

It's All About Preparation

A few years back, I was out of town and the place I was staying at had an indoor sports court. For 30 minutes, it was a well-worn Wilson basketball, a hoop with a partially torn net, and me. And it was good. Very good.

I've been shooting baskets for over 50 years, and as I shot that day I was reminded of the inordinate amount of time one spends PREPARING for the game of basketball in contrast to the amount of time one spends PLAYING the game

No spoiler alert here. What is true in the game of basketball is true in the game of leadership: You prepare a whole lot more than you play. It is a fundamental reality of leadership that seasons of success are preceded by seasons of preparation.

In view of this reality, it calls into question the best way to prepare for the task of leadership, especially if you understand the significance of leading with your life—leading from the inside out.

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I believe that one of the best ways to prepare for the task of leadership is to have a well-seasoned set of core values at the ready. James Kouzes and Barry Posner in their classic book *The Leadership Challenge* put it this way: *Values comprise the things that are most important to us. They are the deep-seated, pervasive standards that influence almost every aspect of our lives... Values constitute our personal "bottom line."* For my part, core values are a list of non-negotiable markers that guide my way as I encounter the uncertainties and unpredictable terrain of leadership.

While some people enjoy collecting coins or stamps or baseball cards, I love to collect core values. Here are some "keepers" that may serve as prompters as you identify (or renew) your own core values:

- Be God's person before I do God's work
- Extend to others the same grace God extends to me
- Autograph my work with excellence
- Choose to live in a big story
- Seek ways to encourage and build up others

- Remain alert to an enemy who never goes off-duty
- Under-promise and over-deliver
- Live this life in anticipation of the next
- Seek integrity between my private and public life
- Extraordinary decisions are the by-product of everyday choices
- While you may not always have certainty, you always can provide clarity

In the arena of leadership, no two days are exactly alike. No photocopies. No reloads. Each day brings a fresh set of challenges. And for the leader who is prepared with a well-established set of core values, these challenges can be seen not as obstacles but as opportunities.

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