

Depth Perception

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What is your definition of a steward leader?

Steward Leadership as an approach to understand and practice leadership remains relatively new, but as with so many terms that start to catch on, definitions of what is meant become varied and unfocused, threatening to undo all the good that otherwise might get done.

The heart of a steward leader understanding is that of treating one's role as a trust that one is given and that will be handed on when one is finished. Exercising the steward role is on behalf of the owner. Those who hold a faith perspective would identify the chief owner as God, while those without such a perspective would identify the owners as either shareholders or all stakeholders, depending on their economic point of view.

Many who use the words *steward leader* or *steward leadership* are not working from this definition. The following are all real definitions in use from real people:

- I am a steward leader because I care about my work.
- I am a steward leader because I am a religious person who was given a leadership role.
- I am responsible to raise funds in my congregation so I am a steward leader.
- Steward leadership is really just a new name for Servant Leadership. There is no difference.

Compare these less-focused understandings with this one:

The organization I serve belongs to God. I belong to God too, including all that I have and all whom I serve. I am responsible before God for how I carry out any trust I am granted, and will give an account for my leadership.

Do you know any leaders like this—leaders who are daunted by the work yet do not shirk from it? On this 4th of July, let us tell their stories to each other and may their number increase!

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