



Creating Leaders Across Your Ministry

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SPARK
HOUSE

Introduction

Leadership is only necessary if an organization needs to go somewhere.

Leadership is only necessary if an organization's mission requires it to go somewhere. Without leadership, a church goes nowhere. Developing leaders can be difficult and time-consuming, and often falls to the bottom of a pastor's list for a place to focus. However, discipline and consistent reflection on the current skills of your leaders, and how you can close the gap between where they are and where you need to go, can help you make the progress you need.

In my ministry career, I've viewed leadership development in this way: Our goal is to form the Body of Christ and then to set it in motion by calling forth, equipping and commissioning leaders of Christ's mission.

I had to get to the point where I believed that, no matter how many one-on-one meetings it takes, no matter how many people turn away from the process, it is my responsibility as a pastor to raise up members of the Body so that they can be set in motion towards their potential in Christ.

My goal with this book is to restore in you enthusiasm for developing leaders. I pray this leads to a fresh understanding of the importance of leadership development as some of the most essential work you will do in "equipping the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph 4:12).

A few key points as we get started:

- **Our context has changed, and will continue to change.** As such, the tasks required of a congregation to grow and respond to the commission of Christ requires a supple approach to leadership that calls forth different kinds of leaders with different qualities.
- **The meaning of leadership has evolved.** What you learned in seminary may be relevant to some extent, but our changing context requires us to grow in our role as a leader of the leaders. You must continually be on the lookout for the needs of your congregation and fill the leadership gaps accordingly. What worked for one season may not be appropriate for the next.

- **Each of our members has their own gifts that can help accomplish our mission.**
A major responsibility of the church is to find ways to recognize and to call forth the gifts that God has given each of our members. While it is not solely your responsibility as the pastor to perform this task, oversight will fall squarely on your shoulders.

Each of these points offers a unique opportunity to build a stronger bond with those you are leading. After all, each obstacle we face—both as leaders and in life—serves as a learning lesson.

Identifying Leaders

Many of us wish we had more gifts for identifying and calling forth the gifts of others.

When you are looking for the “right” leader for the job, whether it’s for a new youth ministry program or to lead a welcoming committee, it can feel overwhelming. How do you know who will be the best fit for the job?

I like to look at this as a process with a formula. Start by making a list of all the tasks that need to be performed if the person in this position will succeed. What are the personal qualities, talents, and skills that a person must have in order to fulfill the responsibilities of this role?

For instance, a shy or introverted person should not be asked to take on a role that requires gregarious, extroverted qualities. Are special skills such as financial management or meal preparation necessary?

Once you’ve identified this information, you are ready to recruit. Don’t start by asking, “Who is available for this job?” but rather ask, “What is required to succeed at this job and what are the characteristics of someone who can perform this job well?” Few things are more demoralizing than talking someone into taking on a task in the church that will only lead to frustration and disappointment when the person fails to fulfill the task.

How you communicate with the potential leaders is an important consideration as well. While it’s tempting to send the message out across all your communications channels, resist. Instead, the appeal ought to be direct and in-person. People respond better if they are told, “We have this very important task and we’re confident that you are just the person God has sent us to lead us in this endeavor.”

“But what if they say no?”

Pastors fear rejection when we approach someone about taking a role in church leadership, perhaps because we feel the “no” signals a lack of Christian commitment, or arises from a sense that the mission of the church is not a priority. My encouragement: don’t stop at no, use no as a springboard to go deeper. People can say no for lots and lots of reasons, and oftentimes it’s their first inclination when presented with a daunting task. Their initial rejection may come from a sense of personal inadequacy or from their deep commitment to the church; if it’s the work of Christ, it ought to be done right.

Ask a few follow-up and probing questions. You may find out it's not a definite no, but it's an issue of a few concerns which need to get resolved first. Such as, "I'm in a horribly demanding job, and I can't go down to church and sit there for two-and-a-half hours in a meeting with no agenda, where the pastor goes on and on about how hard she's working – too busy for that." Equipping yourself with this information can help you determine what their needs may be, as well as how you can improve to attract the best leaders for your needs.

Real World Example - Getting Beyond the No

A friend's church didn't have a good youth group, which presented an issue for keeping families engaged. One couple that belonged to the church had visited another church in the area, which offered a thriving youth ministry for their family.

This couple returned to my friend, who was serving as a pastor, and told him they were prepared to leave the church. At this point, the pastor realized that this was a major issue—and he was desperate to find a solution. They were one of the few families he had, and he didn't want to lose them.

"Do you really want your children to have a great youth ministry experience? If so, I can't think of any better leaders than you. Would you be willing to work with me to create it? I'm going to make this a priority of my time and energy. If you're willing to do that too, let's the three of us, create the best youth ministry this town has ever seen."

