

“MIRROR OF PRINCES” FOR MIDDLE MANAGERS: ROLE MODELS FOR SUBORDINATE MANAGERS

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ABSTRACT

The “mirror of princes” is a collective name for books that provide role models for rulers, which are deeply rooted in ethical and, in many cases, Christian values. This study attempts to describe a role model for middle managers based on the teachings of the New Testament, primarily on the requirements set forth in the first letter of the Apostle Paul to Timothy. Middle managers who follow this role model reject double talk. Both their superiors and subordinates trust them, knowing that they will protect them from illegal and professionally incorrect decisions. Their integrity is based on their stable value system and strong character. They are soft-hearted, believe in the usefulness of soft management tools, and can use them properly thanks to their high emotional intelligence. Middle managers must be like the gardener in Jesus’ parable who gives another chance even to the barren fig tree.

Keywords: role model, middle managers, integrity, emotional intelligence, management science

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INTRODUCTION

The title of this study is a paradox in emphasizing the need for an authentic role model for middle managers. Why? Because management science books are usually written for senior managers. The qualities of a successful leader are also mostly researched regarding top managers. This used to be even more the case. In the Middle Ages, the writings that gave leaders guidance were addressed to the rulers of countries. These books for kings and princes were collectively called a *mirror of princes*. From China to the Arab countries and to Europe, many such works were created.¹ However, there is not one among them that intends to provide guidance for leaders other than monarchs. It is a pity, since this literary genre elaborated very important ideas deeply rooted in ethical – and, in many cases, Christian – values.

It is even more remarkable that in the parables of Jesus Christ, kings or high-ranking leaders symbolize the Father himself, and the leaders at the center of the parables are middle managers. They are expected not to perform great deeds, but to treat the people entrusted to them fairly. Consequently, the Gospels provide important but less specific guidance for the behavior of leaders, including middle managers. Of all the books of the New Testament, the Apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy is the one that sets out specific requirements both for the primary leader of the parish (the overseer) and the managers of practical tasks (the deacons).

The English word deacon is the translation of the Greek word *diakonos*. The Acts of the Apostles and several letters of the Apostle Paul mention two functions within the ancient churches: those of elders and deacons. The Elders had authority to rule: they held the office of “overseer”. Deacons are never described by the books of the New Testament as exercising governing authority. Their function was to serve the community of the church, primarily by looking after the needy. The purpose of the election of the first seven deacons was to relieve the apostles of practical leadership duties, so that they could spend more time preaching the gospel. Consequently, and later, the deacons took over the day-to-day management duties from the Elders (overseers), and in this sense they can be considered middle managers.²

¹ Noëlle-Laetitia Perret – Stéphane Péquignot (eds.): A Critical Companion to the ‘Mirrors for Princes’ Literature Brill E-Book (PDF), 2022.

² I used the following works for the description:

Merkle, Benjamin: *The Biblical Qualifications and Responsibilities of Deacons*, 2010, <https://www.9marks.org/article/biblical-qualifications-and-responsibilities-deacons/>; Siahaan, Paimin et al.: Christian Leaders Competences Based on 1 Timothy 3:1–13 *Pharos Journal of Theology*, Volume 103, Issue 2, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.103.0227>; Storms, Sam: *10 Things You Should Know about Deacons in the New Testament*, 2019, <https://www.samstorms.org/enjoying-god-blog/post/10-things-you-should-know-about-deacons-in-the-new-testament>

Today’s management literature does not forget about middle managers. They form the largest target group of management training institutions, so the curriculum of their training courses is largely aimed at helping them develop middle management skills. Experts highlight some competencies that are considered necessary for middle managers to become successful, and then management training institutions base the curricula on the development of these skills.

For example, Andrea Abbas,³ an instructor of leadership courses, defines the characteristics of a thriving middle manager as follows:

1. Trustworthiness
2. Practicing accountability & coaching
3. Fairness and fact checking
4. Offering an ear to listen
5. Consistency and keeping their word
6. Providing hope and inspiration
7. Authenticity & being real
8. Practicing what they preach
9. Being okay with being in the middle.

