

Forge Podcast with James Lawrence.mp3

Peter Wooding: [00:00:09] Welcome to the Forge Leadership podcast. Today Simon Barrington is joined by the leadership principal of the Church Pastoral Aid Society, James Lawrence. James has over 20 years experience of training leaders and shares his insights in this thought provoking interview.

Simon Barrington: [00:00:27] So welcome to the Forge Leadership podcast. Today I'm joined by James Lawrence. James welcome.

James Lawrence: [00:00:33] Thank you great to be with you.

Simon Barrington: [00:00:35] Now James tell us a little bit about yourself, you teach and develop leaders as a profession. Tell us about yourself and your own leadership journey.

James Lawrence: [00:00:44] Yes I work for an organization called CPAS which is an Anglican mission agency. And my role here is Leadership principal so I oversee our leadership development work with leaders around the country trying to help them think through how to grow and develop as leaders themselves. And my own leadership journey really started back when I was a teenager. I wasn't a naturally confident teenager. In fact my very best friend was the naturally confident leader and I just tagged along with him. But I came to faith as a 13 year old and that started a massive transformation in my life and over the next three years through to about 16 I sort of grew in that faith came to some clarity about what that faith might mean for me and I can remember an occasion when I went down to my local church and that the vicar said to me one day, he said we don't have many young people in our church. I looked around. Yes I know I'm the only one. And he said why don't you do something about that. And I honestly didn't know what he wanted me to do but I sort of said yes okay. And that was really the first moment of responsibility that I took in terms of leadership. And over the next two years I started a youth group, encouraged folks to come along that I knew and we saw people come to faith. They involved me in all sorts of leadership stuff that I hadn't really had to do before and I learnt, probably, as much about leadership in those two years as I've learnt at any other time in my life. Primarily because I was given the opportunity to do something and even though I'm not sure it was that sort of strategic leadership development strategy on behalf of my vicar I think it was more, a gosh we need some more young people people desperation, actually it was a very significant growth time for me. And the two people who were most helpful to me their points were my parents who were just models of great leadership. Both my mother and my father in very different ways were just great models of leadership and it was from them that I really took my lessons.

Simon Barrington: [00:03:01] And how's your leadership developed over the years since those early days of leading a youth group and those initial steps of obedience and taking responsibility, how has that developed as you've grown.

James Lawrence: [00:03:16] Yes so following school I went to university. I had a sense that God might be nudging me towards ordination so I read theology at University. And I honestly don't remember how this happened but somehow I got into the Anglican process for discerning whether somebody might be being called to ordination and ended up going through that process and leaving University and going straight into a vicar factory. So I was actually ordained by the time I was 24 years old - very young or very green very um yeah lots to learn. The next stage in the process for me was just having the most brilliant training incumbent vicar learning how to do the job. He was just brilliant at giving me opportunity and encouraged me to understand and develop my own gifts. He was immensely supportive and over those three years again I learnt a huge amount about myself and also about the nature of Christian leadership and how that might be exercised through the good

example of my incumbant and through the opportunities that he gave to me. And really since then I've been on this ongoing journey of growing and understanding what it means for me to be a leader, what that looks like, and how to exercise leadership in a way that reflects the Christian faith. Because there's lots we can learn from other places but at the heart of it we need to be those who lead like Christ and that's been my ongoing journey of trying to work that out over the last 30 years - lots still to learn.

Simon Barrington: [00:05:01] Absolutely, we're all on a learning journey. How would you describe the core values and beliefs that you now have as a leader being formed through all of those experiences.

James Lawrence: [00:05:13] Yeah. I would say first of all that the first priority of every Christian leader is not to be a leader. And that's fundamental to my understanding of leadership. The first priority of every Christian leader is to be a disciple of Jesus. You may know in the business world that they sometimes say how do you know if someone's a leader and the answer is look behind to see if anyone's following. Well I want to say that just will not do for us as Christians. How do you know if someone is a Christian leader. Don't look behind to see if anyone's following. Look to see if they are following Jesus. Because if they're not following Jesus then they are not a safe leader to follow. So our first priority is to be a disciple and to be perfectly honest that's the biggest challenge of Christian leadership. I don't find it difficult to lead others. I find it a lot more difficult to lead myself, in other words to be a follower of Jesus to allow his agenda, his priorities, his perspective to shape my thinking, my understanding, my living the way I lead. That's the biggest single challenge for me and it's the thing that you know on goingly grapple with and trying to faithfully continue to grow and learn in. So that would be my first thing. It's about following Christ, growing in Christ like character, understanding more what it means to be Christ like in both who I am and what I do. Because when our identity is clear in Christ then we are much less likely to use leadership to meet insecurities that are in us and we are much more likely to lead from a place of security, significance and self worth. And that's a much healthier way of leading.