He didn't stop there, as he wanted to make sure they knew how much he—and the church—personally needed them and their leadership skills. "I am not going to pastor a church that doesn't have a good youth ministry and God has sent me you. *I need you.*"

We pastors must get good at saying to people, "We need you. What can I do to enable you to take this job? What can I do to support you so that this job becomes one of your great spiritual experiences?"

Equipping Leaders

The day of the ANNUAL leadership retreat is over. Training leaders must be constant and continuous.

Now that you've identified your potential leaders and requested your church's need for their leadership, it's time to equip them for success. We've got to get past the old, "I get good people and then I stay out of their way and trust them to do good work," a boast that often signals a leader who refuses to take the time to help people succeed at the job they are given. See yourself as a coach of the new leader, helping that person thrive in this position. You are also the person who helps collect resources for the developing leader.

A warning: Not every leader you begin to mentor will make it. And it's not because of you. In fact, one of my business friends says that only about 30 percent of his new hires work out in the long run—and I think that could be the same for CHURCH leaders.

This is why it can be discouraging. I know that whenever a really good leader—whom I had lovingly equipped and worked with – was moved by their company to another town, I felt a real sense of loss knowing that I had to start all over again by identifying and equipping another person.

Yet do not lose heart. Identifying and equipping isn't a one and done event. Instead, it's a constant cycle of identify, equip, grow, oversee, and release. At no point can a pastor say, "At last I've got the leaders we need to move forward." Once you find a great leader, congratulate yourself, but know that tomorrow you'll continue your evaluation of the leaders you have and your lookout for new leaders. After all, this may be the most valuable service you can render to your congregation. Not only being the loving pastor but also the skilled leader of the leaders. There are few more significant acts of pastoral ministry than when we discover, call forth, and set in motion the baptismal gifts that God has given someone.

When it comes to equipping your leaders, training needs to be constant. No longer can we rely on a once-a-year leadership retreat to form and equip our leaders; instead, it needs to be a constant practice to truly develop the type of leaders that your congregation needs. You probably will not be the main resource person for your developing leaders, but you have the chief responsibility for getting the leader in touch with those, inside or outside your congregation, who can help.

For instance, though you may have little training in children's ministry, you can find nearby churches that set the standard for children's ministry and where your developing leader of children's ministry can go and learn best practices in this area.

Pastors, we must support our leaders by calling them forth, helping to affirm and identify the gifts that God has given them and releasing them to use those gifts in service to God and others. Conversations will reveal where they may feel they need the most work as leaders, and give you insight into how you can equip your leaders. Some key questions that you can ask, and thus, fulfill:

- What new skills must you have in order to fulfill this role?
- Where do you feel weakest as a leader? Why?
- How can I help you to recognize that you are a leader?
- Who do you need to talk with who can help you develop as a leader?
- What can I do to support you in this work?

Real World Example - There's a Leader in All of Us

We had a woman in our congregation who was struck down, completely bedridden by a terrible illness. She was left unable to walk or to get out of bed on her own. Visiting her one day, she asked me, "I wonder what Jesus wants me to do now. Is there any job that you have for me in the church?"

I gulped, thinking, "What job could she possibly do in her condition?" Then, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, I noticed the telephone on her bed, and I said, "You know, we don't have enough resources to pay for clerical help. I spend so much of my day on the phone, reminding people about meetings, checking in on people who are recuperating, following up on visitors. Could you do some phoning for us?"

Each day, I would get to her a list of persons to be called and she called every single one. It was wonderful. One night a trustee entered the trustees' meeting and said, "What kind of low, conniving preacher would have a paralyzed woman harass people for him? I came home dog-tired tonight. The phone was ringing. 'Hope you will be at the trustee meeting tonight,' she said. What could I do? I had to show up!"

Holding Leaders Accountable

Accountability begins in answer to the question, “How will we know when you have done this job?”

Firmly in motion now, with leaders being better equipped constantly by your mentorship, don't stop! It's important that your leaders are held accountable for their work. After all, real knowledge of how your leaders are performing will help you continue to equip them and ensure that they are serving your programs in the best manner possible.

To this day, “Three Signs of a Miserable Job” by Patrick Lencioni remains one of my favorite books. I believe that his conditions of a miserable job directly relate to a lack of accountability that can impair your leaders. These three conditions are:

- **Anonymity:** You are anonymous; nobody appreciates you or the job you are doing
- **Immeasurable:** Nobody counts what you are doing and therefore you are unable to gauge progress and level of contribution
- **Irrelevant:** You are never shown a connection between your work and the satisfaction of another person or group of people

As you work alongside your leaders, keep these three conditions in mind—particularly as you focus on accountability and how you can hold yourself accountable. Accountability begins with the overseer asking, “To what will I hold myself personally responsible?” If you convey, through your actions, “I am taking responsibility for ensuring that you have what you need to succeed at this important job,” you will go a long way toward teaching and encouraging your developing leaders.