Indeed’s editorial team underlines the following skills as being extremely important for a successful middle manager:⁴

- a) Effective Communication
- b) Problem-solving Skills
- c) Attention to Detail
- d) Organisational Skills
- e) Empathy and Understanding
- f) Systemic Thinking and Action
- g) Resilience
- h) Influencing Others
- i) Conflict Management
- j) Emotional Regulation

The two lists clearly reflect that the biggest challenge for middle managers is directly managing their subordinates. Strategic thinking and planning do

³ Andrea Abbas: *The characteristics of a thriving middle manager*, 2022, <https://www.ems1.com/ems-management/articles/the-characteristics-of-a-thriving-middle-manager-NvFLuHbUuX-2m0VC4/> (accessed 5 January 2025).

⁴ *Indeed*, Editorial Team: 9 Essential Skills for a Career as a Middle Manager, 2024, <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/middle-manager-skills> (accessed 5 January 2025).

not appear among the skills considered most important. The listed competencies can be divided into two groups. One group contains the ethical requirements for middle managers, which mainly include the traits listed by Andrea Abbas. The other group consists of competencies that make direct management effective. *Indeed's* editorial team primarily focuses on the latter.

This practical approach has advantages and the development of skills at the heart of the training helps middle managers to perform their tasks more effectively. My perspective is different. The title of my study suggests that it attempts to approach the role of middle managers from a more elevated perspective. The authors of the mirrors of princes warn the addressee, i.e., the future ruler, that he has been called to a great vocation, and must therefore grow up to his lofty vocation in morality, wisdom, and behavior. It is also relevant for managers working at lower levels of the hierarchy.

If someone is appointed to be the leader of a community, then he/she becomes responsible not only for himself/herself, but also for the community he/she leads. The achievement of the community's goals and the well-being of the community's members depend to a significant extent on his/her decisions and example. This is highlighted also by the Apostle Paul. He writes: "Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task." (1Tm. 3:1)⁵

My starting point is that leaders, including middle managers, are role models for their subordinates, whether they like it or not. To be attractive and credible role models, they themselves need an authentic role model. My research question is whether the requirements set by the Apostle Paul for the selection of deacons can serve as a credible role model for today's middle managers.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SELECTION OF DEACONS

Let us recall the criteria recommended by the Apostle Paul for selecting deacons: "... deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of faith with a clear conscience. ... A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well." (1Tm. 3:8–9, 3:12.)

In the following subsections, I will apply these requirements to all middle managers, leaving it to the reader to judge which apply exclusively to church leaders.

⁵ Translations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version (NIV).

Middle managers are to be worthy of respect

The Apostle Paul makes no distinction between overseers and deacons in that both should be worthy of respect. In contrast, many people believe that a middle manager does not need general respect: he is the boss's man; it is enough if his boss trusts him. Even scientific surveys confirm that integrity is less commonly expected of middle managers than of top managers.⁶ This is completely contrary to the concept of the Apostle Paul and is nothing more than the destruction of the image of a middle manager set up by the Apostle.

Middle managers are often under pressure to be their boss's extended arm, to carry out the boss's instructions without thinking twice. That is why it is important to choose a person as a middle manager who is strong enough to resist this pressure. Resistance to compulsions and maintaining integrity is not impossible even under difficult circumstances. This is illustrated by the first two sections of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's poem. He was a German Lutheran pastor who opposed Hitler's fascist regime, was imprisoned, and then executed. In prison, he wrote his influential poem: "Who Am I?"

Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a Squire from his country house.

Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
Freely and friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.

...

Where does he draw the strength for this? The last two lines of the poem provide an answer to this question: "Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine. / Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine!"⁷

The relationship between a middle manager and his/her superior is one of the most important aspects of a middle manager's integrity. What kind of relationship should a middle manager build with his/her boss? For me, the answer lies in the relationship between state dignitaries (very high-ranking state leaders)

⁶ William A. Gentry et al.: Integrity's place among the character strengths of middle-level managers and top-level executives, *The Leadership Quarterly* Volume 24, Issue 3, June 2013, 395–404.

