers Perrin, provides a helpful framework for understanding personal effectiveness and speaks of the importance of aligning “cans”, “wants” and “shoulds”. “Can” refers to our emotional quotient competencies, gifts, skills, talents, abilities. “Want” covers our desires, motives, drives, and interests. “Should” includes aspects of personal values, principles, statutes, commandments, organization needs and values.

Using the “Skill”(Can)/”Will”(Want) matrix (see diagram below), people who are low on “skill” and “will” are ‘depressive sloggers’. Usually they are deadwood in the organization. They drag themselves to work each day. Others who are high on “skill” but have no “will” become ‘cold engineers’ - very competent but with no desire in what they do. They perform tasks because they have to.

Those with “will” but no “skill” are ‘unrealistic gung-ho’ - lots of passion but unaware of their own competencies (or incompetencies). They seem to enjoy what they do but bear little result in their work. Of course, sometimes, passion can translate into competency, when there

is adequate training and coaching. However, often, they are sincere in what they do. Their audience is usually frustrated but polite in their evaluation, as they do not want to dampen their enthusiasm. The last group that is high in “skill” and “will” are ‘motivated professionals’ - passionate about their work and competent in what they do.



From this matrix, we understand how important it is to find alignment in what we “can” and “want”. Unfortunately, in Christian ministry, we make people feel guilty by telling them what they “should” do or by arm-twisting them to serve because of a pressing need, even though they have no “want” and/or “can”.

When I was younger, I thought that a great ministry worker was one who could do everything or at least, was willing to do anything and everything. This might be true for people who need to chalk up experience and who are still finding their “can”, “want” and “should”. Sometimes, younger leaders are not cognizant themselves. This is where leaders may need to give candid feedback and provide adequate coaching and training to help them discover alignment. As we grow older, it is important that we become more focused and learn to deselect. We don’t have to do everything.

4. Cultivate an Affirming Culture

In my years of management consultancy and executive coaching, I made a most astounding discovery: we lack an affirming culture. Affirmation is almost non-existent. But we all need it. And leaders need it even more. Let me explain.

First, unaffirmed leaders threaten the organization. Leaders want to be affirmed by their significant others - usually their board members or senior pastors. Unfortunately, they seldom receive it because they are expected to perform. So they go into a comparative mode. They compare themselves with other more successful leaders. The more they compare, the more fragile they become. They become jealous of their peers' success.

Board members also start comparing their leader with other leaders, and they become critical and even less affirming. They focus on what their leader cannot do rather than what they can. The leader becomes insecure, fearful and controlling. The life of the organization is then threatened as a result.

Second, the stakes are much higher at the top. Insecure leaders with shrinking egos can be devastating to the people and the ministry they lead. As their need for affirmation grows, they become more driven. The more driven they are, the more they suppress their need for it. The more they suppress it, the more they need it. No wonder, we have bred a society of emotionally starved, highly competitive individuals with little contentment. These leaders become compulsive workaholics.

Because leaders are not affirmed, they find it difficult to affirm others. They perceive their more competent subordinates and peers as competitors. In the long run, they deprive their organizations of the best men and women. They choose lackeys and yes-men. They become more demanding, less sympathetic. They disdain and despise others' successes. Often others are cognizant and become victims of their insecurity. But they themselves are oblivious to it. They become ego-maniacs and self-serving. When we lack affirmation, we leave a legacy of :-

damaged self-image,

discouraged individuals,
unrealized potential,
disillusioned workers,
dissatisfied spouses,
emotionally-starved children,
a demoralized team and
a chronic perception of ‘under-performance’, even when we
have performed.

We need to reverse this trend and culture of non-affirmation. It must begin with us. We should begin by focusing on own strengths as well as the strengths of others. We must affirm what others have achieved instead of focusing on where they have failed. No one has ever died of an overdose of affirmation but many lives have been destroyed for lack of it.

5. Get a Coach/Mentor to Hold Us Accountable

All great athletes in the world have great coaches. Ever wonder why? Great athletes always strive to improve. They realize that there is always something new to learn. As leaders, we need to recognize that we need help. Learning must be part of our lifestyle.

Another reason we need coaches is for them to hold us accountable. The good coach is relentless in observing and correcting our mistakes. Effective leaders recognize their own fallibility. Without a good coach, we will develop blind spots and perpetuate uncorrected failures in our lives. As Walter Wright²³ rightly proposes, “Leaders need wisdom. They need perspective. They need accountability.”

Ronald Heifetz²⁴, in writing about leadership suggests, “Because we get so swept up in our professional roles, it’s hard to distinguish role from self on our own. That’s why we need partners who can help us stay analytical. And we need two different kinds of partners. We need allies inside the organization – people who share our agenda. And we need confidants both inside and outside the organization – people who

²³ Wright Jnr, W.C, *The Gift of Mentors*. De Pree Leadership Center, 2001.

²⁴ Taylor, W.C, *The Leader of the Future*, Fast Company, 2001.

can keep us from getting lost in our role.” Find a coach/mentor if you don’t have one yet. If you do, keep the relationship honest.

