

"A MEANINGFUL NEW APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP..."

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THE
HOSPITABLE
LEADER

CREATE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE
PEOPLE AND DREAMS FLOURISH



TERRY A. SMITH

“*The Hospitable Leader* presents a meaningful new approach to leadership that is sure to improve the organizations that embrace it. Terry Smith’s deep commitment to moral leadership, dignity, and diversity shine through on every page.”

—Jack and Suzy Welch, bestselling authors and cofounders of the Jack Welch Management Institute

“By far, this is one of the most inspiring leadership books I have read in a decade. Terry writes beautifully of the unspoken longings hidden away in most leaders’ hearts . . . to lead so others will thrive as they travel with us and to inspire others to a level of trust and faith that ultimately draws God near to the kingdoms of their hearts. Terry’s *The Hospitable Leader* is a unique blend . . . part Dallas Willard, part Winston Churchill, part Mother Teresa, but completely unique. Terry Smith is a wordsmith with a gift for igniting a passion that makes us long to become the leaders God created us to be. You. Will. Love. This. Book!”

—Valerie Bell, CEO, Awana Clubs International

“Terry Smith is an extraordinary leader and communicator. *The Hospitable Leader* is Terry at his best as a thinker, writer, and leader. He and his church embody the art of hospitality as well as any church I’ve ever met in thirty years. This is a fantastic and important read.”

—Dr. Mac Pier, founder and CEO, The NYC Leadership Center

“Joel Osteen and I count it an honor to have access to Terry Smith’s leadership insight and impartation. Terry is a pastor, life teacher, business consultant, philosopher, futurist, and confidant to a wide circle of influential leaders in this country. No hype: This may be the most important book on leadership I have read in more than a decade.”

—Phil Munsey, chairman, Champions Network and Joel Osteen Ministries

“Hospitality and leadership are not often words that coincide, but this book proves how the ideas are inseparable. *The Hospitable Leader*

gives a welcome look into how these principles should play out in our lives.”

—Mark Batterson, lead pastor, National Community Church, Washington, DC, and bestselling author of *The Circle Maker*

“Pastor Terry has certainly had a positive influence on my life as a father, husband, and leader through his ministry at TLCC. He lives each day as an example of a hospitable leader, and I know he will have the same impact for readers of this book.”

—Roman Oben, vice president, Youth Football, National Football League, and Super Bowl XXXVII Champion

“Here’s a gentle reminder that leading effectively can be enhanced by including the heart as well as the head. Be prepared to see how caring, warm relationships can surpass technology and tactics as approaches to extraordinary organizational success. Breaking bread together may accomplish more than harsh words and demanding quotas.”

—Dan Miller, *New York Times* bestselling author of *48 Days to the Work You Love*

“I have known Terry Smith for a long time and if anyone can speak to the topic of leadership and hospitality it is certainly him. A visit to The Life Christian Church has always been a pleasure and I’ve always brought it back to the hospitality. There is an atmosphere of ‘being at home.’ Terry and his wife, Sharon, set that atmosphere.”

—Willie Alfonso, chaplain, New York Yankees & Staten Island Yankees

“I have had the honor to call Terry Smith my friend for many years. I have seen him live out these principles of leadership in his life. *The Hospitable Leader* easily guides you to the next level you desire to get to.”

—Matthew Barnett, *New York Times* bestselling author and cofounder, Los Angeles Dream Center

“Terry Smith knows what it takes to become the kind of leader people want to follow, and in *The Hospitable Leader* he shares the surprising

keys to creating environments where people thrive and realize their God-inspired dreams. Whether you're a CEO, pastor, or parent, you will be equipped to adopt this unique leadership paradigm and unleash the power it brings to effectively influence others."

—Tommy Barnett, copastor, Dream City Church,
Phoenix; cofounder, Los Angeles Dream Center;
author of *The Power of a Half Hour*

"Reading this delightful book put a smile on my face and stirred up a desire in me to become a more hospitable leader. I had never strung together the words *hospitable* and *leader* but now I see how beautifully they go together."

—Nancy Beach, leadership coach, Slingshot Group, and author of
Gifted to Lead: The Art of Leading as a Woman in the Church

"*The Hospitable Leader* is a practicum on leadership and teaching built on the twenty-six years Terry Smith spent building and equipping leaders in one of the most diverse churches in the United States. My success as a professor in 'the greatest urban university in the world' is based on these principles."

—Maria Rice Bellamy, Ph.D., associate professor of literature,
City University of New York, and author of *Bridges to Memory:
Postmemory in Contemporary Ethnic American Women's Fiction*

"In my frequent travels, I have rarely met a leader and a church more hospitable. I am thrilled that Terry is sharing some of his secrets to hospitality with other leaders and churches. Hospitality is one of those underrated biblical concepts, and yet it has the potential to transform our workplaces and churches in ways that make the warmth of the Gospel more accessible for the people who need it the most."