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Who am I?, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, New Greatly Enlarged Edition, New York, Touchstone, 1971, 347–348.

and their bodyguards. During my work as administrative secretary of state, I came into personal contact with a few state dignitaries whose security was ensured by bodyguards. The dignitaries complained that their movements were severely restricted by security measures and they could only leave their residences in consultation with the bodyguard commander and accompanied by bodyguards. Despite their complaints, they accepted this situation and followed the rules because they knew, on the one hand, that the rules served their safety, and on the other hand, that the bodyguards would protect them even by risking their lives in the event of an assassination attempt.

A middle manager can best preserve his integrity if he becomes the protector of his boss. A financial manager should be his boss's "financial bodyguard", the human resources manager should protect his boss against mistakes related to labor affairs, etc. It is not an easy role. The boss sometimes gets angry if his subordinate manager says no to him. He will complain about the restrictions, but sooner or later he will realize that they serve his protection. This will be especially true if the boss experiences that in other matters his subordinate manager is not working against him, but for him, and that he fulfills his legitimate requests enthusiastically and to a high standard. A subordinate manager needs to say yes "loudly" nine times to his boss's legitimate requests, to be able to say no to an illegal request for the tenth time. This is not theoretical reasoning, since my own experience corroborates it.

I have been in a management position for thirty-seven years, of which I was the number one leader of an institution for only two years. So I was effectively a subordinate manager, albeit in relatively high positions. In 1990, following the formation of the first democratically elected government, I was appointed deputy state secretary in the Ministry of Social Welfare, and in 1993 I was promoted to administrative state secretary in the Ministry of Labor. In Hungary, the job of the administrative state secretary is the highest non-political position in a ministry; he is the head of the ministry's administration and one of the minister's deputies. I spent more than 13 years in this position, albeit in different ministries. In the meantime, the government changed five times. When the administrative state secretaries were usually replaced, only I remained in this position, as deputy to five different ministers. This shows that I was not "a specific minister's man", but rather I tried to prepare the professional decisions of my current minister as best as possible and to protect them from bad decisions.

I had been an administrative state secretary for about 12 years when I was asked at a roundtable discussion how I could measure the success of my work. "By the fact that not a single minister was replaced while I was the administrative state secretary in his or her ministry," I replied. The audience liked my answer, because a subordinate leader can do no more than that for his boss, and if his boss is successful, then he too is successful, and so is the organization

he leads. This is shown by the fact that I was never fired from the position of administrative state secretary either; this phase of my career ended because the position of the administrative state secretary itself was abolished in 2006. To lift one example from this period: one minister, for whom I served as administrative state secretary for seven years, never signed a single important document that did not have my countersignature.

I have been working in the State Audit Office (SAO) since 2012, as a senior, but subordinate manager. It was here that I received one of the greatest verbal compliments from the president of the SAO, when he once introduced me in this way: "he is my colleague who protects me from making bad decisions."

A middle manager must protect not only his boss, but also his subordinates. From whom? First of all, from himself, from his bad moods, his impatience. However, the greatest danger for subordinates is when their boss tries to persuade them to act illegitimately or in a way that prioritizes the boss's selfish interests. They can only resist this by risking their jobs. For me, the greatest recognition I received from my subordinates was when one of them said to me: "Mr. Secretary of State, I would like to thank you for one thing: in the three years we have been working together, you have never asked me to do anything that would have been incompatible with my conscience."

Middle managers must protect their colleagues from the unfounded anger of the "big boss" or lower-ranking bosses. But they must also protect their vulnerable subordinates from the mockery and teasing of others. Middle managers earn the respect of their subordinates by standing up for the weak, not by siding with those who abuse them.

Conclusion: The ideal middle manager can be trusted both by his/her subordinates and by his/her bosses and is widely respected. Sometimes it is very difficult, but Bonhoeffer's behavior clearly proves that a man of integrity can preserve his human dignity even among terrible conditions.