6. Reaffirm the Priority of the Family

- **Don’t neglect marital relationship**

The leader’s marriage matters. Good marriage is a chief factor in bringing up children. We must model love, friendship, loyalty, and commitment for our children. Building a relationship is like riding a bicycle on a slope. You either move forward or slide down. There is no stationary position. Marriage takes effort. Before marriage, we put in a lot of effort into courtship. But after marriage, we take our marital relationship for granted. We neglect it to death. We commit what is called the “Absentee Spouse” phenomenon. We are too busy in our work and ministry and ignore our marriage and family.

- **Don’t neglect children**

After having three kids of my own, I realize that children have simple tastes. They just want our time. Sometimes, we use cheap substitutes like expensive toys to replace what we cannot give - time. We must give them time. Don’t neglect them. They deserve the best we can give. Don’t just build competency in your work or ministry. Build competency in your home. Be the best husband to your wife and the best father to your children. They deserve nothing less because they are deeply loved by God.

Here are some practical suggestions that I have tried to keep in my ministry.

- Prioritize and make time for family vacation
- Have at least one night a week for family time
- Make time for your spouse at least once a week

- Rekindle “wow” moments (or good times) in your marital relationship
- Re-evaluate family lifestyle, indebtedness, spending habits
- Take your kids on mission trips. Put it in the mission budget.
- Continue to inspire your spouse for your ministry and involve him/her in your ministry.
- Constantly embrace shared values of God, Kingdom, and family.

E. CONCLUSION

In his landmark book, “*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*”²⁵, Stephen Covey underscores a principle for successful executives: “Don’t kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.” Too often, we are so concerned about laying golden eggs, we neglect to take care of the goose. We pressurize it to produce. We over-work it. Sometimes, in our frantic desire to over-achieve, we kill it. Alas, we need to take care of ourselves.

In summary, we need to practice the **REST** principle in leadership.

Reflect on life: Take time to think about life, family, and ministry. We need to learn, unlearn, re-learn. That requires us to make strategic pauses in our personal and organizational life. So often we push and drive ourselves so hard, we forget to reflect on where we are going and how we are doing. Ronald Heifetz²⁶, Director of Leadership Education Project at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, writes: “Leaders need a sanctuary, a place where they can go to get back in touch with their worth of their life and the worth of their work.” He warns: “To stay alive as leaders – to tend the wounds that we inevitably receive when we raise tough questions – requires maintaining these structures in our lives.” We may drive ourselves hard but in the wrong direction!

²⁵ Covey, S.R, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Simon & Schuster, 1989.

²⁶ Ibid., Taylor, W.C.

Enjoy work: Enjoy what you are doing. We have lost the joy of life. Instilling fun back into our life and work is critical for long term survival. Christian author Em Griffin puts it this way: “We need to take God seriously but not ourselves.” Another way to enjoy our work is to celebrate success with our co-workers at the end of a project.

Serve people: Cultivating a spirit of servant-hood and humility is crucial to help us find fulfillment. To be effective in our service, we need to be the best we can ever be in our personal, family and ministry life. Set quality standards and a deep sense of responsibility. Some people are competent but irresponsible while others are responsible but incompetent. Both create impact. This is how we impact others.

Trust God: For the Christian, we need to trust God for all our efforts as well as results of our efforts. Very often, we worry and fret over uncontrollable events in our lives. Even in areas within our control, there is no guarantee of success. Our responsibility is to do our best and leave the result to God. Only then, can we find rest.

In conclusion, allow me to close with this story. A ten-year old boy wanted to learn how to play monopoly. His grandmother gave him some lessons. Feeling confident, he went out to battle with his twelve year-old neighbour. He lost. Returning home, he urged his grandma to give him more lessons. After two weeks of training, he challenged his grandma in the game and won. He was delirious. He felt he was ready to confront his neighbor. He did just that. Unfortunately, he was thrashed badly again. He lost everything. Despondent, he went back to grandma for more practice. After a month of intensive training, he returned to challenge his neighbor believing he would win. This time he did. He beat his opponent hands down – took all the houses, hotels and cash. The victory was comprehensive. His neighbor was completely overwhelmed and became a bankrupt within half an hour.

Hugging all his winnings, he rushed home and screamed triumphantly, “Grandma, grandma, I won! I won!” Grandma was overjoyed and embraced him. After the joy had subsided, grandma

turned to him and said: “My dear, I need to tell you something else about the game of monopoly.” “What is it?” the boy asked excitedly. “You don’t get to keep anything you have won. Everything has to be returned to the box!”

That is true of life too. We don’t keep anything we have won in this life. It has to go back into the box. If that is the truth, then the only way to find fulfillment in life is to invest in something beyond this life. Jesus puts it this way: “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mt. 16: 24,25)

Invest in God and people – even as we struggle incessantly to balance personal matters, work and ministry. Only then will we find joy and fulfillment. Max De Pree asks, “What will I die for?” It must certainly be for God and people.

Dr John Ng is the Executive Vice-President of Eagles Communications. He also serves as Principal Consultant with Meta HR & Communication as well as a Mediation Consultant to the Eagles Mediation and Counseling Centre and other legal establishments. He is also an adjunct faculty with the National University of Singapore.