Simon Barrington: [00:07:05] Now this issue of insecurity and identity is huge in the work that I do with leaders. How do you help leaders who are coming through your programs to really explore that and to become more self-aware and also more secure in their identity. I'm sure people listening will want to know that because it is such a big issue.

James Lawrence: [00:07:32] And obviously it's a life times journey really. The tragedy of a world which has rejected God as King of the world is that of course we see the consequences of that not just in terms of broken relationships with others and with the very earth in which we live but we see it in terms of a broken relationship with God with ourselves. So it's a major major thing. We do a whole range of things to try and help with that. We encourage people to grow in the spiritual disciplines that route us in Christ of which are a whole range of spiritual disciplines that help with that. But actually those spiritual disciplines are fundamental to our growing in Christ and we live in a world where discipline isn't a very popular word. So actually one has to actually help people to learn how to exercise those disciplines, practice those disciplines, train wisely in Godliness. It's much less about trying harder and much more about training wisely and the spiritual disciplines if you like are the training regime for the Christian life. And that helps to root us in Christ. The second thing is that we do as you suggested help people to grow in self awareness. And that's often about what are the drivers that are inside us that if we're not careful will drive us beyond the call of God and we all have stuff that comes about through a combination of nature and nurture that is unhealthy and unhelpful in us and drives us inappropriately. And so helping people identify what those drivers are and how to get them out of the driving seat and ensure that actually our identity in Christ is in the driving seat, if you like, is part of the process of helping people to grow in security in who they are in Christ. And then the third thing we do is that we know that Christian leadership

is not meant to be exercised individualistically. Christian Leadership is a communal enterprise not a solo enterprise. And so the third thing we try to help leaders work with is how to lead well with others to share and to share leadership with others because we're far more likely to be safer in our leadership because people will be offering us the sort of feedback and accountability that's helpful. We are far more likely to be safer in our leadership if we are leading with others rather than on our own. And some of the temptations and struggles that come if we lead on our own are ameliorated by being in a community of others that we lead with. So that's some of the things that we try to help people with as we think about this identity, security dynamic of leadership.

Simon Barrington: [00:10:32] James you talked about unhealthy drivers as leaders of the need to deal with them. And certainly I resonate with that from my own baggage that I've had to deal with in my own life. Why is it that leaders seem to find it so difficult to deal with those issues. How would you go about helping them.

James Lawrence: [00:10:49] That's another great question. I think one of the reasons why leaders find it hard to deal with them is something called the Dark Side of leadership which is that the very things that often get you into a position of leadership, once you're in leadership are the things that destroy you. And this is the paradox of the dark side of leadership. So. And the reason why they end up destroying you when you're actually in leadership is because of what happens when you're in leadership. And it's to do with power basically. You get power. It's a word we don't use a lot actually in church circles but I think we probably need to use it a little bit more because the reality is every leader's role involves some power that can be exercised positively and well or negatively in the context they're in - both soft and hard power. And the drivers feed on power and if we're not careful if we don't keep them in a good place they end up damaging us and damaging others around us. S.

Simon Barrington: [00:12:03] So how do you help leaders both identify where that soft and hard power is causing those drivers to impact the way they are leading and to do something about it.

James Lawrence: [00:12:14] The way we do that is we actually give them a little assessment around the drivers. We use a couple of tools to help people reflect on what their drivers are and then also to understand a little bit about therefore how power could take those drivers to an unhealthy place and what you need to do. So it's actually by getting some sort of honest reflection and an evaluation going on, deepening self awareness through that and identifying that it actually helps people to go OK I can see that, and I can see how it's playing out potentially negatively and therefore I need to do something about it and then working with them to look at practical things they can put in place.