—Matt Brown, evangelist, author, and founder, Think Eternity

"Terry Smith wants the church of Jesus Christ to shine for Him! But in his new book *The Hospitable Leader* he wisely points out that the message must always include the kindness, encouragement, and

compassionate understanding that everyone needs. His book will both inform and inspire you!”

—Jim Cymbala, senior pastor, The Brooklyn Tabernacle

“Terry Smith has once again written a cutting-edge leadership book that engages both mind and heart. On numerous occasions I have been blessed to personally witness the principles set forth in *The Hospitable Leader* as I visited the church he leads. With this thoughtful and captivating offering, I now have a much greater insight into how the richness of the diverse culture was intentionally created. This is a must-read for leaders desiring to glean new insight on creating a hospitable environment.”

—Dan Dean, lead singer, Phillips, Craig, and Dean, and lead pastor, Heartland Church, Carrollton, Texas

“In *The Hospitable Leader*, Terry Smith challenges leaders to create positive environments, and transform the inhospitable places. No matter the place or position, the climate we set as leaders matters. This read will enrich the heart of any organization.”

—Chris Durso, author of *The Heist: How Grace Robs Us of Our Shame*

“Wow! *The Hospitable Leader* is more than a book—it is a guide, a total paradigm shift for leaders. It masterfully captures the leadership of Jesus, which makes it captivating. Every sentence evokes a big YES deep down in your soul. It’s the simplicity of this concept that makes it so profound. It takes something you knew but had tucked away, like an old recipe brought back to be the star of the meal. Great job!!!”

—Maria Durso, pastor, Christ Tabernacle, Glendale, New York

“Given the constant expectations and demands on leaders, being hospitable can be easily overlooked. Yet, it’s a prerequisite for effective leadership. Using clear, simple language, Terry Smith provides us with tools to help us excel in creating a hospitable culture for those we lead. His leadership take-homes at the end of every chapter will

make you a ‘doer.’ *The Hospitable Leader* is an enjoyable must-read for anyone aspiring to influence others for the Kingdom of God.”

—Michael Durso, senior pastor, Christ
Tabernacle, Glendale, New York

“In a world torn apart by animosity and polarization, we need more hospitable leaders! Practical and substantive, this book invites us to lead well by first serving well, opening our doors to our neighbors, and embracing a much more welcoming picture of home.”

—Peter Greer, president and CEO, HOPE International,
and coauthor of *Rooting for Rivals*

“Terry Smith has found a hidden ingredient in successful leadership: hospitality. We have all known driven, angry, overbearing, or controlling leaders in our lifetimes. It’s sad, but a kind, inclusive, hospitable leader is far too rare. Terry lays out a formula found in the ancient wisdom of the Scriptures that seems modern and new. I not only fully recommend reading but also applying *The Hospitable Leader* to your life. You will go further and be happier and more fulfilled doing it!”

—Mike Hayes, president, Churches in Covenant and the Center for
National Renewal Initiative; founding pastor, Covenant Church

“*The Hospitable Leader* echoes Peter Drucker’s insight, ‘Good manners are the lubricating oil of an organization.’ Mr. Smith will open new doors with his values-based words.”

—Frances Hesselbein, former CEO of the Girl Scouts of
the USA; recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom;
chairman, The Frances Hesselbein Leadership Forum

“In *The Hospitable Leader*, Terry Smith has served up fantastic food for thought and leadership nuggets. Get ready for a fresh approach to leadership and life that is inviting and enticing to others while growing the reader with applicable truths and tools. Terry’s entertaining and intellectual approach, blended with years of hands-on hospitable leadership, makes this book a must-have for every leader’s bookshelf.”

—Scott R. Jones, senior pastor, Grace Church, Humble, Texas

“Terry Smith has discovered the power contained in a welcome. And now *The Hospitable Leader* is available to all of us and provides a practical roadmap for building a hospitable and welcoming organization, church, or business. Making people feel welcome is vital for all of us, regardless of where we live and work. Terry and the team at The Life Christian Church do this incredibly well!”

—Brad Lomenick, former president, Catalyst, and author of *The Catalyst Leader* and *H3 Leadership*

“Leadership is multifaceted. If you’ve been leading for any length of time, you know this. In *The Hospitable Leader*, Terry shines an important light on the value of hospitality in leadership and the power of what happens when it’s a central part of who we are as leaders. If you think hospitality is simply a task for your team, you’re missing this.”

—Carey Nieuwhof, founding pastor, Connexus Church

“If his notion of hospitable leadership is not universally taught now, it should be. Pastor Terry Smith carefully and clearly outlines a leadership style that is too often absent in this modern world. A blueprint for both people in leadership and for all of us in our daily lives.”

