

If we are honest, leading a group of people is terrifying at times. People look to leaders for direction, vision, and hope. People also turn to leaders for advice and answers to some of life's greatest questions. The pressure to have answers can overwhelm leaders and leave them feeling unqualified to lead.

For some leaders, the temptation is to be the knower of all things. The inability to give an answer can instill fear of losing credibility. It leaves leaders feeling inadequate and unqualified to lead. However, to be relevant in today's world, it is essential that leaders understand a seismic shift that has taken place in our culture in the last 50 years.

There was a time when people looked to their leaders to have all the answers. That is simply no longer the case. Today's world is skeptical of authority. People now reject the notion that leaders know everything. As a result, for leaders to build any credibility, they must now be okay with acknowledging that they do not, and sometimes cannot, know all the answers. Only then will today's North American culture begin to trust leadership again.

As an example of this shift, Dan Kimball, a leading voice amongst ministry leaders, writes that contemporary leaders need to be more comfortable admitting what they do not know if we are to engage the emerging generations as part of the church. In his words, he has "grown comfortable and secure in saying 'I don't know' about some things (many things, in fact)." This is the attitude that leaders need to adopt.

And so, what do you do when you don't have all the answers? How do you preserve your role as a leader? Here's what you can do when you find yourself stuck to give an answer.

1. Don't Pretend You Know

The first thing to consider is to never pretend to know the answer to a question when you actually don't know. One sure fire way to destroy your credibility is to give an answer that someone can then prove wrong. As ministry innovator, Sally Morgenthaler wrote, with information in peoples' back pockets, business, political, and religious leaders are being deconstructed at the click of a button. In that world we cannot afford to give an answer if we don't know the answer. Nothing will destroy your leadership faster than giving wrong answers. People will quickly lose trust in you.

2. Don't Say You Don't Know

Saying you don't know can also wreck your credibility. When someone turns to a leader for advice and they get "I don't know" as an answer, it can leave them with the feeling that

there is no reason to go to the leader next time. While you may legitimately not know, saying so is a good way to abdicate your responsibility as a leader.

3. Find the Answer

The best thing you can do is to say “That’s a great question. Let me find out for you.” This acknowledges that you don’t know, but it also helps them because you will go and find out for them.

4. Teach Them to Find the Answer

Chances are they would have turned to Google once you gave them an answer. So, why not Google it together!

5. Know Where We Can Go To Find Trustworthy Answers

One of the dangers of searching for something on the internet is the flood of bad information that is out there. Even scarier is how easy it can be to stumble across articles that are completely out to lunch yet sound so convincing. Our brains are also wired to find information that agrees with our preconceived ideas. So, it is important that you search for answers with an open mind.

How do you know if you are using credible sources? Sometimes this can be difficult. But, here are a few helpful suggestions:

1. Is the author credible? Have you heard of them before? Where did they go to school (yes, you can look up their school too)? Do other people reference them? Who do they reference in their articles?
2. Is the opinion they offered shared by others? Sometimes, a person who is the only one saying something is to be avoided. That is not always the case. But, I’ve been taught to trust the weight of scholarship on issues more than the lone voice.
3. If you are tackling an issue in the Bible, check and see where it is mentioned in the rest of the Bible. This can be done by going to sites like Bible.com and using the search feature! The Bible will not contradict itself. So, it is dangerous to try and formulate an opinion or answer based on a single verse or passage.
4. Consider attending a class on theology to learn more! At Central, we offer Alpha for new believers and Believe or Creed for those who want to go deeper into theology. There are also great online courses that you could join offered by schools around the world!

True leadership is not about knowing all the answers.

As one pastor once told me, people will accept your humanity long before they believe your divinity. You cannot possibly have all the answers. The good news is that people will not expect you to have all the answers. Pretending you do will just drive people away from you.

Be comfortable with not knowing! But, don't be comfortable with not looking for answers. Great leaders are continually learning. So, when someone asks a question that you don't have the answer to, don't pretend. Help them find the answer or go out and find the answer for them.

In the end, you'll learn something new too!