Simon Barrington: [00:12:59] And what are some of those drivers.

James Lawrence: [00:13:04] There's actually a number of ways of sort of identifying them. One of them comes through the world of transactional analysis actually and they talk about five different drivers for example. "Be perfect" will be one of them. "Please others" would be another. So if we take the "Please others" driver which is actually very common amongst church leaders in essence where that leads you when you're in leadership is if your driver is always to please others then of course it's very hard to say no. And if you never say no as a leader you will be ineffective as a leader. You'll be ineffective in two ways you'll be ineffective because you end up doing too much and actually if you're not careful you end up damaging yourself by burning out or becoming exhausted. And you also if you can't say no you become ineffective in terms of your leadership of others because we all know that one of the most important words that those of who are in leadership have to exercise is the word no. No, we're not doing that because as much as we're able to discern it this is what God is wanting us to. And again if the "please other" driver is too strong or not

contained in a healthy way then actually it gets to damage.

Simon Barrington: [00:14:20] Yeah that is fascinating isn't it because I've seen that play in many different situations where actually people who wanted to please people but because of that there leadership becomes very inconsistent i.e. the decisions aren't being driven by values, they are not being driven by core beliefs but they're being driven by who ever shouts the loudest around them and whoever's causing the most problems around them. Do you see that happening as well.

Simon Barrington: [00:14:46] Yes I do. And also sometimes just being made on the basis of who last spoke to them. And that's never a good basis on which to be making decisions. Yeah we certainly see that playing out. So that's just one of those five different drivers and they all play out in different ways and have sort of different patterns that they follow. So self awareness is so important to understand, to which one am I likely to be defaulting to. Most of us have a mix of them but which one is the one I'm likely to be defaulting to. And and of course the other reason why these things become more apparent when you're in a leadership role when you have leadership responsibility is not just because of the power but also because of the pressure because these things manifest themselves under pressure. They're more likely to come out under pressure and therefore you've been around leadership long enough to know that there's a lot of pressure involved in leadership and therefore most evidently some of this stuff is going to manifest itself, if we're not aware of it and haven't got good strategy of keeping it in a healthy space.

Simon Barrington: [00:15:59] Wonderful, I resonate so much with that James. Now your in CPAS, an Anglican Mission organization, is there anything unique or more challenging about leading in the Anglican Communion than elsewhere.

James Lawrence: [00:16:13] That's an interesting one to explore. I think maybe a couple of things that might mean that leadership in the Anglican Communion is a little bit more challenging. I mean I'm speaking primarily of course from a UK perspective and I'd say maybe one thing is that it is both, it is a good and a bad thing about the Church of England. Things take a long time to change. We don't measure change in a days, weeks, months or even years. In fact we often don't measure it in decades. We tend to measure in centuries. Now there is actually there is a positive thing about it because when change does occur we we often have really thought very hard about it and it will be deep and significant and lasting. There is of course a negative about it as well. And the negative is that there are in an increasingly fast paced change society times where you just need to be quicker in your change. And we sometimes get left behind. So that would be one. Another would be diversity. So one of the wonderful things about the Church of England and one of the challenges about the Church of England is that it is an enormously diverse church, on all sorts of levels, and leadership in where there is significant diversity is nearly always more challenging and demands things of us in leadership that can be can be lead us to have to delve deep to hold diversity well in an honouring, respectful and yet at the same time holding to biblical insight and truth, you know all those dynamics, and you know the Church of England is a very diverse place.

Simon Barrington: [00:18:03] And there are some benefits that obviously are there as well in terms of the the different voices that are brought to the table, the different understandings, and the different giftings and skills that are brought to leaders as well.

James Lawrence: [00:18:16] Yeah and all that diversity is what this is you know as you say much certainly when working on teams what you want is people who aren't like each other you want people who are different to one another because the diversity is what actually makes a team rich. But there are also some challenges around diversity as well. And it's just trying to work out those two realities the both the positives and the challenges and how we handle those both well. I remember hearing someone say recently or a little while ago just a really helpful thing on that about

one of the key things in leadership is to understand that you you actually resolve problems and you manage tensions. Don't get them the wrong way round. And I think there's a lot of wisdom in that because if you try to resolve. Yeah, if you try to resolve tensions and manage problems you end up in a mess. And actually what you need to do is you need to resolve problems- here is a problem, it needs sorting, we need to find a way through. That requires leadership. Here is a tension, this tension needs to be held. It needs to be managed. We recognize people are in different places in this tension and that requires leadership but it requires a leadership that is secure enough to hold the tension and not feel that it's got to be resolved. And quite a lot of leadership is about holding tension. But if you get them the wrong way round and you try to resolve the tension and only manage a problem you get frustration on both sides.