For effective accountability, I recommend focusing on an accurate assessment. Following a few steps, you can foster a culture of accountability:

- **Find underperforming areas** and work together to get an accurate picture of the problems.
- **Determine your “why”** for each of these areas in coordination with your leaders.
- **Create a roadmap** that offers clear solutions and gives your leadership team an opportunity to focus on how they can improve the current situation.
- **Continue to check in** to ensure that it stays on your team's radar, meeting key dates and milestones that you established in your roadmap.

If underperformance seems to be due to having a bad fit between a person and a leadership job, work to correct the problem by changing personnel. Shifting someone out of a job and someone else into the job can be a tricky matter, requiring great pastoral care and sensitivity. And yet, it may be one of the most important acts of pastoral leadership.

Generally speaking, churches take far too long to remove an underperforming leader, often citing concern for possible personal hurt feelings. While the church should be a place where people are respected and cared for, pastors also have a sacred responsibility to foster respect for and commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes fidelity to Christ's mission requires us to have difficult conversations and made tough decisions about personnel. That most of the personnel are volunteers makes no less important our commitment to have the right people in necessary posts in order that the church be faithful to its God-given vocation.

Real World Example - Create the need before you know how to fill it

Recently a pastor told me that his leadership team had decided to triple the meeting times for the Christian education of children, youth, and adults. Previously they had been focusing on Sunday morning, but now they would have repeat offerings three times a week.

"I'm excited about this," he explained, "because it forces us to become more intentional about identifying, recruiting and equipping more educational leaders in our church. We need to be pushed to look for the people whom God has sent us and then to say, 'We are determined to be more effective in this area of ministry. We need you.'"

A church that has a mission and a destination requires leaders. This may require creating a need before you know how you'll fill it—creating an accountability push to find new leaders.

Get Started Today

It's not enough to have had hands laid on your head.

Most of us were ordained to a pastoral function like “ministry of word and sacrament.” Most of us must add to those responsibilities, identifying, calling, developing, overseeing, and (sometimes) replacing leaders in the congregation.

Here are five things that you can do today to start the leadership development in your congregation.

Schedule time into your calendar

Make leadership development a priority by blocking out time each week for identifying, equipping and holding leaders accountable. Building the structure for constant leadership development early on will set you up for success. Pray that God will give you the gifts you need to unleash the baptismal gifts in people in your church.

Embrace the difficult conversations with people

These will come, I promise you of that. Avoiding tough conversations is not an option and it doesn't do anyone any favors. Conflict, when handled with grace, produces truth-telling, growth, and energy. If needed, bring in a third-party coach to help you facilitate the conversation or to give an unbiased outside opinion.

When in doubt, turn to constant affirmation

Leading leaders is hard work. There will be times you feel empty and are not sure what else to say to your team. In these moments, turn to affirmation. Be an encourager, even if you don't feel it yourself. Encourage until you feel the encouragement! Keep telling yourself that God gives us the gifts and the people we need to succeed at the mission God has given us.

Something has to be the number one priority

While every job holds importance, a lack of clearly defined priorities can make it easy to lose focus and accomplish nothing of worth. Decide which jobs are absolutely life and death for this church. Turn your top resources and focus on that – don't try to focus on every possible leadership position in the church and make sure that you spend most of your energies with those people who, by God's gifts, are most able to help make a difference in your congregation.

Ask for help

While you have been called and ordained for ministry, this won't automatically give you all the leadership skills you need. At some point in this process, face yourself and identify your strengths and weaknesses as a leader.

I find that many pastors avoid the area of conflict. It's important to identify what your weaknesses may be, ask for help, admit shortcomings, be honest, and find the resources needed to fill in the gaps. Seek out help and coaching within your congregation. Ask them for advice. It's good for your lay leadership to see their pastor asking for and receiving help from others.

In Summary

Developing leaders often falls to the side of our plates as we focus on the larger issues and tasks at hand. The future of your church, and your congregation, rests on your shoulders to follow God's guidance to fill your leadership needs with those who offer the best skills for the role's needs.

Identifying your leaders starts with an honest view of what the role requires—both the good and the bad. Focusing on equipping and strengthening your leaders requires a time investment, but a worthy one as you see the positive impact that they have on your congregation.

Over the years, I have learned that the most important aspect of creating leaders across your ministry may not be what you expect. Discipline. Discipline in finding the right leaders, as well as giving them the tools—spiritually and emotionally—they need to succeed.

With that, I'll leave you with one last thought. Change may be difficult, and it may even be more challenging to find room in your already busy schedule to focus on building leaders on a daily basis, but if there's one thing I've learned throughout serving the church, it's that old ways will not open new doors. Even the slightest change in your approach to finding leaders can result in the biggest bounty, and I encourage you to take one small step to finding the leaders that have not yet responded to God's calling.



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