

## Leadership Lessons from the Life of Moses Lesson #12, There Will be “Pushback”

### Text: Ex.5:4-9

“Leadership” often initiates change- either in leading toward a more righteous *new* or *different* path, or returning to an *old* one. But we humans typically prefer the status quo. So, as well informed and prepared leaders, “pushback,” or *resistance* to the change(s) from what has become *normal*, should be expected. Effectively leading in spite of and through this “pushback” is aided tremendously by identifying both its motivations and forms- what produces it, and how it will be presented. Let’s examine the text to learn more (please review vv.1-3 first). **Pushback:**

- **Often starts with a false premise, v.4.** Note carefully Pharaoh’s words, “*why do you draw the people away from their work?*” Wait a minute. Initially, the Israelites were *guests* who, by the order of Pharaoh, were *given* land and apparently also *bought* property in Egypt to live there independently, cf. Gen.47:5-12,27. Then, a subsequent Pharaoh came to *fear* their growing population and prosperity, and thus reneged on the promises and arrangements previously made, cf. Ex.1:8-11a. The point is that despite Pharaoh’s words to the contrary, it was NOT “*their*” work; it was the work of the Egyptians who had unjustly enslaved Israel, cf. 1:11b! Such is frequently the way of “pushback”- it starts with a *false premise* and then builds from there. Good leaders can often “nip in the bud” these objections by identifying and correcting such fallacies of logic and reason with truth, cp. Titus 1:9-11.
- **Often reveals its real motivation if you listen carefully, v.5.** While Pharaoh repeats the phrase, “*their labors*” (though he used “*work*” in v.4), note what he says before it in v.5, “*Look, the people of the land are now many,*” thus echoing his predecessor, cf. 1:9. His word choice indicates *fear* or *pragmatism*, or both: fear of their numbers in the event of war, cf. 1:10; or pragmatism with regard to the potential (loss) of slave labor, cf. 1:11; 5:4-5. Either way, the words he used revealed his true concern. It was not the *false premise* with which he began in v.4, but *fear* or/and *pragmatism* that was the basis of his real objection in v.5- that they wouldn’t return from the 3-day spiritual furlough into the wilderness, and thus that all that free, slave-labor would be lost. True motives are often revealed in the objective “pushback” if you listen closely, but usually are far less “justifiable” than as presented. Good leaders listen closely, and discerningly, and can thus “cut to the chase” of dealing with real rather than purported concerns and objections.
- **Usually impugns motives or character, or both, v.8b.** I’ve experienced and dealt with the aftermath of two congregational “splits.” In both instances, I learned the validity of and quoted the adage: “Divisions which are *doctrinal* will be made *personal*; and those which are *personal* will be made *doctrinal*.” Here, Pharaoh seems to prove the point. Though actually motivated by *fear* and beginning with a *false premise*, he quickly resorts to *character assignation* and *assassination*, “*Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out...*” v.8. It is telling that their *laziness* or *crying out* hasn’t come to his attention previously (before the request was made to worship in the wilderness), but suddenly has not only come to the forefront, but apparently demands additional burdens. Not only did Pharaoh practice this tactic toward Israel here in our text, but they repeated it later toward Moses, cf. Num.16:1-3 (see also Num.15:32-41 which *triggered* the complaint/accusation). True leaders recognize these tendencies, and deal with them discerningly and appropriately, cf. 1Thess.5:14-15.
- **Often exaggerates in assessment and response, vv.6-8a,9.** It seems that when we recoil at and rebuff the changes those attempting to *lead* us to greater faithfulness and obedience suggest, our all-too-human response is to *exaggerate*- both in our own assessment of the situation, and in the appropriate response. Pharaoh did both. He *assessed* that the “real” problem was the Israelites *laziness*, and concluded that the “right” thing to do in *response* was to make the situation *more difficult*, and inevitably, *worse* by requiring *more from less*. Surely, if the *assessment* is wrong, the *solution* cannot be right. Good leaders understand that responsive *exaggeration* usually belies *rebellion* rather than mere *ignorance*, and counter accordingly, cf. 2Thess.3:6-15.