Simon Barrington: [00:19:56] I see the need for a great tool there, James to help people determine the difference between the two, unless one exists that you are going to tell us about.

James Lawrence: [00:20:06] Yeah maybe a bit. I mean, you can do a little sort of you know a quadrant sort of things that you often use in these type of things you can do quite an interesting exercise around a quadrant that actually helps you to go, now is this a tension or is it a problem, and how would I know of where would I place it on the quadrant. So there are some things which can help us explore that further.

Simon Barrington: [00:20:24] Yeah I'd love to talk some more about that off-line and maybe maybe we can produce something thatn will help people in that, that would be great. Now you've looked at millennials, people born between 1984 and 2000 and how their approach to leadership is in someways the same and in some ways different. What have you seen as you've seen that young generation who are now making up nearly 50 percent of the workforce and are increasingly stepping into leadership. What are you seeing amongst them in terms of the way that they will lead and their approach to leadership.

James Lawrence: [00:21:05] Yeah they're an exciting bunch. But actually I think one of the things I just want to say right at the start is that more recently we've begun to recognize I think others have as well that actually the millennial group 1994 to 2000 or thereabouts actually divides into two groups that the early millennials and the late millennials and they're actually some quite distinct differences between the two. So I think quite a lot of the research on millennials is getting a little bit more nuanced even about the group called millennials, Gen Y. But some of the shifts in terms of leadership, they tend to be folks who think of leadership less in an individualistic sort of way and more in a sort of collaborative sort of way. They tend to be folks who think of leadership less in terms of position and more in terms of something which is earned and I think I think they tend to be those who think of leadership and are less guarded and wanting more vulnerability in leaders which if you're my age is quite a challenge because I was brought up basically by sort of early years brought me up to be guarded and if I want to develop younger leaders and I am guarded as a leader I am really going to struggle to connect with Gen Y because authenticity is one of their touchstones and one of the ways they see authenticity is through vulnerability. So here I am a guarded you know good old Baby Boomer and they struggle to connect with me because I don't I don't show the I don't act in the ways that help them to see the authenticity they're looking for even though it might be here. They don't see it. So that's an interesting dynamic the guarded/vulnerable one and how that works out between leaders of different generations.

Simon Barrington: [00:22:51] And do you see conflict arising there between leaders of those different generations because of that.

James Lawrence: [00:22:58] Yes, because of that and a number of other things. So for example people of my generation have been brought up in a culture of commitment. People of Gen Y

generation millennials have been brought up in a culture of choice. So that means you come at things from a very different perspective. So we do a lot of work with Gen Y leaders and who are often in leadership positions with those of an older generation and they've got into difficulties. And I think quite often people whittle it down to personality. But our experience is quite a lot of those difficulties are more related to generational differences than to personality difference. And sometimes just naming that and helping them to see that and then work out OK this is why this is happening. Here's what we can do about it. We talk quite a lot about just trying to help each generation understand one another and we've only named in this in the conversation two generations. There are these four or five that are alive at the moment. So it gets even more complex when you add in others to the mix.

Simon Barrington: [00:23:59] You know what do you see is the unique contribution I suppose the Millennials will bring? What is it about their upbringing that will enable them to go further in leadership than maybe our generation has.

Simon Barrington: [00:24:15] A number of things. I think they have an integrated approach to stuff so they are more likely to see things in connected and holistic ways. I think they are more emotionally empathetic and I think that's a real strength that they bring. I think they have a love of fun. I actually think that's a really important thing in leadership. And it's great that they have a love of fun. And that partly is reflected also in terms of their sort of ways of wanting to learn and grow and developing a little bit different. And I think that's quite quite a healthy and engaging thing that that they bring. And then I think like every younger generation they bring energy. I don't think that's unique necessarily to them. But we need the energy of the young don't we basically if you know of an older generation where you know your energy levels are beginning to fade, you know they're not what they were when you were 25. We actually want that energy and that enthusiasm and that positive sort of can do let's make it happen attitude. And we want to try and combine the energy of the young with the wisdom of the old and put the two together in a really healthy way.