—Robert Parisi, mayor, Township of West Orange, New Jersey

“After fifteen-plus years of working in the Church and in business, I’ve seen the power in paying attention to hospitality and creating a welcoming environment for everyone. The crazy thing about this is that so many people do not do this successfully or see it as a leadership issue. It’s 100 percent a leadership decision, and I’m so thankful for my good friend Terry Smith diving into the power of this principle!”

—Tyler Reagin, president, Catalyst

“*The Hospitable Leader* by Pastor Terry—a must-read to be a WINNING leader! It is practical, inspirational, and definitely timely. This is taking leadership to the next dimension. Not just IQ + EQ but demonstrating love, compassion, and grace as a leader, with Jesus as our example!”

—Jenny Sim, vice president, Global Sourcing, Foot Locker

“All readers, whatever their leadership level or spiritual bent, will find much to stimulate their thinking in this book. Its breadth and elegant simplicity, the various leadership tenets explored, and the soundness of concepts will stir both the heart and mind. As Terry has done throughout his career, he helps us again think more clearly about ways to lead.”

—Tony Steadman, transformation lead,
Americas Organization, Ernst & Young

“Regardless of whether you are a CEO, a line supervisor in a factory, a teacher, a service provider, a parent, or a student, *The Hospitable Leader* has something for everyone. Pastor Terry does a remarkable job in explaining to us how to lead hospitably, while showing us, by example after example, how Jesus did the same.”

—Paul Theodore, president and CEO, Visual Graphic Systems

“Terry has an incredible way of guiding the reader through what it means to be a true leader. This book is a go-to for anyone who is interested in becoming a stronger team member and overall leader in their organization.”

—Jarrod Wilson, pastor and author of *Love Is Oxygen*

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TERRY A. SMITH



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To the people of TLCC:
You are the most hospitable leaders I know.

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Invitation

On the shelf behind me, as I write this, are some of the best books ever written about leadership. On another shelf are some of the best books ever written about hospitality. I imagine—and I do have a fertile imagination—that if these two shelves got married, this book might be their offspring: the best qualities of leadership and hospitality comingled in one descendant. Over the course of this book I'd like to share with you how this combination can change your life and the lives of those around you.

I may seem like an unlikely person to write about hospitable leadership inasmuch as I have been leading for many years in a place not well known for its warmhearted hospitality. Do you remember the Frank Sinatra song celebrating the challenge and possibility of New York City? He sang, "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere." I love to hear that song blaring over the loud speakers as I leave Yankee Stadium with my family after a Yankees win. But in the past twenty-six years or so I have also heard it play over and over in my mind as I have faced the complexities inherent in trying to lead something great in a New Jersey suburb of New York City. Sinatra—who grew up

in New Jersey not far from where I live and lead—could sell the message of this song not only because of his sublime talent, but because he got it. If you can make it here, you just might be able to make it anywhere.

This book is about how to lead in all kinds of places, but it flows out of my experience leading in a famously inhospitable place. You know what I mean: Our national spokesman for some time was our bombastic former governor, famous for his YouTube tirades and bridge closings. I was honored to meet him—and in person he really is a nice guy. But like most things New Jersey, the public presentation is loud and in-your-face.

Our most famous businessman may be a television character named Tony Soprano. When people hear *Jersey Shore*, they think not of the 141 miles of beautiful boardwalks and beaches that New Jersey natives treasure, but a beyond-crass reality TV show. Somebody said that our state bird is a hand signal and our state song is a honking horn. And though, in fact, our state nickname—the Garden State—is a perfect description of New Jersey’s natural beauty, people talk much more about how property taxes are ridiculously high and how far too many of our politicians are infamously corrupt. Late-night comedians drop New Jersey jokes like our trees drop leaves in the fall (though some are lucky enough to live here).

It drives me a little crazy, to be frank. Yes, we are the most densely populated state in the nation, and we have our share of challenges. But we also have one of the highest per capita income levels, and sit in the shadow of the greatest city in the world, with all the wonders it affords. Okay. I’m getting defensive here. My point is that though I passionately love this place and its people, New York City and its New Jersey suburbs are not known for a particularly hospitable climate in almost any way.

Look, I’ll take New Jersey people any day. They are so real! When they say they love you, they really love you. When you make a friend, you have a friend for life. Underneath it all,

people are genuinely gracious and kind. It just seems that we might never want anyone to know it. But I have to acknowledge that when folks around the country talk about Southern hospitality, they are not referring to the South Bronx or South Jersey.

