

The Science Behind Effective Ministry Leadership: 3 Tips to Help You Navigate the Crossroads of Results & Relationships

Effective leaders shoulder a lot of responsibility. They are responsible to shareholders for financial results. They are responsible to clients for quality and service. And they are responsible to employees for guidance, support and recognition. Managers are presented with a leadership crossroads when asked to balance external expectations with anticipated results. It can be stressful; even the best of us sometimes shift from coaching and supporting to anger, judgment and blaming.

But there's a **better way for leaders to deliver results and strengthen relationships** than exerting tighter control, conveying disappointment, or taking over projects that have failed to meet targets. How?

Get closer to your team, engage it in problem solving, be transparent, and share your concerns.

The Science Behind Effective Leadership

Anger activates our fear networks and releases the hormone and neurotransmitter cortisol, which blocks access to areas of the brain that govern advanced thought processes like strategic thinking. Fear engages the amygdala, the primitive part of our brain responsible for memory and emotional reactions, which triggers a “fight or flight” response. A leader whose actions provoke fear in others may unwittingly shut down team members’ creative and strategic capacities.

Healthy relationships serve to release oxytocin, another hormone and neurotransmitter. Unlike cortisol, which closes neural pathways, oxytocin opens up the networks in our executive brain, or prefrontal cortex. Cortisol enables leaders to successfully manage the expectations, motivations and efforts of all stakeholders and to co-create optimal solutions. That allows teams to experiment with new ways of doing business—and to grow together.

So, the next time you find yourself having to decide between results at all costs or aligning your energies with others on the road to mutual success, consider these leadership tips:

- **Manage disappointment** by seeking to understand shortcomings without judgment and by enlisting your team in collaborative problem solving.
- **Set goals and expectations** with your team. Discover where they want to go and make sure they have an opportunity to weigh in on the plans and commitments they are going to be held responsible for. Make it safe for people to be honest—to freely share their thoughts, concerns and perspectives.
- **Allow others to shine.** Hang back, listen up, and let others jump in to take the lead. You might be pleasantly surprised!

Leaders that are guided by both their heads and their hearts—and the energy and aspirations of

their team—are more likely to optimize outcomes, even in the face of tough challenges and underperformance. [It's not rocket science, it's neuroscience.](#)

Choose the constructive response the next time you find yourself at a leadership crossroad between results and relationships.

Read more from Judith [here](#).