



Leadership as Stewardship

"Our life is what our thoughts make it."

-Marcus Aurelius

"Our life is what our words make it."

-Marcus Haeussler

We frame our lives, relationships, and actions by our thoughts. And our thoughts are guided by our choice of language and vocabulary; *our internal choice of words influences our reality.*



Stewardship is being entrusted with an asset, person, organization, or idea. Embedded in that notion is to take care, attend to, or to be watchful of something or some group. *A steward is someone who does what needs to be done in support of their charge.* As a word, it brings strong commitment, context, and focus.

The photo above shows Horace Albright when he was Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park (he would go on to be the second Director of the National Park Service in 1929). He does appear to be in the role of steward and the land, fauna, and animals, so much so, the bears come to meet him! Horace Albright (and Stephen Mather, the first director), both imperfect men, launched the National Park Service from a nascent idea to something that seems so obviously important to us today.

Compare these statements:

- Ian farms the land he inherited.
- Jessica is a steward of the farm she inherited.

It is clear Ian grows things and likely sells them (and certainly we need farmers). When Jessica describes herself as a steward of the land, she declares and reinforces herself as a caretaker, guardian, trustee, and safekeeper of the land to produce needed goods. Listeners perceive that her stewardship ensures that successful and sustainable farming occurs over time.

Many titles and role descriptions lack that power or focus. We promote someone, and give them a new title. Yet we fail to define their stewardship. Many common titles, such as vice president, do not evoke a strong sense of stewardship. Changing how people talk changes how they think, including how we talk with ourselves. Words matter, and they affect our perceptions of the world.

Changing titles to change titles is not the point. Working with some conventions provides certain advantages. *It is important that we declare ourselves as stewards of our responsibilities.* Albright and Mather both were imperfect, yet they provided stewardship; each of us can *choose* to define ourselves in a larger context. As vice president, for example, we can declare: I am a steward of the culture, the organizational financial well-being, of assets, or a steward of the patients who seek healthcare in a crisis. What is *your* stewardship in the role you inhabit? How do you see yourself in a large context – one that spans beyond your time in the organization and creates lasting value?

Cultivating leaders others **want** to follow

www.AlpineLeadership.co | 602.803.5979 | MarkHaeussler@AlpineLeadership.CO

© 2023 Alpine Leadership all rights reserved