Here's the deal: I have learned—and am learning—how to be a hospitable leader in what many believe is an inhospitable place. I know, however, that most of us lead in an inhospitable setting at some time and place in our lives. The finest corporation experiences challenging periods during the normal ups and downs of organizational life cycles. The most profitable small business must survive seasons facing economic headwinds. The healthiest family suffers times of turbulence. The winningest coach must lead teams with less talent than needed to win during some seasons. The finest teachers have to practice their craft in less than favorable learning environments at some point. The most gifted pastor attempts to shepherd a congregation to unity and growth during times when it feels like everything in this world and beyond fights every effort to do good.

Let's face it: The whole world can feel a little inhospitable at times. But that's okay—we can create the conditions for good and great things to happen. Any time. Any place. Through this book, I want to help leaders make positive environments better and transform the most difficult settings into hospitable places.

Jesus modeled hospitable leadership in so many ways. I am particularly inspired by His description of His kingdom as a feast that a king prepared for his son. How many leaders could describe their leadership sphere in such hospitable terms? I suggest that we think of our leadership in this way: as a feast we are throwing for our followers—stockholders, teams, employees, customers, congregants, students, children. Jesus did

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the most important work for the world, and led the most successful movement in the history of the world, in the context of a radical hospitality—a feast He made ready and to which everyone is invited.

Hospitality was not optional for the earliest leaders of the Christian church. They were required to practice hospitable leadership, and their hospitality is part of the reason they were able to continue to provide leadership for the most successful movement in history.

The apostle Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy that a leader is to be hospitable or “he must enjoy having guests in his home.” He told Christians in Rome that they must “practice hospitality.” The apostle Peter told the church at large to “offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” And the writer to the Hebrews was clear: “Do not forget to show hospitality.”

Hospitable leaders view life and leadership through the lens of hospitality. They aspire to create environments of welcome where moral leadership can be exercised in all of its permutations. These environments can be physical—even a literal feast, perhaps—but even more they are spiritual, attitudinal, and communicative.

We should see hospitable leadership as a worldview, a mindset, an approach. It can have multiple expressions in action and behavior. We should think of it as a philosophical operating system. A great operating system helps everything work better, both independently and in relation to others. If we can view all of our activities through the lens of hospitality, I think our leadership might feel like a feast that we prepare for everyone in our domain.

Let me show you one of the many ways this plays out in my leadership context. I am the lead pastor of The Life Christian Church in northern New Jersey. Perhaps the thing the congregation is best known for is its incredible diversity. We are a beautiful mosaic of all kinds of people. We do not have

a dominant racial group. We are black and brown and white and every imaginable variation thereof. We come from a multitude of nations of origin. We are rich and all levels of not so rich. We are PhDs and GEDs. We are young and not so young. We are Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, Lutherans, Methodists—and lots of previously unchurched people. When people visit us—especially from other parts of the country—they are often blown away. Several years ago, an internationally recognized pastor who has addressed churches and leaders all over the world spoke for us. When he saw the diversity of our congregation, he said, “It took my breath away.” Frankly, that’s pretty typical of what people say about us.

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When I am asked, “How have you grown such a diverse congregation? And how do you lead it now?” my response is, “Hospitable leadership.” This book is an attempt to explain what I mean when I say that.

For now, suffice it to say the hospitality I propose is a way of approaching everything. Yes, there is a physicality to hospitable leadership. We have developed a beautiful broadcast campus on a major thoroughway thirteen miles from Times Square, with a pond, waterfall, fountains, coffee bar, fireplace, and other requisite hospitable stuff. We have warm, happy, and well-trained first-impressions people, as do many churches and other organizations. But we were hospitable during the long seventeen years we spent in a storefront Worship and Mission Center—contiguous with the Liquor Lobby on one side and Pauley’s Pub on the other—just off main street. With not one parking space we could call our own. We did the best we could with that old bowling-alley-turned-printing-factory-turned-church. But if hospitable primarily means physical space, we were severely limited for a long time. So how did we grow such a large,

thriving, diverse congregation in such an inhospitable physical setting? We created the conditions—in a multiple of ways—in which every imaginable kind of person could be welcomed and led to a better life. In this book I want to share some of what we have learned.

I think it is important to say that I hear more and more really good leadership practitioners and theorists talk about leadership in a manner that sounds like a feast to me—leaders who talk about leadership in terms of love, who truly serve their followers, and who work hard to create organizational cultures that care for people as a primary part of organizational mission. I humbly submit *The Hospitable Leader* as a means to describe a leadership zeitgeist of sorts—something that is already happening, increasingly, through some stellar leaders and outstanding organizations. I have learned from so many who are leading hospitably without, perhaps, ever having heard the term *hospitable leader*.

I also observe that on the other hand, there is a proliferation of a kind of leadership that can most hospitably be described as inhospitable. The result is an increasing ugliness and polarization in our world. I think people are longing for more hospitable leaders who create a climate of invitation and welcome that allows all kinds of people to work together in unity to heal the brokenness that is all around us. Hopefully this book will serve as an invitation to be part of a movement of hospitable leaders.

