

SOUTHERN AFRICA-INDIAN OCEAN DIVISION
SECRETARIAT



LEADING
from the
SECOND CHAIR

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Living in the Paradoxes



Because of your position and your natural temperament, you cannot be passive about the future of your church or organization. At the same time, your position seems to limit your ability to change things for the better.



What Is a Second Chair Leader?

A second chair leader is *a person in a subordinate role whose influence with others adds value throughout the organization.*

A person who is able to succeed by influencing others is a more effective leader than one who issues edicts to be obeyed.

Those who thrive, find much of their success through influence and relationships.

Three Paradoxes in the Second Chair



A second chair leader's unique role involves a special set of tensions.

The unique tensions for a second chair arise because the expectations he encounters appear to be incompatible, or even contradictory. *He is expected to be a bold initiator and faithful follower, a creative thinker and detailed implementer.*



We describe these tensions as the three apparent paradoxes of second chair leaders:

1. Subordinate Leader
2. Deep-wide
3. Contentment-dreaming



They are paradoxes because at first glance they seem to be mutually exclusive. But our contention is that these pairs do not represent either-or choices. Rather, effective second chair leaders need to live within each paradox and master both ends of the spectrum.

The first is the subordinate-leader paradox.

For many of us, our mental model of leadership involves having complete freedom to set direction and determine actions for ourselves and the organization without any "interference" from a supervisor. From this perspective, any submission to another person is less leaderlike.





Effective second chair leaders do not have this sort of zero-sum view of organizational responsibility.

They know that two heads are better than one, and that the first chair is not an adversary. They are able to lead without being at the top of the pyramid.

Most important, they understand that their authority and effectiveness as a second chair stem from a healthy, subordinate relationship with their first chair.



The second challenge is abbreviated as the deep-wide paradox.

Second chair leaders have specific roles that are narrower and deeper in scope than those of the first chair, yet they need to have a broad, organization-wide perspective.



Some who struggle with this paradox resent the restrictions of their role as being too narrow, or they see the more detailed dirty work as being beneath them. At the other extreme, some excel at their specific tasks but fail to see the big picture.

Effective second chair leaders develop the skills to be both deep and wide.



The final paradox is described by the tension of contentment-dreaming.

Being the second chair does not mean giving up on individual or corporate dreams. But a dream cannot be allowed to become shortsighted ambition, nor can it be positioned in competition with the plans of the first chair.

Second chair leaders intentionally seek to shape the organization's direction and mesh their individual dreams with the broader vision.

They understand that an apparent detour from their dream may be short-term and even a catalyst to fulfilling their God-given potential.

Successful second chair leaders are able to maintain contentment with the present without losing their sense of God-given calling for their future.





The three paradoxes represent daily tensions for a second chair leader. These are not tensions she chooses but the reality of her position and temperament.

Although each paradox is present to some degree for every second chair, a leader's specific situation or personality may lead to extra stress in one of the three.



The lens must be trifocal, allowing you to focus on how you manage your relationships (subordinate-leader paradox), your work habits (deep-wide paradox), and your emotions (contentment-dreaming paradoss).



Wherever you serve, we hope that you will be inspired to honor God in all your ways.

Reinhold Niebuhr's "Serenity Prayer" is an apt prescription for any second chair leader:

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."