Middle managers should be sincere (not double-tongued)

The second most important characteristic that the Apostle Paul expects from a deacon is sincerity. Sincerity is the quality of being free from pretense, deceit, or hypocrisy. It is easy to understand that sincerity is a very important characteristic of a deacon. But the King James Version, a more ancient translation, uses another term: a deacon must not be "double-tongued". The latter term is rarely used in contemporary English and is difficult for a non-native English speaker to understand. Therefore, practical considerations dictated that the NIV translation replace the term "double-tongued" with a more commonly understood term: sincere. However, something of the original text is lost in this

translation. The more commonly used synonym for the term “double-tongued” is two-faced. Becoming two-faced (double-tongued) is one of the greatest temptations for middle managers. They must meet a double expectation: carry out the orders of their superiors and maintain the sympathy of their subordinates. This can apparently be achieved most easily if the middle manager tells both sides what they want to hear. For example, a middle manager receives instruction from his superior that is difficult for his subordinates to implement. If he were a sincere person, he would try to get his superior to change the instruction so that it would be easier for his subordinates to execute. Instead, he nods in agreement when the superior gives the instruction, then blames the superior for the bad decision in front of his subordinates who protest the instruction.

Conclusion: The double-tongued behavior of “bowing to the boss and winking at the subordinates” could be useful in the short run, but in the long run it is very risky, since if it is exposed, then the middle manager loses the confidence of both his boss and his subordinates as well.

Middle managers “should not indulge in much wine”

This requirement seems self-evident, since no one appoints an alcoholic as a middle manager.⁸ But the situation is more complicated, since there is a risk that a middle manager will become an alcoholic if he has the tendency. Why? Because managerial work is associated with increased stress, and if the manager solves it with the help of “too much wine”, he can easily become an alcoholic. Unfortunately, there are even more harmful stress relievers. From this perspective, one can assume that the Apostle was drawing attention to the danger of stress associated with leadership.

The person appointing the manager must be aware that management involves much more stress than the work of a subordinate – and the new manager even more so. This is especially true for middle managers, who are under pressure from both above and below. It is advisable for senior managers to help their middle managers cope with increased stress. Ultimately, however, it is up to the middle managers to discover and apply the tools that will help them in this struggle, as the effectiveness of the chosen tools depends on the individual. The important thing is that the stress relievers they use build rather than undermine the manager’s abilities. The very extensive literature on this topic is worth studying. Channuwong and Kantatian describe 17 strategies that managers can use to reduce stress,⁹ for example: physical exercise, listening to music,

⁸ According to biblical scholars, the emphasis on this requirement may also have been related to the fact that the deacons were also responsible for providing the wine essential for the celebration of the Mass.

⁹ Sukhumpong Channuwong – Wutthinant Kantatian: Stress Management Strategies for

developing a sense of humor, breathing exercises, reframing thinking, leaving the past in the past, and learning how to keep smiling during times of crisis.

Conclusion: Stress is an unavoidable feature of managerial work. "Indulging in too much wine" is just one of the stress relief tools to be rejected. Middle managers need to learn to cope with stress in healthy ways.

Middle managers must not pursue dishonest gain!

It is important to emphasize that the Apostle Paul only forbids dishonest gain, and consequently approves honest gain. A Christian can therefore with a clear conscience assume managerial positions not only in the public sector or non-profit organizations but rather in a variety of businesses, provided the business is run honestly. However, he should stay far away from any dishonest activity. This is important because if a middle manager has been working for some time in an organization that does not follow ethical standards, it will be difficult for him or her to avoid engaging in unethical behavior.

At the same time, this requirement echoes the words of the Gospel of Matthew, in which the master says to the servants who doubled the talents they had received from him: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Mt. 25:21.) Why? Because the middle manager is the one who is initially only entrusted with a little, which he must handle faithfully, not only taking care of it, but also doubling it. His faithfulness may indeed be rewarded with a promotion, but even if that does not happen, he can still feel the happiness of working with integrity.

Conclusion: It is advisable to formulate the prohibitive requirement set by the Apostle Paul in a positive way: middle managers should be trustworthy even in small things!

Only take on a middle management position with a clear conscience

"They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience." This is the original requirement set by the Apostle Paul. What might be the interpretation of this requirement in a non-religious context?