The Hospitable Leader is organized into five Welcomes. **Welcome One: Home** more fully introduces the concept of hospitable leadership and makes the case that productive hospitality is rooted in the idea of home and warm hearts. **Welcome Two: Strangers** invites you to consider the revolutionary possibilities of practicing a radical hospitality that welcomes every stranger as a potential messenger from God and offers resistance to the relational division in our world. **Welcome Three: Dreams** alerts us to the opportunity to be intentionally hospitable to dreamers

and their dreams and to help their dreams come true in their Area of Destiny. **Welcome Four: Communication** clarifies that hospitality is not a vague sentimentality but that hospitable communicators create space where transformative truth can be spoken. **Welcome Five: Feasts** speaks to the leader's state of being and shows us that if our leadership is going to feel like a feast, then we must learn to be intentional about hope and happiness and enjoy the feast of life.

I welcome you into exploring and applying these ideas that have changed my life and the lives of so many others who offer me the privilege of serving them. I hope you sense something warm and welcoming—something that invites you in—through the words I have written. I desperately want to be a hospitable leader—a hospitable communicator—who through this book creates space that helps you lead more and more successfully in all kinds of times and places.

Sources

“If I can make it there”: Frank Sinatra, vocalist, “Theme from *New York, New York*,” by John Kander and Fred Ebb, *Trilogy: Past Present Future*, 1980, Reprise.

“he must enjoy having guests”: 1 Timothy 3:2 NLT.

“practice hospitality”: Romans 12:13.

“offer hospitality to one another without grumbling”: 1 Peter 4:9.

“Do not forget to show hospitality.”: Hebrews 13:2.

Welcome One

HOME



1

The Hospitable Leader

A hospitable leader creates environments of welcome where moral leadership can more effectively influence an ever-expanding diversity of people.

I confess that I am not often powerfully moved when visiting a museum. My favorite collection is often found in the café. But Renaissance painter Paolo Veronese grabbed my heart with *The Wedding Feast at Cana*.

My wife, Sharon, and I, along with our son Caleb, were in Paris for a few days of holiday and learning. We made the obligatory visit to the Louvre and thoroughly enjoyed exploring the largest art museum in the world. We made certain not to miss seeing the *Mona Lisa*—arguably the most famous painting on this planet. I was incredulous when we walked into the room where it is displayed: Da Vinci's masterpiece was celebrated like a rock star. A scrum of people surged as close as possible to the surprisingly small painting. So many pictures were being taken and videos shot, it was as if we were in a room full of paparazzi.

I probably shouldn't admit it, but I was a little underwhelmed. The *Mona Lisa* is beautiful, but it looked small and distant on the large and otherwise empty wall.

Then I saw it. On the opposite wall was the largest painting in the Louvre: *The Wedding Feast at Cana*. This is the painting the *Mona Lisa* looks at. There on a gargantuan canvas, with warm light emanating from His head, sat Jesus, the focal point of a great banquet. And He was looking right at me. Of the more than one hundred guests at this sumptuous feast, He was the only one looking at me. I felt like He was inviting me in. Welcoming me.

Veronese seemed to feel this welcome when he created his astounding work of art. Part of what fascinates me is who he placed with Jesus at this wedding celebration. Mary and some of the apostles surround Jesus at the center of the table. But Veronese also included known historical figures, as well as some of his contemporaries, family, and close personal friends. And . . . he included himself. All of them are speechless and sated as they drink wine of eternal vintage in the presence of the Miracle Maker himself.

I was so moved as I stood before that stunning scene. I wanted to shout at the museum crowd, "You are focused on the wrong thing! Or at least the lesser thing! As beautiful as the *Mona Lisa* is, you should turn and look at what she looks at all day." There, on the largest canvas in the largest museum in the world, was the greatest leader in the history of the world inviting us to a feast. And no one was paying attention.

To be fair, as I looked at the scene before me, I had some sense of what it represented. I had thought about it for years. I knew that Jesus had introduced himself to the world at this wedding celebration. That when He turned water into wine to gift a newly married couple and to satisfy and amaze all of their guests, it was the first indication of who He was and what He came to do. As John wrote in his gospel account of this feast,

“What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory.”

Furthermore, on that day in Paris, I had been in a season of thought and research concerning a new way of thinking about leadership. I was so discouraged with so much of the leadership I was seeing in the world around me. I knew I was not alone in this. I believed—and I believe this now even more than I did then—that our world aches for a new kind of leadership. For a new kind of leader. And there in the Louvre, that leader sat looking right at me. Revealing to the world that a new kind of leader had, in fact, arrived. A leader who would change everything and do it while inviting all of us in. Who would welcome us—in ways great and small—to follow Him. To join Him in His mission. At that moment I realized that Jesus was the prototype of the new kind of leader our world needs. A hospitable leader. Jesus is the ultimate hospitable leader.