Simon Barrington: [00:25:30] That's great insight James. Now one of the signature programs if you like of CPAS is the Arrow Leadership Program. Tell us a little bit about that and how it works and the key components of it and how people can get to go on it as well.

James Lawrence: [00:25:45] So Arrow is a program we have been running now for nearly 20 years. It's aimed at 25 to 40 year olds who are in leadership primarily in either local church or Christian organization contexts. We have had some from other spheres but primarily were aimed at that particular group. And it's an 18 month process where the strap line we use is we try to help leaders to "Be led more by Jesus, lead more like Jesus and lead more to Jesus". So what we're grappling with as we go through the program is not just the sort of stuff of competence in leadership it's the stuff of character stuff of call, stuff of our ongoing relationship with God the deep stuff that ultimately is the stuff that sustains us for the long haul. And yes we want to help people grow in their competence as well. But it's it's more than simply competence. We run the program every couple of years and take a couple of 24 people it's a sort of application process. You know people apply to come on the program and it's always such an engaging and interesting group to work with over an 18 month period. It's such a privilege to be involved with it. I'm sure I learn far more than anybody else does on the program every time it's run.

Simon Barrington: [00:27:03] Absolutely. And what kind of transformation do see in the lives and ministry of leaders who've been through the program. What do they say to you about the impact that it's had on their lives and their ministry.

James Lawrence: [00:27:17] I'm slightly hesitant because there's always a danger of over egging these things and one needs to be measured I think in response to a question like that. But I I've over

the years heard enough people from the program talk about it being ministry saving. I think that generally genuinely is the case that for not for all by any means but for a significant number of folks over the years it has had that level of impact that people who were on the verge of leaving their ministry role or wondering how on earth they can continue in their ministry role have found the process has been ministry saving. Actually I was I was actually staying with a couple the other day he went through the Arrow program way back in the early days. And as soon as I arrived at their house the wife embraced me warmly and said thank you, it's so nice to see you again. It saved our marriage, Arrow. And I've heard that a number of times as well. Yes. So at one level there there has been for some a very significant impact. Then there's a larger group for whom it's just been a jolly helpful process. They've learnt things, met new people, had some refining of their understanding of who they are. Growing godliness so they wouldn't they wouldn't talk about it out of ministry or marriage saving that they're talking about it has been transformative. And then I think if I'm really honest there are there are some who go through the program and it almost bounces off them. I'm not sure they're impacted very significantly by it and it might be for a whole range of reasons. We've done a bit of work on it for why that might be the case. For a range of reasons. So there's a real variety real variety of sort of impact but we we've had a couple of occasions where we've had external assessors measure the impact and have been encouraged by the assessments that have been offered.

Simon Barrington: [00:29:17] That's great. Now if people want to find out about the program or about CPAS where do they go to have a look at that.

James Lawrence: [00:29:27] Yeah just to our Web site www.cpas.org.uk/arrow . And there's lots of information up there and there and some videos and loads of that people can find out. And then if they want to find out more then there's contact details on there, they can come through to us and we're very happy to chat with people about it. It's something we enjoy enjoy running. It's a privilege to be involved with and love love love having the folks who come on at each time round, seeing what God's going to do in their lives through the process.

Simon Barrington: [00:29:59] Well James thanks so much for joining us on the podcast today. I love what you guys are doing at the Arrow program and the heart of it in terms of seeking to raise up leaders who follow Jesus first and then create other followers of him is absolutely fantastic and applaud you in what you're doing. And I'm sure that our listeners have learned something from what you've said. I certainly have as well. Thanks so much for joining us today.

James Lawrence: [00:30:28] Great to be with you. Thanks for having me.

Peter Wooding: [00:30:29] Thanks for listening. We love getting your feedback so please do e-mail us with questions or ideas for guests or comments on what you've heard. Our e-mail is Hello@forge-leadership.com . You can review and subscribe and share the podcast at www.forge-leadership-podcast.com.