

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Second Chair Leadership

The Influence Challenge

No doubt about it. It's often frustrating to try and lead from an associate or assistant position, what some call "Leading from the Second Chair."

Leadership expert John Maxwell lists seven challenges that second chair leaders face.

The Multi-Hat Challenge

Many times second chair leaders are given responsibility

to do what the senior leader doesn't desire to do. Second chair leaders are usually given responsibility but little authority, and their expected jobs often go beyond their gifts.

The Ego Challenge

Working behind the main leader, second chair leaders usually don't get credit for the ideas and work they perform. One assistant leader said it well, "He's Batman, you're Robin."

The Fulfillment Challenge

Second chair leaders often desire to set direction, set the pace, and be part of the action. They may feel frustrated holding back their desire to lead from the first chair.

The Vision Challenge

While second chair leaders may have their own vision for the future of the organization, they must champion the vision of the primary leader. But, it's easier to support one's own vision than that of another.

Second chair leaders have influence over a small section of the overall organization, but they sometimes desire to direct a larger group of people.

The Tension Challenge

The amount of authority a second chair leader has is usually unclear. Worse, the more a second chair leader initiates, the more the first chair leader may be threatened.

The Frustration Challenge

Working with an ineffective first chair leader creates major frustration. Insecure first chair leaders don't invest in personal relationships with assistants.

"The more a second chair leader initiates, the more the first chair leader is threatened."

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Solve your own problems.

Support the first chair leader publicly and privately.

Discipling UP

So, how does one lead from the second chair? Assistant and associate leaders must disciple up. If you are a second chair leader, consider the following ideas.

First, build your confidence and security in your relationship to Christ.

Second, establish relationships outside the church.

Third, disciple your first chair leader.

1. Learn what makes him or her tick.

Study your first chair leader so you know him well. For example, when is the best time to present a new idea to him? When does she like to be left alone?

2. Listen to your senior leader.

Pay close attention to what your first chair leader says. Listen between their words to hear their pain, joys, emotions, worries, etc.

3. Keep your first chair leader informed.

First chair leaders do not like to be surprised, so make sure they are well-informed.

4. Speak and write concisely.

Senior leaders have a lot of people seeking their time. So, keep your communication short and concise.

5. Solve your own problems.

Work hard to take care of your own area of work and solve your own issues and problems rather than asking for advice.

6. Give your main leader options.

When you must take problems to your first chair leader, always suggest three potential options for her to consider.

7. Do what you say you will do.

When you promise to do something, do it! Be certain to follow through on all of your commitments.

8. Make your first chair leader successful.

Do all you can to make your first chair leader successful in his work, even if you don't get the credit.

9. Represent your leader fairly.

Support your senior leader publicly and privately. If you can't support him, consider resigning quietly.

10. Don't embarrass your primary leader.

Whatever you do, do not bring embarrassment to your senior leader.



Gary L. McIntosh is a writer, professor, and growth consultant. He recently spoke in Australia on the topic of Second Chair Leadership.

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