Let us start with the fact that middle managers are the executors of the decisions made at a higher level, and they must represent the appropriateness of these decisions. If they do not agree with the decision, then they will only

be half-hearted in representing the decision to their own subordinates. This reduces the effectiveness of their work and is therefore detrimental to the organization that employs them. But middle managers also suffer if they must implement decisions that they do not identify with. Middle managers cannot be expected to agree with every decision they have to implement, but it is essential that they accept the strategic goals and declared values of the organization, and that the goals and values do not conflict with their own beliefs.

It is not always possible to foresee whether the managerial position one is applying for entails the performance of tasks that cannot be undertaken with a clear conscience. Therefore, it is advisable for a candidate applying for a position as middle manager to clarify his moral stance in advance. For example, if he is applying for the position of financial manager, he can write in the application that he would choose this company as his workplace because, to the best of his knowledge, fair management principles are applied here. If this is true, then his chances to get the job have just improved by him expressing his moral standpoint. If this is not true, then he would probably not be selected as financial manager, but this way he would avoid future conflicts.

Let me mention my own example. In 2003, when a socialist-liberal government was in power, I was offered the position of administrative state secretary in the Prime Minister's Office, which was the highest administrative position in Hungary at the time. The opportunity appealed to me, but I was afraid that some of the tasks to be performed would conflict with my Christian values. Therefore, I asked the minister who invited me to apply whether my Christian beliefs would cause a problem. "Not at all," he replied, "at least there will be one such person among us." And indeed, in the next three years, I never received a single task, the implementation of which would have contradicted my ethical principles.

Conclusion: Middle managers are not able to significantly change the strategy or project that they must implement. Therefore, a middle management assignment should only be undertaken for a task that the person in question can perform with a clear conscience.

Middle managers should make essential decisions in accordance with their core values

"A deacon must be faithful to his wife," wrote the Apostle Paul, according to the NIV translation. We can get to the deeper meaning of this requirement by going back to an older translation. The translation according to the King James Version is the following: "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife." The Apostle Paul sets forth the requirement that a man who had not divorced his first wife and chosen another wife should be chosen as a deacon. The Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy in 65-67 AD. At that time, this

requirement was of fundamental importance. Jewish law allowed men to divorce their wives by issuing a certificate of divorce and then to remarry. However, Jesus Christ expressly forbade this. This meant – more than thirty years after Jesus' teaching on this matter – that the only Christian men to divorce their first wives were those who still preferred the Jewish law over the teaching of Jesus. The essence of the requirement set forth by the Apostle Paul is therefore that only such should be chosen as leaders of the Christian community who follow the teaching of Jesus in the existential decisions of their lives.

Obviously, only Christian organizations can set this requirement for applicants who profess to be Christian. However, this requirement can also be generalized, meaning that it is advisable to choose a person as a leader who has already proven in his/her life that he/she makes important decisions in accordance with his/her core values, and that these values are in harmony with the organization's values. This is the touchstone of solid character. A leader – even a middle manager – is often faced with a decision-making situation in which he/she must choose between his/her own self-interest or the organization's short-term interest, on the one hand, and stated values on the other. In such situations it takes solid character, a willingness to make sacrifices, the ability to delay gratification and often courage to make decisions that are in line with the organization's values.

In the time of Jesus, divorce was more like dismissal: "scrapping the wife". The culture of scrapping is especially characteristic of our age. Pope Francis has spoken out against this on several occasions. The following story reinforces the need to reject the culture of scrapping. On their 50th wedding anniversary, a celebrated couple was asked how they had managed to stay together for so long. Their answer was simple: At the time when we got married, if something didn't work, people fixed it and didn't throw it away.

We receive an even more general picture of the above-mentioned requirement if we recall from the Gospel the conversation that took place between the Pharisees and Jesus before Jesus uttered his teaching on the indissolubility of marriage.

Pharisees said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. (Mk. 10: 4–5.)

