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HI, AND WELCOME TO A BOOK on church leadership written by a non-leader! You may be wondering why on earth a lay person would summon up the audacity to tell a church leader how to do their job. The bulk of the leadership books I've seen on the shelves and web pages of Christian bookstores, are books written by leaders for leaders. The rationale is, "I've done it; here's how." I want to offer something different: feedback. I hold a Certificate of Christian Ministry and a Diploma of Youth Work, but I'm not a leader in the traditional sense. I don't have "leadership gifts", and I don't even *want* to be a leader. (I've led music teams, with middling results, but I'm more relational than dynamic. I mention this, and three decades to date of actively serving in church, lest you worry that you are reading the ramblings of an armchair critic.)

This book came about over lunch with a fellow abuse survivor, who questioned whether things would ever change in the hierarchy and culture of the church. I answered that things had improved, but that if we really wanted to see patterns change and abuse eradicated, we would have to change the way we taught leadership—because if we always do what we've always done, we'll always get what we've always got. I'm not sure how different today's leadership training actually is

from that of 20 years ago. While I do see some welcome shifts, I also see some prevailing attitudes which give me pause.

So, if you're interested in unpacking a vision of what church leadership *could* look like, enjoy! I will be honest about the shortcomings I've seen, yet this is not an exposé, but rather an exploration. My ideas are untried, but at nearly 50, having been in church since birth, I've seen a lot of different leadership styles across three countries. I do have a few scars. I'm hoping you'll permit me to get some mileage out of them for the purpose of edifying the Church.

I'd like to thank the many excellent leaders I've had, and my beta readers for their input; my husband, Chris Robinson, and our kids, Daniel & Emma; my parents, Trevor & Kay Weavers and Heather & the late Lloyd Robinson; my amazing and supportive pastors; Anne Hamilton, who has mentored me through the authoring process; and Koda-Jo Berry Stewart, who inspired it.

Writing a book is a lot like writing a song: the notes have all been heard before, but one hopes that the combinations, arrangements, and actual voice will have a freshness. So here I go. You are beautiful people called to a difficult thing, and I honour you. Allow me to add to your store of market research just a little. As always, ask the Lord for guidance. If you like what I say, you are welcome to springboard off it. And if you don't, you can always tell yourself that this is just an opinion piece, which it is.

Rebekah Robinson
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Because I Said So

NOBODY CAN EVER GO INTO PARENTHOOD and come out unscathed. It's the leadership role that a huge chunk of us take on, whether we're gifted for it or not, and in some cases whether we desire it or not. If you are not a parent (and some of you won't be), you will at least have *had* parent figures of some stripe in your life at some point, so please don't groan too loudly just yet! Besides, the unique joy of discovering your limitations through child rearing may well be ahead of you in just a few short years, who knows.

I'm Gen X, as you may have guessed. I'm a wife, parent of two young adults, regular churchgoer, and sometime songleader; my stock level sits somewhere between "not a crackpot, can be a bit flaky, heart of gold" and "big on promise, short on delivery". I was once called a "velvet sledgehammer", but that's another story! We go on trying, don't we? And sometimes we are *very* trying ...

My parents were missionaries, so I must disclose here that I do bring a certain amount of MK/PK experience to the table, and that may colour what I write. It also put me in much more regular, close-up contact with a range of leaders and leadership models. Everything colours what an author writes, anyhow. You'll see a lot of hues emanating from

my New Zealand culture, my gender, and my denomination, as well as my generation.

The thing about being Generation X is that we were parented by Baby Boomers. And the thing about Boomers is that they were parented by Builders. This is going to mean different things to different people. I can speak of my own experience and observation, but you may find it parochial, so take it with a grain of salt.

Born in the early 1970s, I grew up with the certain knowledge that at the back of all adult dicta was *Because I Said So. And I Am Your Parent (or Teacher or Pastor or Policeman or Prime Minister). And So You Must Toe The Line*. Let's give this a shorter name, shall we? I shall christen it "the appeal to authority". This is what John C. Maxwell calls a "positional leader". It's not so much to do with the threat of consequences, though they do loom large behind the adult's shoulder. It's to do with *respect*. It says, "You owe me a measure of respect simply because I hold this position of authority in your life, and people in those positions are automatically granted honour and maybe even a bit of awe." So, it's not just an appeal to authority: it's also an appeal to the *dignity* of that authority.

*It's not just an appeal to authority:
it's also an appeal to
the **dignity** of that authority.*

Generation X Christians in my circle might have dreamed of disobeying their parents, but they kept those dreams well tamped down. Verbal defiance was out of the question. Actually, most verbals were out of the question. Children were to be seen and not heard. Our Boomers, with the various maxims and anxieties handed down

to them from their Builder parents, were light on extravagance and emotion, and heavy on steering the household into a place of modest prosperity. The fathers worked hard, assuming an Acts of Service love language whether they were born with it or not. The mothers kept up appearances. And it was important to have well-behaved, well-turned-out, thoroughly Christian-looking children. There was a lot of love. Large chunks of it were expressed through ensuring we were best placed to not make fools out of ourselves, our families, or our Saviour.

We were speaking of the dignity of authority. Various people in authority could at any time hand down a pronouncement you would have to abide by. Any pushback against that edict was tantamount to an attack on that person's dignity. It was like saying, "I don't respect you, I don't respect your office, I don't think you deserve your office, and I think that, in my vast experience, I know better than you do."

Imagine my shock to discover that this fear-of-the-Board was not the beginning of wisdom outside my church. My public school classmates didn't talk back to their teachers, but they didn't venerate them, either, and they had a low opinion of politicians and law enforcement. Imagine my further shock to discover that my own children, surprise surprise, weren't sold on the authoritative model. No amount of reiteration, illustration or verse-quoting brought enlightenment.

I recently worked as a primary school chaplain in an Australian state school for nine years, in addition to co-raising to my own two grown children. I therefore feel somewhat qualified to comment on the emerging generation. And what I've noticed is this: old models of leadership are not cutting it for today's kids. Those methods are tried—but they are no longer necessarily true across the board. It has nothing to do with the quality of our teachers, which is outstanding. It has nothing to do with their very reasonable expectation that children ought to do as they are told, for their own and the common good. It has to do with cultural evolution. And it has a lot to do with entitlement,

but that's a far more complicated issue than most people give it credit for.

So let's talk about entitlement.

I feel that "entitlement" is a word simply bristling with porcupines. Nobody wants to be labelled "entitled". That would mean that scorn is being levelled at our guarding of something precious to us, as though it were not precious after all, or we were dummies to guard things or imagine ourselves worthy of them. Also, I think most people who point a finger at the "entitled" younger generations are generally doing it disparagingly. "Kids these days! They're so entitled!" But is *entitled* really another way of saying *they will unhesitatingly lay claim to things they have a right to*? Are we actually talking about a gap between the notion of rights and the notion of self-sacrifice?

*Have we ever stopped to ask ourselves
whether we are **equally** entitled?*

Have we ever stopped to ask ourselves whether we are equally entitled? The child in the classroom believes they have something worthwhile to say. The teacher believes the same thing about herself. The difference is that the teacher has been given a mandate to hold the floor, and the student has not. The student is not *less than* the teacher. The student is enrolled with an agreement that he or she has a defined role to play in the mini-society of school. It's when they want to push out of that role, or usurp someone else's role, that trouble ensues. So I submit to you the rocket-science idea that a rebellious pupil is simply one who is violating the agreement made between their parents and the school. And you can't help but see that this lack of personal agency