

## **Filling the Pipeline:** *Shifting the value of leadership development*

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Most senior leaders I talk to — in both the church and the marketplace — say their desire is to grow the next generation of key leaders internally. Yet few organizations find themselves in a position to act on this intention, and end up hiring key leaders from the outside. Why?

A lack of leadership succession is actually a symptom of a much deeper issue: Leadership development is not yet a cultural, organizational value. While nearly everyone values the idea of developing leaders, few organizations have made it an operative value and built their systems around it.

This results in a seat-of-the-pants, reactive approach to developing leaders, where it's easy to:

- Confuse training with leadership development.
- Hyper-focus on the short-term.
- Mistake program management with leadership.
- Rely too heavily on metrics of activity and production.
- Fail to identify a practical set of leadership competencies, much less the systems to develop them.
- Copy organizational models from other churches.
- Over-leverage mentoring.
- Get too busy to focus on it.

The result? The church has too few developing leaders in the pipeline. And the leaders we are producing:

- Lean too heavily on their personality style.
- Struggle to effectively implement a vision.
- Haven't developed the hard discipline of leadership's soft skills.
- Lack wisdom.
- Overreact to fear.
- Have difficulty generating trust because they fear transparency and isolate themselves relationally.
- Understand leadership at the intellectual level, but not at the behavioral level.
- Don't experience significant, ongoing personal transformation.

Depressed? Don't be. This is an opportunity waiting to happen! In fact, I believe the church has the potential to produce more and better leaders than any other human organization. With just a slight change in focus, I believe we can become the most productive leadership engine the world has ever seen. We have all the ingredients; we just need to put them together.

What can we do different? A few shifts of viewpoint — if acted on daily — will radically affect your leadership development results.

**Develop a bias for leadership development.**

Realize that your role as a leader — at whatever level or capacity you serve — is to develop other leaders. Let leadership development become the vehicle for every other aspect of your ministry.

You must decide if leadership development is going to be the engine or the caboose on your ministry train. Most leaders try to incorporate leadership development into their ministry. A shift in focus would mean incorporating ministry into your leadership development. This sounds like semantics, but over time this shift in focus will radically change the impact of your leadership development. It is the only way to insure that leadership development is driving your ministry, and not the other way around.

### **Identify a working set of leadership competencies.**

A leadership competency is an observable and measurable *behavior* developed by dynamic leaders. It is not a leadership competency if it remains at the level of good intention or conceptual theory.

For example, one competency I've identified is courage. Leadership requires courage in the face of unknowns, risk and adversity. It can't be faked, excused or hoped for. You can smell a lack of courage in a leader a mile away. If courage isn't measurably revealed in the way a leader manages a staff, faces difficult decisions or approaches a challenge, people will be leery of following.

A shift in focus would mean identifying your target list of leadership competencies. Consider your current ministry setting. What competencies are required from those who will lead there? Reflect on past leadership positions you've held. Think about the three best leaders you've ever worked under: What tangible behaviors did they exhibit that made you want to follow them?

After this reflection, sit down and make a list. Keep it relatively short, so you won't get bogged down and overwhelmed. Then do the exercise again each week, for a month. By this time your list will probably approach a working list.

### **Create a strategy for your own development.**

Once you have identified your competencies, reflect them onto yourself. How would you — honestly and fairly — assess yourself? Better yet, do a 360° assessment with people you trust that would commit to helping you in your development. A 360° assessment works like a mirror, giving you an unmistakable picture of how your competencies are lived out in your leadership day-to-day.

This can sound threatening to many executive leaders, fearing it will invite undo criticism and critique. But there are ways to maintain confidentiality while insuring the assessment results are valid and constructive. At any rate, you shouldn't be too threatened that others will become aware of your areas of needed development: Most likely, they already know.

A shift in focus is that leadership development starts with you. One of the greatest barriers to leadership development is also one of the most common: The executive leader in the organization who doesn't sense the need to grow. You will never arrive as a leader, no matter how much you excel. So don't create the idolatrous expectation that you don't need further

development. Throw the idol of arrival as far downwind as possible. Bury it. Burn it. Tie it to a rock and drop it in the ocean.

As a leader, you will be facing challenges tomorrow you won't be equipped to handle unless you develop today — *this is true Transformative Leadership*. Are you willing to allow that to happen? Create a mindset of leadership transformation in yourself and your organization — then begin implementation of a strategy for your own development.

### **Commit yourself to a life of ongoing spiritual transformation.**

In addition to the competencies required in secular organizations, ministry leadership requires leader to emulate the ethos of Jesus. It is what I call being a *Transformative Leader*.

This is not an issue of training or skill. It is not additional biblical exposition or theological knowledge. It is not the practice of the disciplines. Rather, it is the disciplined practice of cultivating a connection with God that results in the transformation of our character into the ethos of Christ. It is not formulaic. It is not mechanistic. It is not prescribed. It is fluid, faith-filled, Spirit-driven and alive; like God's mercies, it is new every day.

A shift in focus would be to significantly pursue your own transformation. In my experience being a *Transformative Leader* is the most elusive aspect of Christian leadership. It is also the most rare — and the most critical to the mission.

If...

The church is the local expression of a transforming life with God,  
and...

The church's mission is to reveal this transforming life with God to the world,  
then...

The church requires leaders who embody the product of the transformation process.

Without transformation, we're doing nothing more than leading people on religious crusades.

### **Just get started.**

*Knowing* about developing leaders is one thing; *doing* it is quite another. It can be overwhelming, and daunting. But it doesn't have to be. The *knowing* and *doing* gap is usually a matter of focus and accountability. It's as simple as moving from good intention to good strategy, and then to good execution.

Start small, but you must start. Shift your focus on each of these four issues. Ask open-ended questions, like "What would it look like for me to incorporate ministry into my leadership development?" Look at yourself first. Then look around at the others in your circle of influence and help them arrive at their own answers without being too quick to give your answers.

Try taking just the first step. After that, the next steps are usually much easier.