The most successful leader in the history of the world led in a context of hospitality. Jesus often used—or created—hospitable environments to welcome people to himself and employ them in His mission. Again, one of the ways He described His kingdom was as a wedding feast that a king prepared for his son. A feast to which everyone is invited. How many kings would ever have described their kingdoms in this way? How many of us who lead could describe our leadership in terms of a feast?

We can learn about hospitable leadership by extrapolating from the leadership story of Jesus. We can also learn from many leaders who have led hospitably in many settings through history, down to our time. We can each learn to cultivate climates that feel like a feast, where those we are leading are welcomed in, and where we can practice other tried and proven leadership theories more effectively than ever before.

Hospitable leadership does not replace other successful leadership methods—it supplements them. Hospitable leaders intentionally create environments where all of our leadership

efforts are enhanced. We should hope for our leadership to look more and more like the leadership of Jesus—the most remarkable leader who ever lived.

It is astounding to see just how much the leadership story of Jesus happened in relation to hospitality. Though I suppose we shouldn't be surprised. As Tim Chester explains, there are only three ways the Gospels complete the sentence “the Son of Man came. . . .” Two explain *why* He came. They speak to His mission: “to seek and to save the lost” and “to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” The third describes *how* He came. It speaks to the means He used to fulfill His mission. Jesus said it himself: “The Son of Man came eating and drinking.” He fulfilled His mission in a framework of feasting, welcome, and invitation—hospitality.

When we create hospitable environments, it increases the likelihood that people will receive our leadership efforts. Leaders—especially in today's world—must seek permission from followers in order to lead them. We must invite people in. We must welcome them to the table. We must create conditions in which people want to be led. We cannot lead people from here to there if they have not first been welcomed *here*.

Leaders must work hard to engage people at the level of their will. The people we are trying to influence can, except in rare circumstances, do whatever they please. We are wise if we create pleasing environments where they are more willing to do the good things we are attempting to lead them to do. Biographer Jean Edward Smith recounts an incident during the Second World War when General George Marshall was resistant to a military action President Franklin Roosevelt wanted taken. Roosevelt, America's longest serving president, had an instinctive awareness of what the American people wanted. Though he ultimately would make decisions based on what he

believed was in the best interests of those he led—as any leader should—he knew that if he paid attention to public opinion and led in tandem with the will of the people, his decisions would bring a better result. The president pushed General Marshall to take action that he believed Americans would support, as opposed to the strategy Marshall wanted to pursue from a purely military perspective. Roosevelt prevailed, the action was taken, and the results were effective and historic. Much later, General Marshall confessed that he had in fact been wrong in his leadership approach. With new insight he said, “We failed to see that the leader in a democracy has to keep the people entertained.”

In ways obvious and subtle, hospitable leaders “entertain” those we lead—or want to lead. It is simply easier to influence people who have been welcomed to the table. A famous example of this is when Jesus fed the five thousand. You know the story: Jesus was in a town on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and a huge

crowd came to see Him. He welcomed them. Jesus was concerned that they didn’t have anything to eat. He took a little bit of food, enough for one little boy, and multiplied it into a whole lot of food—enough for more than five thousand people. Characteristic of the hospitality of Jesus, there were even leftovers.

That night Jesus got into a boat with His disciples (actually walked on the water to the boat) and sailed to another town on the Galilean shore. The next morning the crowd “realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, [and] they got into the boats and went in search of Jesus.”

Note, they went searching for Him. You know you are leading well when people are searching for you! When they found Him, Jesus told them He knew they were only looking for Him because they knew He could feed them. But now that they were

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there, He could talk about what He really wanted to talk about: “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.” He then announced that He was the bread of life and that whoever believed in Him would never be hungry again.

The meal he fed the five thousand was more than a meal; it was not really about the fish and bread. I have no doubt that Jesus was terribly concerned about the physical hunger of the people. He was hospitable in their need. But with Jesus, dinner was usually about more than dinner. Now that He had their attention, He could lead them to more than they knew they needed. He could say what really needed to be said. He could exercise influence.

The people could have gone wherever they wanted to that morning. But because he had “entertained” them, they were engaged at the level of their will. And they went looking for Him. Now He could offer them something more than breakfast—he could offer them the Bread of Life.

Hospitality provided a pathway for Jesus to move His mission forward, and to offer the people more than they had ever dreamed of. Hospitality creates environments for people and dreams to flourish.

From a business perspective, Starbucks founder Howard Schultz articulates some aspects of hospitable leadership as well as anyone. He understands the importance of creating environments in which people can be led to make decisions aligned with organizational objectives. In his case, that’s to buy coffee, of course. “The merchant’s success depends on his or her ability to tell a story. What people see or hear or smell or do when they enter a space guides their feelings, enticing them to celebrate whatever the seller has to offer.”

