

Rock Solid

The Audience of One

BLOG

November 2010 – The setting was Haneda Airport in Tokyo. Little did I know that this hub of 24/7 activity would serve as the stage where my family would be greeted in a fashion forever frozen in the memory bank of my mind.

Our family was on the final lap of a trip of a lifetime visiting a number of people that our church loved, prayed for, and supported. Stop one: the Philippines. Stop two: Thailand. Stop three: Japan.

Because Pattie's parents served as missionaries in Japan for nearly 50 years doing church planting and radio broadcasting, part of our time in that frenetic, yet fascinating country was to visit long-time friends of her family.

In short, the people who greeted us at Haneda that day were people who had come to faith in Christ because of the ministry of Pattie's parents. As such, their hearts of overflowing gratitude could not have been more transparent. While I do not speak Japanese, I needed no interpreter to understand the love and hugs and smiles and tears that surrounded this hallmark moment.

For the next few days, we were treated like royalty and received in proxy the appreciation and recognition that we ultimately forwarded to Pattie's parents upon our return to the states.

Spiritual leaders make every decision with the awareness that one day they will give an account to God.

—Henry and Richard Blackaby

This occasion has caused me to think about recognition in the life of a leader. Here's my take: Being recognized as a leader for your contribution to the leadership task is a mixed bag. It may happen. It may not. You never know. On the one hand, you may be the one for whom they roll out the red carpet; and on the other hand, you may be the one they want to run out of town! Such is the lot of leadership.

In all candor, it is good for leaders early in their tenure to learn that it is shortsighted and misguided to live for the applause of the crowd. Leaders need to continually rehearse the reality that there is only one person whose recognition really matters.

Reggie McNeal in his prodigious book, *A Work of Heart*, puts it this way:

There is an Audience of One that the Christian leader must cultivate. Only his approval assuages insignificance and loneliness and feelings of failure. Only he keeps perfect score.



He is the one who has issued the call and convened the games. He is the one who will judge the efforts and award the medals. His is the only vote that counts, no matter how many seem lined up either for or against you. His “well done” will make every effort worth doing again.

This idea of “an Audience of One” is fundamental stuff. That is to say, leaders must come to terms that there is only one recognition appropriately sought. That recognition is the central point when the Apostle Paul waxes sober in unpacking life’s most important evaluation—a “final exam” that you don’t want to fail. *“So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him. For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.”*

Now THAT is a final exam I want to be prepared for. Don’t you?

So don’t spin your wheels contemplating or worrying about whether you’ll be recognized for your leadership efforts this side of eternity. Set your sights on the scorecard that matters most.

Wise is the leader who lives this life in anticipation of the next.

Lord, I admit that all too often I long and listen for the applause of the crowd. In my life and leadership, may You and only You be the “audience” I seek to honor.