

**“SHOW ME WHERE YOU’RE LOOKING”
A Key to Effective Leadership**

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“Show me where you’re looking.”

We were sitting in the cockpit of a two-seater, single engine aircraft as Orville tried to help me master the one thing I was having trouble with in flying. Any pilot will tell you there are only two times of potential danger: take-off and landing. Take-off had proven no challenge, but landings were something else for me in the early stages of training. No matter what I did, a landing was at best a controlled crash, with greater emphasis on “crash” than on “controlled.”

Orville was not a licensed instructor, but he had a knack for teaching. We had been friends, and he had been an informal mentor to me for some time. This day I had bumped into him at the flying club and told him of my problem.

“There’s a plane outside,” he said. “Let’s go! I can help you solve your problem.”

“Great! I’ll get the keys and we can take-off.”

“No need to do that. I can teach you just as well on the ground.”

Having already attended hours of ground school, I was somewhat sceptical about how much I could learn about landing without actually doing it. But my own real-time efforts had not been particularly successful, so I thought I’d play along. I climbed into the pilot’s seat; he sat as the instructor.

“Okay,” he said. “Sit as you sit when you’re actually flying. Now, pretend you’re on final approach. Show me where you’re looking.”

“I’m looking at the spot where I’m going to touch down.”

“Okay. But do you change where you’re looking as you get closer to touch-down?”

“Why would I do that?”

“No wonder you’ve got a problem landing, Mel. Your point of reference is all wrong.”

He then explained that the right reference point is critical to success in everything we do.

Simply put, a reference point is that indicator you use to determine what you need to do at any given point in time. Pick the right reference point, and you’ll succeed at what you’re doing.

Just as the reference point needs to change as a pilot gets closer to touch-down, our point of reference needs to change as we move closer to completion of a task or achievement of a goal. We need to consciously establish the appropriate reference point for each stage or segment to achieve the desired result.

To successfully land that particular aircraft, the reference point was the horizon, not the point of touch-down. Having established the touch-down point early into final approach, my reference point then needed to shift from the point of touch-down to the horizon. Contrary to every instinct in me, I had to raise my eyes to avoid a (controlled) crash.

I never blew another landing.

The lesson Orville taught me that day has stayed with me. To be successful at anything, always establish your reference point, then change it as you get closer to your goal. But always be clear about your reference point.

“Show me where you’re looking.”

Successful leaders – those who achieve exceptional results by blending the elusive combination of personal qualities, particular skills, and opportunity, – understand the importance of reference points.

For the Christian leader, the over-riding reference point is God, and our relationship to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. By looking to Him, bringing everything to Him, we can be sure that we are on His path, not our own. Then we can experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit at work within us.

We still need other reference points suitable to the tasks we are undertaking and the outcomes we are seeking, but those place a distant second to the over-riding importance of having the Lord as our primary point of reference.

Because having God as our reference point is contrary to everything we are taught in our culture, it requires certain qualities on our part, qualities that become more deeply ingrained and more natural the more we practice them.

First, it requires **self-discipline**. It requires the resolve to say “No” to self, and “Yes” to God, to bring everything to Him as a child brings his/her plans to a parent before embarking on them. As we lay our most cherished desires and ambitions before the Lord, there is always the possibility that He will say “No,” or “not yet,” or “I’m taking you in a completely different direction, and you won’t be able to see why or where until you’ve said, ‘O.K.’”

To say O.K. to the Lord requires **obedience**, setting aside our own will and accepting His. One good friend experienced the absolute crushing weight of that as he gradually accepted the truth that the dream that had sustained him through devastating defeats and

disappointments was his dream, not the Lord’s. In fact, the Lord’s plan for him was the opposite of the dream that had energized him.

As he struggled to come to terms with full acceptance, he was like one who has had every ounce of breath forced out of his body and all hope crushed in his soul.

“Show me where you’re looking.” It took tremendous expenditure of will for him to shift his reference point from his dream to what he knew God wanted him to do. The battle drained him, physically and emotionally, but strengthened him spiritually.

The joy he now knows from that act of obedience would have been denied him if he had disobeyed the Lord.

But not every goal we set, or instruction we think we hear, is from the Lord. Even people of great faith sometimes confuse their own desires with the word of the Lord. So we need to **seek confirmation** from others that it really is the Lord’s voice we are responding to, and not just our own or the urgings of others.

The temptation to not seek confirmation is particularly attractive to seasoned faith-warriors. After listening to the Lord many times and seeing the blessings He provides, it’s easy to stop asking and simply keep doing. “Why bother the Lord with this? I know what He wants me to do.” The reference point then shifts from the Lord to ourselves.

“Show me where you’re looking.” If you’re looking to self instead of the Lord, you need to raise your eyes. Seek out those deep in their faith, humble in their service to the Lord, warriors in their prayer life – and ask them what they believe God is trying to say to you.

The Old Testament tells us that it requires two witnesses to confirm the truth – one of whom can’t be the one initiating the claim to truth. One of the sure signs that we may have shifted to the wrong reference point is our own unwillingness to seek confirmation that our most cherished goals really are from the Lord.

Faithfulness in doing what we know the Lord wants from us is equally important. Much of life is routine, pedantic, unglamorous – yet essential. Like the prophets and disciples in the Bible, years and even decades may go by without hearing from the Lord. Faithfully reporting for duty each day, doing the ordinary things that need to be done that day without complaint or neglect, honouring the Lord even though He does not seem for a season to be within ear shot – that type of faithfulness is what we are called to in an age of constantly shifting priorities and interests, where loyalty is measured in minutes or days, not in months or years.

Having the Lord as our reference point requires **endurance**. The Lord’s time horizon is measured in decades, centuries, even millennia, not in nano-seconds and minutes. We grow weary if the Lord does not act according to our impatient time-table. Yet He requires us to be part of His grander plan, part of bringing His will to fruition for the long haul, not just for today.

Finally, having the Lord as our reference point requires **constant communication** with Him. Cleared on final one day by the air traffic controller, my peaceful focus on the right reference point was shattered by his voice telling me to “Break pattern! Veer left! Veer left!” Veering left, I looked to my right to see a faster moving plane coming through the point I had just vacated. His radio broken, he had no way of communicating to the tower, nor the tower to him. For inexplicable reasons, he had not seen me dead ahead of him. The absence of communication almost proved fatal to both of us.

Active prayer is essential if we are to keep God as our reference point. A continual flow of conversation with Him throughout the day ensures that we maintain the self-discipline to seek confirmation of His will, and to faithfully endure in doing it.

“Show me where you’re looking.”