



Becoming the Boss:

How to Unravel a Tangled Partnership

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You are pioneering the growth of an exciting ministry. You have dreams and plans and a commitment to do things right. But your partner doesn't share your way of doing things. It has reached the point where you are frustrated and unclear about where it is all going. For many leaders, the first thought is to take control. Failing that, they split off and start their own ministry. But not Marcio Garcia, director of the Evangelical Mission for Assistance to Fisherman (EMAF), in Cananeia, Brazil. His answer was to follow rather than lead—to take charge of himself rather than the situation.

Jim Orr and Marcio Garcia shared a dream—take the message of Christ's love to remote fishing communities along Brazil's extensive coast. What they didn't share was a view of how to get things done.

Jim was the intrepid Brazilian born missionary, an independent, do-it-yourself trailblazer. Long before Marcio arrived, Jim had plied the coastal waters in search of isolated communities. His plan was simple—travel by boat, meet people, share Christ and help with basic medical needs. His idea of Marcio's job was equally uncomplicated, consolidate gains and share the workload.

But that wasn't the kind of direction Marcio wanted. What started out as shared leadership quickly eroded into no leadership, at least from Marcio's point of view. "Jim had the idea that we would share leadership. Ideally that sounded great to me, but in practice it didn't work. No one followed, and no one supervised the things to do." What appeared to Marcio as a lack of leadership, was Jim's effort to avoid becoming the "paternalistic missionary."

Before long, Marcio grew confused and frustrated. "The ministry didn't grow. It was disorganized. I felt guilty with myself, with God, and with the donors." Marcio saw how things could be done differently and, in his mind, better. But he didn't feel he had the authority to set the directions for the ministry.

Even though Jim saw Marcio as a partner, their idea of shared leadership meant something different. To Jim partnership meant sharing the workload of contacting coastal communities. To Marcio it meant sharing in the forethought, planning, organizing and decision making of the ministry. Jim was comfortable where authority is not given but must be negotiated as work gets done. Marcio wanted more structure.

For a time, Marcio thought he could manage the differences by ignoring them. To avoid conflict, he operated in parallel with Jim. Marcio would take a boat and go in one direction. Jim would go in the other direction. If Jim asked for help, Marcio would decline, saying he was already busy with something else. To his credit, Jim never complained and went on about his business. Meanwhile, Marcio's feelings of guilt and frustration mounted. Each partner was doing his own thing, but for Marcio, "There was no team spirit, no leadership, nothing changed."

How could Marcio remain faithful when he believed things were not being done right? Was he a partner with equal authority, or did Jim really have more authority? After all, Jim had invited Marcio to join him, and not the other way around. If he didn't have authority to change the way things were done, what would become of the ministry?

It is at this point where aspiring leaders are tempted to attack or desert. Wanting change and not getting it, people sometimes turn on the one in charge. The problem is the other guy, they reason. Remove him and you've removed the problem. The result is always the same—political infighting, turmoil, stress, and a huge waste of time and resources. More is lost than gained. Others pack their bags and leave, but not without taking a piece of the ministry with them.

Marcio took the road less traveled and within a year he was in charge of the ministry. Jim had come to recognize Marcio's abilities and happily invited him to take the lead. The change was so amicable Jim stayed with the ministry for several years.

How did they reconcile their leadership differences? What was the route Marcio took? Here are five factors gleaned from their story.

For starters, Marcio considered the possibility that he might be part of the problem. He realized that some of the issues getting in the way lay not with Jim, but with himself. He sought the counsel of godly people, spent time in prayer, and searched for guidance through Bible study. He knew he couldn't get a clear view of himself without a clear view of God. But he still couldn't see his way ahead until one night when he finally heard what God had been saying all along.

He had gone to a retreat hoping to hear from the speakers what God would say to him. But he heard nothing. Later, in the words of an ordinary song, the message broke through. "I don't remember the words," Marcio reports, "but it was as if God were saying, 'Your work is to trust me.'" Marcio realized his struggle wasn't about him and Jim, it was about him and God.

Marcio had to make a choice between trusting his own abilities and trusting the providence of God. When he got that straight, he would get the rest of it straight.

It was then that Marcio began to work specifically on being a follower. He returned with a new attitude, announcing to Jim that he would follow his lead and cooperate in every way. Taking the role of follower not only meant submitting to God, it also meant deferring to Jim's approach.

Compliance can sometimes look more like surrender than submission, a kind of "if you can't beat them, join them" strategy. If Marcio had been ambivalent about taking responsibility, that might have been the case. But it wasn't. Besides, that's not what true followers do. Good followers don't wait

passively for direction. They look for ways to complement their boss, to help him succeed in the direction of shared values.

Rather than fall back, Marcio stepped forward and took responsibility to improve the partnership. As he began to trust God with the circumstances, it gave him space to think about how to advance the ministry by helping Jim succeed. By working to support Jim, Marcio's leadership abilities became more apparent. The paradox is that the more one empowers others, the more influence he gains. As a beneficiary of Marcio's talents, Jim began to see what he could do for the whole ministry.

Along the way they discovered some of their differences were a matter of personal style. By focusing on how to cooperate, both men had to think more explicitly about their style differences. What they didn't realize at first was that they are two entirely different kinds of people. Jim is a matter-of-fact, hands-on missionary. His idea of getting the job done is to do it himself. Marcio prefers to train others and help them get the job done. As a former Brazilian biking champion, Marcio knows how to achieve goals. Jim, on the other hand, prefers to take life one day at a time.

Because style differences can exaggerate strategy differences, it helps to adjust to the leader's style. Marcio did so and was able to keep the focus off his preferences and on the core values of the ministry.

They kept God at the center of their relationship. "It doesn't matter," Marcio says, "if the ministry has its weaknesses, whether technical problems or strategy differences. But make sure God is the center. We would have had a disaster if personal opinions would have been the way to handle differences."

When we put God at the center it forces us to take the focus off ourselves and what we want. When God is in the picture we have to ask ourselves, "What is my intention? Am I trying to honor God or get my own way?" To honor God is to make Him known by treating others the way He treats them. Because both men kept God at the center, they found themselves building bridges to understanding, willing to be influenced as much as to influence.

In effect, Marcio showcased his leadership potential by following. He didn't have to be in charge to practice the art of leadership. Leadership is a behavior, not a position. Instead of insisting that Jim's strategy was all wrong, Marcio put Jim's interests above his own (Phil. 2:3-4).

Jim Orr has since moved on to new ministry, while Marcio Garcia continues to head up the Mission for Assistance to Fisherman. The two friends continue to minister to coastal communities, only now twenty-five Brazilian missionaries share their passion. ■



Source

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