

"A MEANINGFUL NEW APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP..."

JACK WELCH

FORMER CEO GENERAL ELECTRIC

SUZY WELCH

BESTSELLING MANAGEMENT AUTHOR

THE

HOSPITABLE LEADER

CREATE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE
PEOPLE AND DREAMS FLOURISH



TERRY A. SMITH

THE
HOSPITABLE
LEADER

CREATE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE
PEOPLE AND DREAMS FLOURISH

TERRY A. SMITH



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Terry A. Smith, *The Hospitable Leader*
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2018. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2018 by Terry A. Smith

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

ISBN 978-0-7642-3214-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018935251

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations labeled ABUV are from the American Bible Union Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations labeled ASV are from the American Standard Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations labeled CEV are from the Contemporary English Version © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations labeled EB are from the Emphasized Bible by Joseph Bryant Rotherham.

Scripture quotations labeled GNT are from the Good News Translation—Second Edition. Copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations labeled KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations labeled MESSAGE are from THE MESSAGE. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Scripture quotations labeled NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations labeled NCV are from the New Century Version®. Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled NET are from the NET Bible®, copyright © 1996–2006 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://netbible.com>. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled NJB are from THE NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE, copyright © 1985 by Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd. and Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

Scripture quotations labeled NKJV are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled NLT are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations labeled PHILLIPS are from The New Testament in Modern English, revised edition—J. B. Phillips, translator. © J. B. Phillips 1958, 1960, 1972. Used by permission of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

Scripture quotations labeled TLB are from The Living Bible, copyright © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Cover design by LOOK Design Studio

Author is represented by The FEDD Agency.

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 Terry A. Smith, *The Hospitable Leader*

Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2018. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

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

Contents

Invitation 000

Welcome One:

HOME

1. *The Hospitable Leader* 000
2. The Power of a Warm Heart 000

Welcome Two:

STRANGERS

3. Stranger Angels 000
4. Radical Hospitality Produces Revolutionary Results 000

Welcome Three:

DREAMS

5. Head Full of Dreams 000
6. Anything is Possible in Your Area of Destiny 000
7. Dream Challenge 000

Welcome Four:

COMMUNICATION _____

- 8. Grace and Truth 000
- 9. People are Opportunities 000
- 10. Communication Champion 000
- 11. The Usefulness of Beautiful Things 000

Welcome Five:

FEASTS _____

- 12. Enjoy Life 000
- 13. Happiness Creates Conditions for Success 000
- 14. Always Hope for More 000

- Acknowledgments 000

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 commingled 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, his 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.

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 we 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, the New Jersey suburbs of New York City 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

**We can create
the conditions
for good and
great things
to happen any
time, any place.**

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 this 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, pastor and leader of leaders Bill Hybels 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.

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 throughway 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—wedged between the Liquor Lobby on one side and Pauley’s Pub on the other. 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

**We should see
hospitable
leadership as
a worldview,
a mindset, an
approach.**

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



Terry A. Smith, The Hospitable Leader
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2018. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

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—but I was incredulous when we walked into the room where it is displayed: Da Vinci’s masterpiece was being celebrated like a rock star! A scrum of people surged as close as possible to the surprisingly small painting, and 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 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

**It is simply easier
to influence
people who have
been welcomed
to the table.**

crowd came to see Him. He welcomed them, but He 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

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 food; it was not really about the fish and bread. Oh, 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; therefore, 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

**Jesus
demonstrated
a blend of
hospitality and
leadership that
is breathtaking.**

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.

John 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 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.

Sources

- “What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee”: John 2:11.
He described His kingdom as a wedding: Matthew 22:2 NIV.
“the Son of Man came”: Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, and Mission around the Table* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 12.
“to seek and to save the lost”: Luke 19:10.
“to serve others and to give”: Mark 10:45 NLT.
“The Son of Man came eating”: Luke 7:34.
“We failed to see that the leader”: Jean Edward Smith, *Eisenhower: In War and Peace* (New York: Random House, 2012), 216.
“realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples”: John 6:24.
“Do not work for food that spoils”: John 6:27.
“The merchant’s success depends on his or her ability.”: Howard Schultz, *Onward: How Starbucks Fought for Its Life without Losing Its Soul* (New York: Rodale, 2011), 34.
“Ideally, every Starbucks store should tell a story”: Schultz, 273–274.
“business owners need to view their business”: Ken Gosnell, “The Secret Leadership Traits—HOSPITABLE,” December 3, 2015, LinkedIn.com.
“Jesus sent Peter and John”: Luke 22:8–13.
“the full extent of his love”: John 13:1 NLT, note.
“he got up from the meal”: John 13:4–5.
“Jesus knew that the Father had”: John 13:3.
“I no longer call you servants”: John 15:15.
“I chose you and appointed you”: John 15:16.

“A friendship like Roosevelt and Churchill’s”: Jon Meacham, *Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship* (New York: Random House, 2004), xvii.

“C.S. Lewis noted that Emerson once observed”: Meacham, *Franklin and Winston*, xvii.

“devoted themselves to teaching”: Acts 2:42, 47.