Consequently, when Jesus forbids divorce, he also draws attention to the fact that a husband must not be hard-hearted; he must not ignore his wife's interests and feelings. In Jesus' time, Jewish marriage was not a relationship of two equals; the wife was subordinated to her husband. The wife was existentially

dependent on her husband and became completely vulnerable if he dismissed her. To prevent the wife from becoming destitute, one of the most important points of the marriage contract stipulated the amount of money the husband had to pay to the dismissed wife in the event of divorce. Therefore, usually only a well-to-do man could afford to divorce his wife and marry again, which also entailed a significant financial burden. Let us imagine the situation when a Jew who had become a Christian, a well-to-do, respectable man who had divorced his previous wife, applied to be an overseer¹⁰ or deacon. According to the requirement formulated by the Apostle Paul, he had to be rejected because he proved to be hard-hearted and followed not the teachings of Jesus, but the old Jewish law instead.

The lack of equality also characterises the relationship between employer and employees. This is true even though modern labor law attempts to mitigate this inequality and protect the rights of employees. Employees are existentially dependent on their employer and they must perform their work according to their employer's instructions. Employees are directly subordinated to their workplace leaders, i.e., middle managers. Therefore, the requirement formulated by Jesus is particularly applicable to middle managers: do not be hard-hearted. If somebody is hard-hearted, he/she is not kind or not able to feel sympathy. One of the opposites of hard-hearted is soft-hearted; people who are kind and often compassionate towards others.

In a workplace setting, an important characteristic of managers' soft-heartedness is that they believe not only in the effectiveness of the hard management tools, but are convinced of the usefulness of soft manager tools, and have the soft manager skills to use them appropriately. Modern management science also highlights the importance of this, which is supported by the following three quotes:

A soft skill that's extremely helpful for management roles and can significantly improve workplace relations is the ability to empathize with employees. Middle managers can exhibit empathy by listening intently to employee concerns, offering resources and providing support and understanding when unexpected or uncontrollable circumstances impact performance.¹¹

Always think about people's well-being. Trust is a key element for human relations, but it is something that must be cultivated and that is achieved with the behavior demonstrated on a daily basis.¹²

¹⁰ Among the requirements for selecting an overseer, the Apostle Paul also states that he should be "husband of one wife", and in fact mentions this requirement as the second one.

¹¹ *Indeed*, Editorial Team: *9 Essential Skills for a Career as a Middle Manager*.

¹² People First: *5 essential qualities in a middle manager*, 2020, <https://www.peoplefirst.blog/en/5-essential-qualities-in-a-middle-manager/> (accessed 5 January 2025).

One of the most rewarding aspects of being in a middle manager role is the opportunity to positively impact the daily lives of everyone you work with. A supervisor that listens, keeps confidentiality when possible and holds you accountable while not passing judgement is modelling a strong character and will influence a healthy culture.¹³

However, there are situations when a middle manager must make or implement a decision that negatively affects his subordinates in the interest of the organization. What can a middle manager do in such a case? One is recommended to take out the New Testament and search for the teachings of Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, one can find the following parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So, he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" (Lk. 13:6–9.)

What is the lesson from this? Middle managers must fight against negative measures affecting their subordinates. On the one hand, by trying to persuade their senior manager to postpone his/her order or mitigate its negative effects, and on the other hand, by giving their subordinates all assistance necessary to avoid the negative measure, and to help them, above all, to grow up to the requirements which provide security. However, if all this does not help, middle managers must also implement decisions that negatively affect subordinates.

Conclusion: Taking the analogy of the parable, the best role model for a middle manager is the careful gardener protecting the barren fig tree. Although he is sometimes forced to weed, he cares deeply about the beautification and enrichment of the garden and knows that for this purpose the plants must be protected and nurtured.

Competencies learnt in the family circle are useful for managerial work

"A deacon ... must manage his children and his household well." The Apostle Paul makes a similar requirement for overseers, but he also explains why this requirement is rational. "He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)" (1Tm. 3: 4–5.) From the necessity of the explanation one can conclude that the

¹³ Abbas: *The characteristics of a thriving middle manager.*

similarities between parental and leadership competencies were not self-evident even at that time. Nearly two thousand years later, management science discovered the importance of emotional intelligence in the success of managerial work. The term emotional intelligence (EI) was first defined by researchers Mayer and Salovey in a book chapter¹⁴ published in 1990. They explained EI as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions.”

