

# Management by Walking Around: A Biblical Perspective on Servant Leadership in Action



## Capacity: Leadership

### Baton Exchange

In the modern workplace, leadership is often imagined as a series of meetings, emails, and strategic plans. Yet some of the most effective leadership happens not behind a desk, but by walking among the people you lead. This approach, known as **Management by Walking Around (MBWA)**, emphasizes presence, engagement, visibility, and listening. When grounded in biblical principles, MBWA becomes more than a management technique—it becomes a spiritual practice, a form of Christlike leadership that fosters trust, understanding, and empowerment. For believers in leadership positions, MBWA offers a tangible way to embody the servant heart of Jesus while strengthening relationships, improving performance, and cultivating a healthy, mission-driven culture.

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### BIBLICAL PRECEPTS FOR MBWA

#### 1. Leadership as Presence and Participation

Jesus consistently modeled leadership by being with His people. Mark 3:14 tells us, *“He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.”* Being physically and relationally present communicates value, care, and attentiveness. Leadership is not merely delegating; it is engaging with the people God has entrusted to your stewardship.

#### 2. Listening and Observing

James 1:19 reminds believers to be *“quick to listen, slow to speak.”* Walking around offers leaders the opportunity to observe, hear concerns, and understand challenges in real-time. Observing with a humble, attentive heart allows for insight into team dynamics and individual needs.

#### 3. Servant Leadership in Action

Jesus washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:1–17), modeling service through action. MBWA is the secular equivalent of this principle: it demonstrates that leadership is not elevated above, but present with, the people.

#### 4. Encouragement and Affirmation

Proverbs 12:25 notes that *“Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.”* Leadership presence enables timely encouragement, recognition, and correction delivered with love.

#### 5. Accountability and Integrity

When a leader walks among their team, they can ensure that integrity is maintained and that God’s standards are upheld (Proverbs 11:3). It is a proactive way to nurture a culture of transparency and trust.

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### BASIC PRINCIPLES OF MBWA

### **1. Visibility Builds Trust**

A leader who is seen is a leader who is trusted. MBWA communicates that leadership is approachable and invested in the team's daily realities.

### **2. Engagement Fosters Understanding**

Being present allows leaders to ask questions, hear ideas, and understand challenges firsthand, rather than relying solely on reports or metrics.

### **3. Service Demonstrates Leadership**

Walking around is not micromanaging; it is serving. Leaders are available to remove obstacles, answer questions, and provide guidance when needed.

### **4. Relational Investment is Key**

Relationships are the soil where culture, productivity, and influence grow. Presence nurtures connection, loyalty, and open communication.

### **5. Observational Feedback**

MBWA provides leaders with first-hand insight into work processes, team dynamics, and organizational health, enabling informed and timely decisions.

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## **BEST PRACTICES FOR BIBLICAL MBWA**

### **1. Schedule Time for Presence**

While MBWA can be spontaneous, leaders should deliberately schedule time to walk among teams. Even 15–30 minutes daily can make a significant impact.

**Tip:** Avoid using this time for urgent email or calls; the focus is on people, not tasks.

### **2. Listen More Than You Speak**

Ask open-ended questions:

- “How is your work going today?”
- “What challenges are you facing?”
- “How can I support you?”

Focus on understanding, not instructing.

### **3. Observe Interactions**

Notice how team members collaborate, communicate, and behave. Scripture reminds us that “*A discerning heart seeks knowledge*” (Proverbs 15:14). Observation allows leaders to anticipate issues before they escalate.

### **4. Recognize and Encourage**

Offer sincere words of affirmation. Recognition does not need to be grand; even a simple “*I appreciate how you handled that*” communicates value and motivates others.

### **5. Problem-Solve Collaboratively**

If challenges arise, offer support rather than directives. Ask, “*What solutions have you considered?*” and work together toward resolution.

## **6. Model Humility and Servanthood**

Engage in tasks alongside your team when appropriate. This demonstrates that no task is beneath a leader and reinforces Jesus' teaching on servant leadership.

## **7. Maintain Consistency**

Regular presence, rather than sporadic visits, builds trust. Team members should know that leadership is consistently accessible and invested.

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### **BENEFITS OF MBWA FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

#### **1. Strengthens Relationships**

Leadership presence fosters relational bonds and demonstrates Christlike care. Trust increases, and team cohesion improves.

#### **2. Improves Communication**

Casual, on-the-ground conversations uncover issues that formal meetings may overlook. Listening actively encourages transparency and honesty.

#### **3. Encourages Accountability**

Visibility naturally encourages integrity, diligence, and alignment with organizational values. A leader who is present sees and can guide behavior in real-time.

#### **4. Enhances Team Engagement**

Employees feel seen, heard, and valued. Engagement rises when people perceive leadership as accessible, approachable, and invested in their success.

#### **5. Provides Real-Time Feedback**

Observing work processes and interactions allows for immediate coaching, correction, and encouragement, fostering growth and efficiency.

#### **6. Develops a Servant Leadership Culture**

When leaders walk the talk—literally—they model service, humility, and attentiveness, inspiring the team to do the same.

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### **ASK YOUR MENTOR**

1. How did walking among your team transform your leadership style?
2. How do you balance presence with other responsibilities?
3. What are the key signs to observe that indicate a team's health?
4. How do you encourage openness without overstepping?
5. How do you maintain humility while being in a position of authority?
6. How can MBWA be applied in virtual or hybrid teams?
7. What mistakes did you make early on in practicing presence and engagement?

## REFLECT & RESPOND/SELF-RATE

Rate yourself 1–5 (1 = rarely true, 5 = consistently true):

Do I make myself accessible to my team, or do I remain behind my desk?	
How often do I actively listen versus instruct?	
Am I genuinely interested in the well-being of those I lead?	
Do I notice both accomplishments and struggles in real time?	
How often do I model humility and servanthood?	
Are my interactions encouraging and edifying?	
Do I follow up on issues and feedback in a timely manner?	

## CREATIVE CONNECTION AND/OR ROLE PLAY

Think of a song, character or person from a book, movie or history, or an everyday item that personifies the main idea of this lesson and share it. Or, if applicable to this lesson, role play a practice from this article with your mentor.

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## PROMPT TO REFLECT AND JOURNAL

Spend 10–15 minutes journaling: **“Lord, when I walk among my team, what am I communicating about my values, priorities, and heart? How can I better embody Christlike leadership through presence?”**

Consider the tone of your interactions, the consistency of your presence, and your attitude of service.

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## ACTION STEP

Schedule at least **one 20–30 minute walk-through this week** to engage with your team. During this time:

- Ask thoughtful, open-ended questions.
- Listen actively without judgment.
- Observe interactions and workflow.
- Offer genuine encouragement.
- Seek opportunities to remove obstacles or provide support.

Finish by reflecting: *“How did my presence affect the team? What did I learn about my leadership or their needs?”*

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## SOURCES & RESOURCES

- Holy Bible (NIV, ESV)
- Peters, Tom, and Waterman, Robert. *In Search of Excellence* (for MBWA principles)
- *The 5 Levels of Leadership* – John C. Maxwell
- Greenleaf, Robert K. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*
- Blanchard, Ken. *Lead Like Jesus* (for servant leadership alignment)