Leadership, whether Christian or secular — in a business or a social club, a church or a nation — is based more than anything else on one thing ... TRUST. If the leader is not trusted by those he leads, he can “manage” in the technical sense, by formal authority, but he can’t truly “lead”.

Management implies a set of skills that can be learned. Countless books have been written on management, with successive schools of management thought such as Scientific Management, Human Relations in Management” and so on, to all the latest “new age” pop philosophies. Leadership, on the other hand, is primarily a matter of character — a good leader will have good management skills, but will lead successfully because he or she inspires others with character traits such as courage, initiative, far-sightedness, wisdom and integrity.

People are paid or compelled to follow a manager, but they are inspired to follow a good leader. But they won’t follow a leader whom they can’t trust — trust is the essential glue that holds an effective leader-follower relationship together. Respect and even affection are not enough — if trust is absent, true leadership is absent.

Trust is built on a number of things, but central to trust is integrity, in both the large and small things. Integrity, coming from the Latin word “integer”, implies wholeness or completeness,
and for a leader to have true integrity, he or she must show it in the little things as well as the big things.

There is no point in a leader having the wisdom of Solomon to make good decisions, supreme oratory skills to inspire and motivate, or even rigorous honesty in financial matters, if the people around him can’t rely on him to simply do what he says.

It has been said that “God is in the details” – the little things – but then so is the devil! The road to hell is indeed paved with good intentions.

For all leaders, looking after the small things – keeping promises, turning up on time to appointments, returning phone calls etc, are fundamental. Ted Engstrom, in his book “Personal Excellence and Leadership”, puts it this way: “If you say something, does your staff believe it will really happen, or is there always a questions of whether you really mean it? Integrity ... involves an understanding that people can trust us to attempt to do that we say we will do. Promises should not be lightly given, unless we want them to be lightly received.”

Jesus Himself, our Leader of leaders, makes the point very powerfully in Luke 16: 10, when He points out that if we can’t be trusted with the little things, then we can’t be trusted with the big things: “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much, and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.” We are called by God to be stewards of the resources and gifts He has given us – but again, we are admonished to be faithful in what had been entrusted to us (1 Corinthians 4: 2).

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to observe at close quarters some prominent leaders around the world, and I have to say, it has usually been a great experience. But not always. Because the closer you get to any “towering figure”, the more you see the little blemishes.

No one is perfect – except Jesus. But we should be able to expect Christian leaders at least to operate at a higher level of integrity, and to keep their promises and do what they say they will do. But most would agree that they have had some quite disappointing experiences in this area.

Too many times we hear of firm commitments not kept, invitations given but not confirmed, the call back that never happens, and even specific promises of actions that never take place and help that is never given. When people give gifts of money to various works, both small and large, it is depressingly common to hear complaints of tardy or no acknowledgment or even the issuing of a proper receipt.
Now don’t get me wrong – everybody can forget, with the best will in the world, but what I see is an all-too-common propensity to make promises and commitments that are either given lightly, or given with no real intention of being kept. Phone calls and emails not returned, appointments not kept, and half-baked invitations – “let’s do lunch sometime” – made thoughtlessly and carelessly.

Let me say up-front here – I am not lily-white in this area either, nor I suspect are most of you reading this. However, we can all at least make a commitment to try harder – a “work in progress”!

- So if you tell someone you will phone or email them – then DO IT!
- If you invite someone to lunch, follow through and DO IT!
- If you promise you will do something for someone, then DO IT – and if you can’t, at least call the person and tell them you can’t, don’t just hope it will go away!
- If you make an appointment, then KEEP IT – and if you can’t, make sure you call and cancel in advance!
- If you make an appointment with someone, and someone more “important” comes along, keep the original appointment – don’t be a respecter of persons!
- If someone gives you a gift, be it large or small, thank and acknowledge them, and if necessary, make sure a proper receipt is issued for financial propriety.

These are the kind of self-evident things that should routinely go with courtesy and respect, but in fact, they go much deeper – they go to the fundamental essence of integrity. As Jesus says, if you can’t be faithful in the little things, then you won’t be faithful in the big things, and ultimately won’t be trusted with the “true riches”. In the words of the old song, “Little things mean a lot…”

In the Song of Solomon, there is a well-known Scripture that says the “little foxes spoil the vines” (Song of Solomon 2: 15). It is not always the big things – the small things, the “little foxes”, can destroy a big work just as effectively as a cataclysmic disaster.

No one gets out of bed one morning and says, out of the blue: “Today’s the day I’m going to bed my secretary and clean out the company funds.” No, it’s much more subtle than that – it always starts by letting the little things slide – the seeming trivialities that at first appear insignificant and trifling, but which are in reality the little white ants of the soul that can ultimately bring a proud edifice crashing to the ground.

When a Christian leader falls, it brings shame and condemnation on the whole Body, in the eyes of the world. There is no shortage of critics out there, in the media, government and society generally,
who are all too ready to pounce on any indiscretion by a high-profile Christian.

Our job, whether we are high-profile or not, is to keep a witness of impeccable integrity – even if you think you are insignificant and almost invisible, there is always someone watching, waiting and judging. No matter where you fit into the Body of Christ, you are called on to be the light and the salt – as the old saying goes, you may be the only Bible another person ever gets to read. What an incredible responsibility!

It is a responsibility that we all, as members of the corporate Body, share – whether we are in business, full-time ministry, public service or just a “back seat” believer – we are all called to be His witnesses, and it is our sacred responsibility to ensure that our witness is worthy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself tells us we shall be His witnesses throughout the whole world (Acts 1: 8), and that includes in our own circle of friends, in our own business and church, as well as to the “ends of the earth”.

We may not all be called to lead a mega-church, or inspire millions on television, or generate millions for the Kingdom of God through business. But we are all called to be imitators of, and witnesses to our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was tempted “in all things” just like us, but was “yet without sin” (Hebrews 4: 15).

If we are born again, Jesus Christ Himself lives in us by the Holy Spirit – and if He lives in us, we have the power and the authority to live as he would want us to live, being God pleasers and not men-pleasers, and being faithful in the little things so that ultimately we are entrusted with the “true riches”.