The development of emotional intelligence is one of the most popular training courses among middle managers. The Harvard Business School which provides several training courses in this topic tries to convince the potential students with the following argument:

The technical skills that helped secure your first promotion might not guarantee your next. If you aspire to be in a leadership role, there’s an emotional element you must consider. It’s what helps you successfully coach teams, manage stress, deliver feedback, and collaborate with others. It’s called emotional intelligence, and it’s one of the most sought-after interpersonal skills in the workplace.¹⁵

My own experience is that family is the best place to develop and practice EI. The literature also confirms this: “The family is where we first learn about relationships. It is where we form emotional bonds and learn about social interactions. The continuous, evolving dynamics of family relationships require us to develop skills, knowledge, practice and emotional intelligence to support, love and care for our family members,” writes Mabel Gonzales in the abstract of her book chapter.¹⁶ The literature¹⁷ also points out that a loving family atmosphere is the best soil for the development of children’s emotional intelligence.

The Apostle Paul knew from experience that only that man is suitable for the leadership of a church community who creates a good atmosphere in his family and maintains discipline without using violent means. It is for this reason that he added to the requirement that “he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.”

Conclusion: The competencies acquired by keeping the family together and raising children can also be used well in managerial work. This also means

¹⁴ Peter Salovey – John D. Mayer: Emotional intelligence. In *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, 1990, 185–211.

¹⁵ Lauren Landry: *Why Emotional Intelligence Is Important in Leadership*, 2019, <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/emotional-intelligence-in-leadership> (accessed 5 January 2025).

¹⁶ Mabel Gonzales: *Family Relationships and EI. In: Emotional Intelligence for Students, Parents, Teachers and School Leaders*. Springer, Singapore, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-0324-3_5

¹⁷ Archana Chandran – Bindu. P. Nair: Family Climate as a Predictor of Emotional Intelligence in Adolescents, *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2015, 167–173.

that women who have spent longer periods of time caring for their young children should not be at a disadvantage in managerial appointments compared to men and women who concentrated only on their careers at work.

Comment: It is important to make young people aware of this and to convince them that having children does not have to be postponed and put on the back burner for the sake of a career at work. Employers should also realize that parents raising one child, or two or more children cannot be considered career starters, since they have acquired important competencies while raising their children that they will be able to successfully utilize as managers at work.

ANSWER TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION: A ROLE MODEL FOR MIDDLE MANAGERS CAN BE BUILT ON THE APOSTLE PAUL'S REQUIREMENTS

Starting from the requirements formulated by the Apostle Paul for the selection of deacons and further deepening them with the teachings of the Gospels, I have outlined a role model that today's middle managers can follow to effectively contribute to the success of their organization, while creating a good workplace atmosphere for the community they lead. Leaders following this model possess many qualities and abilities that modern management science considers essential for middle managers. (This confirms that the teaching of the New Testament is always relevant.) This role model is much more than a simple set of useful and nice competencies that help middle managers survive the dual pressure of their superiors and subordinates. In this role model, the middle manager is the man of integrity and not the man of the boss. He/she rejects doublespeak. Both his/her superiors and subordinates trust him/her because they know he/she will protect them from illegal and professionally incorrect decisions. The basis of his/her integrity is his/her stable values and strong character which ensures that he/she won't make decisions following his/her selfish self-interest. He/she is soft-hearted, believes in the usefulness of the soft management tools and is able to use them appropriately thanks to his/her high emotional intelligence.

I am not saying that following this model does not involve conflicts, nor that every organization is looking for such a middle manager. But it is not necessary to accept every job offer for a middle management position. Before accepting a management appointment, it is advisable to clarify what values the middle manager considers important, and whether these fit with the values followed by the organization. If not, then even the most financially attractive offer should be rejected, since a middle manager will never be able to change a corrupt organizational culture, and in fact, there is a greater risk of becoming tainted. It is worth waiting for a better option. Being a middle manager is

a worthwhile mission, but only in an organization whose mission the middle manager can serve with a clear conscience.

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