I was talking to a small-business owner recently who was asking me about hospitable leadership. She seemed dubious

that it would matter to her bottom line. This was an easy one for me. I explained to her what should be obvious to us all. When people engage your business, they either feel invited or they don't. They sense welcome or they don't. They intuit this when they navigate your website. They perceive it when they see your signage. They know it when they walk through the front door. The physical space speaks to them. The receptionist usually confirms impressions already made. And here's the deal: It's difficult to sell your services to someone who doesn't feel welcomed. You must get people to the table in order to influence them. When people experience hospitality—when they are enticed—they are more inclined to say yes to what you have to offer.

As Schultz writes,

Ideally, every Starbucks store should tell a story about coffee and what we as an organization believe in. That story should unfold via the taste and presentation of our products as well as the sights, sounds, and smells that surround our customers. The aroma of freshly ground coffee. Interior hues, textures, the shapes and materials of furniture and fixtures, as well as their origins. The art on the walls. The music. The rhythm of the coffee bar and how our partners move and speak behind the counter. . . . Each store's ambiance is the manifestation of a larger purpose, and at Starbucks each shop's multidimensional sensory experiences has always defined our brand.

Every leader who wants to accomplish good purposes must be aware of what the climate of the organization we serve is saying. Though words are part of this environmental reality, sometimes the overall atmospherics of a place speak so loudly that people can't hear what we actually want to say.

This attention to hospitality is not only for our customers; it is even more important for our employees or teams. Ken Gosnell

blogged that “business owners need to view their business as a home and their employees as guests on a regular basis.” I like that he didn’t say to treat employees like family. Sadly, we are often more hospitable to guests than we are to our families. We should treat our employees as guests.

This has been a paradigm-shifting challenge for me. Am I hospitable to the people who work with me? Who show up every day and partner with me to accomplish our shared vision? I desperately hope so. I hope this is reflected in the office space we carefully designed—full of light, inviting, warm. I hope this is reflected in hospitable policies and internal communications and how performance is measured and rewarded, and even how team members transition off of our team if and when that time comes. I hope this is reflected in the hundreds of simple interactions that occur as the days fly by—through kind words, by trying to catch people doing something right, in finding any possible excuse to praise them. And with simple courtesies such as *please* and *thank you* and *my pleasure* and *you’re welcome*. I’ve not always been successful at this. I have learned. I am learning. I do know that when I create an environment of welcome for those who work with me, they will give me permission to lead them to do great things.

Some time ago I met a guy named Paul Theodore as I was greeting people in the lobby after the Sunday service. He mentioned he was a partner in a sign company. Only later—as I got to know him better—did I discover that it’s not your average sign company. Paul is the president and CEO of Visual Graphic Systems, Inc. If you walk into any Starbucks in the world, you see menu signage that Visual Graphic designed or manufactured. Same at Subway, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Taco Bell, Dunkin’ Donuts, and any number of other fast-food franchises. If you visit the Museum of Modern Art, or the Lincoln

Center in New York City, or Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, you see VGS's sign systems. If you see the famous bow and ribbon across the landmarked Cartier building during a magical Manhattan Christmas, think VGS. And those are just *some* of the things they do.

Paul is one of four partners at VGS. At least for now. As I was writing this chapter, I bumped into Paul and asked him how he was doing. He said he was a little stressed, that he's been working a lot of extra hours. I asked him if something unusual was going on. He said yes; he and his partners have decided to share ownership of a large percentage of their company with their employees, approximately 125 of them. My interest was piqued. "Why are you doing that?" I asked. He explained that VGS has doubled its revenue in the past five or six years and is growing rapidly. Part of this growth necessitated moving out of Manhattan to Carlstadt, New Jersey. This meant that most of his employees, many of whom have been with the company for many years, are commuting from one of the five New York City boroughs. This has impacted the quality of their lives, and he has been concerned that too many of them are living paycheck to paycheck and having trouble saving for retirement. So he and his partners decided to divide a significant percentage of the company into stock that will be paid into their employees'—now owners'—retirement accounts. Paul is excited because if the company is ever sold, people will not lose their jobs but rather be enriched. Everybody in the company will win. The company is owned by its employees, after all.

There's also this: Paul dreams of continuing to grow the company and serving his customers ever better. He knows that owners will be motivated to work hard and long to grow *their* company. Paul understands that moral leaders do not have to choose between caring for people and working toward the fulfillment of their own dreams. They can do both at the same

time. Hospitable leaders create environments where people and dreams flourish.

It boggles my mind to see how applicable the leadership practices of Jesus are to this discussion. At the Last Supper, Jesus demonstrated a blend of hospitality and leadership that is breathtaking. He created an environment where He modeled leadership at its very best, and led a leadership discussion that empowered His followers to change the world forever.

It began when He ensured the preparation of the physical space where the Last Supper was to be held. Luke puts it like this in his gospel:

Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.” “Where do you want us to prepare for it?” they asked. He replied, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there.” They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.”

This provision is often overlooked in the story of the Last Supper. And in discussions about leadership. Jesus ensured that His last dinner with His disciples would be held in a hospitable environment. He made certain that the room was large enough and adequately furnished. He instructed Peter and John to make preparations for the Passover dinner in that space—no doubt a meticulous and time-consuming task. A lamb slain. Wine purchased. A table set for twelve plus one.

When His guests arrived, Jesus set the spiritual climate in a way that reflected the importance of this dinner. John said, in

his gospel, that in this moment, Jesus showed the “full extent of his love.” The air must have been heavy with emotion. I don’t know what He said to convey that much passion, but He didn’t need to say much. The atmosphere was thick with love.

Then, in the greatest act of servant leadership ever recorded, “he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” He assumed the position of the lowest of servants. He did what perhaps someone else in the room should have offered to do. He washed the dirty feet of His followers. I love the words that precede this act: “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.” I like to say, and will say, that hospitable leadership at its zenith is a state of being. It flows out of who we are. Jesus could serve His followers in this way because He knew who He was. And because He knew who He was, He could selflessly show them how much He cared for them.

You have to imagine that His disciples hung on every word Jesus uttered in that environment. As they ate and drank, and then finally walked together to Gethsemane on that fateful night, Jesus gave a leadership talk for the ages. He cast vision for their shared future. He engaged in the most extreme team building, commanding them to love one another, even to the point of laying down their lives for each other. He prayed passionately for unity. He gave them buy-in, if you please, to His Father’s business, saying, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father

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I have made known to you.” He established expectations and let them know He would be measuring results: “I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.” He expected them to produce!

All this leadership activity happened in the context of hospitality. You can’t practice servant leadership unless you have welcomed people in. Hospitable leaders create space physically, spiritually, emotionally, and relationally where all other forms of moral leadership can be employed.

Jon Meacham wrote a beautiful book in which he painted an intimate portrait of the epic friendship between Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. He eloquently makes the point that they were not just friends, but that their relationship was about something bigger than their bond. As the primary leaders of the free world, they each felt destined to save humanity from Hitler and the other Axis powers. “A friendship like Roosevelt and Churchill’s is rightly understood as a fond relationship in which two people have an interest not just in each other (though they do) but also, as [Ralph Waldo] Emerson saw, in a shared external truth or mission.” Meacham wrote that “C. S. Lewis noted that Emerson once observed, *Do you love me?* actually means *Do you see the same truth?* Or at least . . . *Do you care about the same truth?*”

Meacham’s insight helps make the point that this book is not just another book about hospitality, at least not primarily. It is about hospitable *leadership*. Roosevelt and Churchill didn’t just enjoy having dinner together. They had dinner together around a common purpose. Together, they were trying to save the world.

Leaders have a job to do. In our own way, we each have a world to save. Pastors, moms, teachers—and CEOs responsible

for the livelihoods of a whole lot of people. Hospitality is good in and of itself. But I want us to see the potential of hospitality to create a platform to engage people—to lead people from where they are to where they should be.

This does not mean that hospitable leadership is utilitarian, a Machiavellian means to an end. That would not be hospitable. Practicing leadership with a hospitality mindset is the right way—the moral way—to lead people. It is community with purpose, fellowship with outcomes, hospitality with results.

The earliest leaders of the Christian church devoted themselves to “teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer,” and “the Lord added to their number daily.” Something more than fellowship came out of their fellowship. The requirement for early church leaders to be hospitable wasn’t so they could just hang out. They had a mission to accomplish. And accomplish it they did.

When I see Jesus sitting in the middle of a great feast, looking at me and inviting me in, I know He is inviting me to eat with Him, to fellowship with Him, and I thrill to that. But I know that’s not all that’s going on. I also know He is inviting me to join Him in what He is doing. He is creating space where I can flourish—where dreams come true. That’s what hospitable leaders do. I want to be a leader like that.

Practicing leadership with a hospitality mindset is the right way—the moral way—to lead people.

Leadership Take-Homes

1. **Create environments that feel like warm, welcoming feasts.**
Hospitality provided the pathway for Jesus to advance His

mission; to advance ours, we must earnestly embrace His hospitable example.

2. **Create environments where people want to be led, and engage them at the level of their will.** It is easier to influence people who have been invited in and welcomed to the table.
3. **Identify the physical, emotional, and relational pathways leading to your goals.** When Jesus fed the five thousand, He wasn't simply providing a meal, but offering an accessible path to the core of His message.

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